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Reimagining Reality: Challenging Lukács through Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*

Reimaginar la realidad: el desafío de Lukács a través de Woolf en *To the Lighthouse*

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Abstract

This article examines how Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) engages with the social and historical realities of early twentieth-century Britain, challenging Georg Lukács's claim that modernist literature "negates outward reality." While Lukács interprets techniques such as interior monologue, shifting focalization, and narrative fragmentation as retreats into private subjectivity, this study argues that Woolf's formal experimentation offers a historically rooted mode of modernist realism in which consciousness registers social structures and historical pressures. In line with recent scholarship that reconsiders modernist form as socially responsive and historically situated, this article shows that Woolf's narrative techniques make visible the ideological and material conditions that shape consciousness. The argument is developed through three sections. The first explores how Woolf integrates class hierarchy, gender norms, and social anxiety into the individual thought, presenting interiority as a form of social understanding. The second examines how bourgeois perception and domestic ideology produce gendered silences and structural absences that restrict what characters can notice or comprehend. The third analyzes how Woolf conveys historical rupture - especially the trauma of World War I - through temporal disconnection, omission, and structural fragmentation. By bringing together interiority, social perception, and formal disruption, *To the Lighthouse* demonstrates modernism's capacity for subtle, historically attentive social critique.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, modernist form, interior monologue, social perception, gender and class, historical rupture.

Resumen

Este artículo examina cómo *To the Lighthouse* (1927), de Virginia Woolf, se vincula con las realidades sociopolíticas e históricas de la Gran Bretaña de comienzos del siglo XX, cuestionando la afirmación de Georg Lukács de que la literatura modernista "niega la realidad exterior". Aunque Lukács interpreta técnicas como el monólogo interior, la variación focal y la fragmentación narrativa como un repliegue hacia la

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subjetividad, este estudio sostiene que la experimentación formal de Woolf constituye un modo de realismo modernista históricamente arraigado. A partir de investigaciones recientes que reconsideran la forma modernista como social e históricamente implicada, el artículo argumenta que las estrategias narrativas de Woolf muestran cómo la experiencia subjetiva está configurada por condiciones ideológicas y materiales más amplias. El análisis primero examina cómo Woolf presenta la interioridad como una forma de cognición social. Segundo, se analiza cómo la percepción burguesa y la ideología doméstica generan silencios generizados y ausencias estructurales que limitan lo que los personajes pueden ver o comprender. Tercero, se muestra cómo la autora representa la ruptura histórica mediante disyunciones temporales, omisiones y fragmentación estructural. Al articular interioridad, percepción social y disrupción formal, el texto demuestra la capacidad del modernismo para una crítica social e histórica matizada.

Palabras clave: Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, forma modernista, monólogo interior, percepción social, género y clase, ruptura histórica.

Introduction

Modernism has long been understood as a literary response to the profound cultural and historical ruptures of the early twentieth century. As Bradbury and McFarlane (1991) argue, modernist writers sought to remake literary form to reflect the fragmented, accelerated, and disorienting conditions produced by World War I, the deconstruction of Victorian certainties, and shifting gender and class relations. These disruptions generated stylistic innovations – such as stream of consciousness, non-linear temporality, and narrative fragmentation - that attempted to articulate new experiences of time, space, and social life (Childs, 2000; Lewis, 2007). Within this historical context, *To the Lighthouse* (1927)[2] emerges as a paradigmatic modernist novel whose formal experimentation is inseparable from the pressures and anxieties of its moment.

It is precisely this kind of formal experimentation that Georg Lukács found politically and aesthetically problematic. In *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (1963) and *The Theory of the Novel* (1971), Lukács insists that realism must reveal the "totality of social relations," whereas modernism collapses literature into a solipsistic, private subjectivity. For Lukács (1996), writers such as Woolf, Joyce, and Kafka portray individuals as "solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings" (pp. 143–144). By doing this, the modernist authors, in Lukács' view (1996), obscure the material conditions and class struggles caused by capitalism. Modernism, in his view, escapes the material conditions of capitalism rather than criticizing it (p. 155).

However, this distinction between realism and modernism has been questioned by several distinguished scholars. Adorno (1991), for example, argues that modernism's experimental form is itself a technique that is ideal to reveal the contradictions of social life that realism often overlooks. Similarly, Jameson (1972, 1991) argues that the formal innovations of modernism expose historical trauma (particularly WWI), the shock of technological innovation, and the collapse of stable social categories.

Pam Morris (2012) provides a convincing review of Woolf's relation to realism. Morris rejects the binary opposition between the objectivity of realism and the interiority of Modernism.

[2] This is the first edition of the novel. For this article, the 1955 edition was used.

She argues that Woolf practices a form of ethical or worldly realism which reveals the social world rather than escaping from it. Through free indirect discourse, metonymy, and perspectival shifts, Woolf shows how class structures, gender norms, and domestic ideology shape consciousness. In this view, interiority becomes a place where historical and material pressures register affectively and perceptually.

Based on the ideas above, this article adopts a historically rooted formalist methodology. This approach treats formal elements—such as interior monologue, shifting focalization, and breaks in temporal continuity—as signs of the historical pressures and ideological forces that shape lived experience. In *To the Lighthouse* (1927), consciousness becomes the medium through which class relations, gender expectations, and political anxieties come into view. Seen this way, Woolf's modernist techniques function as modes of social and historical representation, directly opposing Lukács's argument that modernism turns away from reality.

The article is divided into three sections. *Interior Monologue and Social Perception* shows how Woolf conveys social and historical forces visible through the textures of thought. *Gender, Class, and Structural Absence* examines how bourgeois perception, domestic ideology, and gendered silences restrict what characters can notice about the social world. *History and Structural Rupture* shows how Woolf's narrative structure in *Time Passes* registers the trauma, uncertainty, and dislocation produced by World War I.

Taken together, these sections argue that *To the Lighthouse* (1927) does not turn away from social and historical reality; instead, it rethinks how such realities can be represented. Woolf's novel demonstrates modernism's capacity for socially and historically engaged art, challenging Lukács's critique and showing that narrative form itself can function as a mode of ideological and historical investigation.

Woolf's narrative strategies - her shifts in focalization, her gendered silences, her disruptions of linear chronology -displays the anxieties, inequalities, and ruptures of postwar life. Pam Morris's (2012) argues that Woolf's "ethical" or "worldly" realism is particularly instructive. She shows that Woolf's treatment of interiority is not a retreat into private consciousness but a mode through which characters understand the social world, internalize power relations, and negotiate ideological pressures. In this view, consciousness is a space where society is perceived, interpreted, and sometimes resisted.

Guided by this scholarship, the analysis in this article proceeds through what I term historically rooted formal analysis. This approach to formalism is sensitive to how formal elements help to express how the sociopolitical world shapes interiority and consciousness. This approach consists of three methodological components:

- **Form-sensitive textual analysis:** Close attention is paid to Woolf's narrative structures, shifts in perspective, and uses of interior monologue. These formal features are read as expressions of social experiences and not only as aesthetic innovations.
- **Interpretative strategy grounded in ideological critique**: Through the lens of Jameson and Ayers, the analysis examines how Woolf's formal techniques reveal ideological formations - gender norms, bourgeois values, class hierarchies - and how they expose the limits of privileged perception.
- **Integration of form and historical consciousness:** Following Morris theory (2012), the study reads Woolf's fragmentation, temporal rupture, and focalization as conveying the

social disruptions of the early twentieth century, including the impact of World War I, shifting gender roles, and the contradictions of domestic life.

This methodology views *To the Lighthouse* (1927) not as a detachment from social reality but as a work that represents history and ideology through formal structures. The analysis that follows demonstrates how Woolf's techniques illustrate the interplay between consciousness, social hierarchy, and historical rupture, and thus challenges Lukács's claim that modernist narrative negates external reality.

Interior Monologue and Social Perception

At first look, *To the Lighthouse* (1927) may appear to focus on a quiet domestic world, distant from the political and historical concerns of its time. Its plot appears to be simple: a family and their guests spend a summer at their holiday home, their long-delayed trip to the lighthouse postponed by weather and realized a decade later, while Lily Briscoe struggles to complete her painting. Yet the novel's social critique does not reside in the plot. Rather, it emerges through Woolf's formal strategies - particularly interior monologue and narrative fragmentation - the very techniques Lukács (1996) claimed produced obscured and solipsistic subjectivity (p. 155). By contrast, and in line with the historically rooted formalist approach adopted in this article, Woolf uses these techniques to capture consciousness in intimate detail while simultaneously registering the social and historical forces that shape it.

This claim echoes Morris's (2012) argument that Woolf's modernism does not abandon realism but rather reconfigures it. Morris argues that Woolf develops a "worldly" or "ethical" realism which is sensitive to the relational and social qualities of everyday life. For Morris, interiority is not an escape from the external world but a means of revealing how subjects internalize social norms, power relations, and cultural expectations. In other words, consciousness itself becomes a space where the "real" is apprehended**.** Woolf's interior monologues, then, are not examples of the withdrawal from material reality that Lukács criticizes. Instead, they demonstrate how modernist writing can rethink and renew realist ways of representing the social life.

Liu's (2023) recent study of Woolf's formalism strengthens this point by showing that Woolf's portrayal of consciousness is always tied to what she wants to represent. Lily's painting, for example, shows how artistic form becomes a way of making sense of lived experience rather than escaping from it. From a historically rooted formalist perspective, Liu's argument is important since it highlights that Woolf's aesthetic choices are not only decorative, but central to expressing the emotional, relational, and social qualities of early twentieth-century life.

The novel's shifting third-person omniscient perspective often moves fluidly into the minds of its characters, revealing not only private thoughts but also the ways these thoughts intersect with social hierarchies, political realities, and cultural expectations. An example of this occurs when Mrs. Ramsay reflects on class inequality:

> It seemed to her such nonsense – inventing differences, when people, heaven knows, were different enough without that. The real differences, she thought, standing by the drawing-room window, are enough, quite enough. She had in mind at the moment, rich and poor, high and low; (…) and the things that she

> saw with her own eyes, weekly, daily, here or in London, when she visited this widow, or that struggling wife in person with a bag on her arm, and a note-book and pencil with which she wrote down in columns carefully ruled for the purpose wages and spendings, employment and unemployment, in the hope that thus she would cease to be a private woman whose charity was half a sop to her own indignation, half a relief to her own curiosity, and become what with her untrained mind she greatly admired, an investigator, elucidating the social problem . (Woolf, 1955, pp. 17–18)

Here, Woolf weaves social issues directly into the intimate movement of thought. Mrs. Ramsay's reflections reveal double awareness: she recognizes her own privilege while observing the hard conditions of the poor with a mix of empathy and social distance. At the same time, she hopes to turn her charitable instincts into something more structured and purposeful - almost a scientific effort to understand the social conditions around her.

This example shows the type of "ethical attention to the social world" Morris (2012) identifies as central to Woolf's reconfigured realism. Rather than moving consciousness away from the external world, Woolf uses subjectivity to expose the tensions, limits, and contradictions intrinsic in social experience.

Liu (2023) extends this argument by showing that Woolf's attention to perception - especially in the case of Lily's paintings - reveals how formal strategies mediate these tensions. Lily's attempts to depict Mrs. Ramsay and James through abstract shapes exemplify how Woolf uses aesthetic form as a mode of understanding social relations, emotional ties, and power structures. Under a historically rooted formalist lens, Lily's aesthetic struggle becomes a way of grasping the social world rather than retreating into abstraction.

Far from portraying characters as isolated or asocial - as Lukács (1996) claimed modernist fiction tends to do - Woolf shows how inner life is profoundly shaped by external realities. Thoughts, memories, and emotions are continuously in dialogue with social and historical forces. Mrs. Ramsay's consciousness becomes a space where class, gender, and social obligation meet, revealing how structures of power permeate personal experience. In this sense, Woolf's modernism does not retreat from history; rather, it reconceives how historical and political dimensions are seized, internalized, and negotiated at the level of subjective thought (Lewis, 2007). Seen through Morris's perspective, moments like these reveal a form of realism based not on simply copying external reality, but on acknowledging the ethical connection between individuals and their social world.

Liu's (2023) analysis of Lily's *ekphrastic* consciousness strengthens this interpretation by showing that Woolf portrays thinking as fundamentally relational. Lily's painting becomes a kind of symbolic framework through which she makes sense of the social world, the history of the Ramsay household, and the emotional traces left by its members. Through these aesthetic acts of interpretation, consciousness becomes a space where social and historical meanings take shape. In this way, subjective experience and socio-political reality are tightly entangled, revealing that Woolf's formal experimentation expresses historical consciousness rather than obscuring it.

Woolf's technique also underscores the tension between seeing and doing. Mrs. Ramsay cannot alter structural inequality on her own, but her reflections function as a form of social awareness - recognizing injustice, examining accepted norms, and entertaining the possibility of

different ways of living (Brecht, 1964; Ayers, 2004). Consciousness thus becomes a form of ethical engagement, echoing Morris's (2012) view that Woolf's fiction replaces traditional realist explanation with an "ethical scrutiny" carried out through perception and emotion themselves.

In this context, interior monologue offers a way of tracing the subtle forms of social power that surface in ordinary thought. By placing social critique inside the movement of consciousness, Woolf shows that modernist technique can work on both aesthetic and historical registers, in line with recent scholarship that links her formal practice to postwar social anxieties. This dynamic between literary form and political purpose echoes the debate between Lukács and Brecht. Lukács insisted that literature should reveal the totality of capitalist social relations (1996), whereas Brecht (1964) argued that devotion to nineteenth-century realist techniques was itself un-realist given the complexity of modern life. Woolf's interior monologues can likewise be read in line with Brecht's defense of formal innovation: they do not erase history but represent social and historical forces with nuance, attentiveness, and formal sophistication. A clear example appears in Lily Briscoe's meditation in section nine of *The Window*:

> How then did it work out, all this? How did one judge people, think of them? How did one add up this and that and conclude that it was liking one felt, or disliking? … All of this danced up and down, like a company of gnats, each separate, but all marvelously controlled in an invisible elastic net – danced up and down in Lily's mind … until her thought which had spun quicker and quicker exploded of its own intensity; she felt released. (Woolf, 1955, pp. 40–41)

Lily's stream of consciousness captures both conscious judgment and unconscious impressions. She oscillates between admiration and criticism of Mr. Ramsay, showing that thought resists simple categorization. Her reflections stretch outward, attaching themselves metaphorically to the pear tree, until an external interruption releases her from the spiral of thought. This moment illustrates what Morris (2012) describes as Woolf's "epistemological realism": a form of realism that captures how perception is shaped by emotion, social position, and embodied experience. In this light, consciousness emerges as open and relational, continually influenced by the world around it.

Rather than retreating into subjective obscurity, Woolf's interior monologues dramatize how the individual apprehends reality. Woolf's narrative contrasts of light and dark, male and female, past and present - translates social and political tensions into aesthetic terms. Seen through Morris's (2012) perspective, this "double vision" reflects an ethical realism that stresses relationships, attentiveness, and a sense of responsibility. Liu (2023) adds to this view by showing that Woolf's formal choices are always anchored in lived experience. In Lily's case, her painting brings together abstraction with the expression of emotional and social realities, allowing form to hold both personal memory and collective experience. Through this process, subjectivity becomes a medium for sensing and working through wider social and historical forces. Woolf's experimental techniques therefore shed light on the social and historical conditions of early twentieth-century Britain and thus challenges Lukács's claim that modernism turns away from reality and highlights how closely interior life is connected to the social world.

Gender, Class, and Structural Absence

The socio-political force of Woolf's formal experimentation becomes even clearer when read alongside her depiction of gender roles and class privilege. In the case of the Ramsay family, women's views on social and political matters are routinely pushed aside, revealing how domestic ideology shapes the ways characters think and perceive. These dynamics illustrate what Morris (2012) calls Woolf's "ethical realism": an attention to everyday habits and constrained domestic spaces where power relations are absorbed and reproduced. From the standpoint of historically rooted formalism, such moments show how techniques like interior monologue, focalization, and strategic omission make visible the historical conditions that structure gender and class.

When Mrs. Ramsay raises concerns about milk distribution in London, for instance, her comments are dismissed as unimportant and redirected toward her expected domestic role. The scene highlights how gendered authority determines whose insights carry weight. As Ronchetti (2004) observes, Mrs. Ramsay's "credibility extends only as far as the boundaries of the traditional gender role" (p. 67); she is expected to provide comfort and emotional support rather than participate in public or political discussion. Morris's framework helps clarify that Woolf's realism does not lie in depicting institutions directly but in showing how social structures take shape within private interactions.

Mr. Ramsay, on the other hand, appears demanding and self-absorbed, constantly seeking reassurance. Yet O'Brien Schaefer (1970) complicates this portrayal by suggesting that his "insatiable appetite for sympathy" stems from the pressures of intellectual work, which require emotional and cognitive intensity (p. 76). Woolf thus treats such traits not as isolated personality quirks but as responses shaped by professional expectations, social class, and gender norms. Viewed through a historically rooted formalist lens, these characterizations demonstrate how Woolf's use of focalization and free indirect discourse registers the pressures and hierarchies that defined early twentieth-century gender and class relations.

This asymmetry between men and women is further evident in social gatherings, such as the dinner table scenes, where men discuss wages, fishing seasons, emigration, and the failings of the government, while women remain largely silent:

> That the fishing season was bad; that the men were emigrating. They were talking about wages and unemployment. The young man was abusing the government. William Bankes, thinking what a relief it was to catch on to something of this sort when private life was disagreeable, heard him say something about 'one of the most scandalous acts of the present government. (Woolf, 1955, p. 141)

Here, Woolf shows how social discourse is filtered through gendered positions: men's political talk appears authoritative and public, while women's comments are pushed toward the private or aesthetic sphere. As Ayers (2004) notes, these moments reflect Woolf's "pessimist-feminist analysis" of how individuals, families, and society function within late British imperialism (p. 109). Morris's notion of "worldly realism" sharpens this reading by emphasizing that domestic exchanges are not isolated from politics; they are the very settings where hierarchies are enacted, reinforced, and occasionally questioned. From a historically rooted formalist perspective, such

scenes are shaped by the novel's form itself, foregrounding the social limits of what characters can see, articulate, or even imagine.

At the same time, the political discussions remain thin, shaped entirely by bourgeois viewpoints. Working-class lives, such as those of the fishermen the dinner guests mention, never appear directly. Their absence exposes the constraints of upper-middle-class perception: privilege determines what counts as "real" and what remains unacknowledged. Woolf highlights this limitation through what Morris (2012) calls a realist attention to "the limits of perception." Balossi's (2025) analysis of minor figures like Mrs. Nabb reinforces this point, showing how Woolf's sparse descriptions and narrative omissions draw attention to classed labor and marginality precisely by keeping them at the edges of the text. These figures occupy narrative gaps that prompt readers to sense the invisible work supporting bourgeois comfort. By emphasizing who is not present and whose voices are missing, Woolf turns absence into a key aspect of her social critique. Bourgeois perception emerges as partial and distorted, shaped by distance and ease.

Within this framework, *To the Lighthouse* (1927) is less concerned with depicting overt class struggle than with revealing how bourgeois consciousness itself is formed. Woolf places gendered silences, domestic expectations, and abstract political chatter side by side, exposing the contradictions and blind spots that structure her characters' worldview simultaneously reveals the inner tensions of individuals and the larger contradictions of the society they inhabit. Morris's work clarifies that this double vision is part of a realist ethic - an effort to show how private experience is interwoven with social structures. Balossi's (2025) finding that Woolf builds minor characters through implication rather than full description underscores this argument: the textual gaps surrounding figures like Mrs. Nabb reveal the social boundaries of bourgeois awareness and the invisibility imposed on working-class lives. Through interior monologue and focalization - central tools of historically rooted formalism - Woolf depicts how gender and class operate both internally and externally.

Woolf's structural design further strengthens this socio-historical dimension. The temporal breaks between sections reflect the rupture of World War I, enabling readers to feel social disruption through the structure of the novel. In *Time Passes*, the absence of human voices and the intrusion of impersonal natural forces intensify the sense of historical disruption, making form itself a means of representing history. Woolf's interior monologues absorb social anxieties, gendered hierarchies, and shifting identities in postwar Britain, demonstrating that individual consciousness is inseparable from political and historical realities. Morris's framework clarifies this further: for Woolf, the social world is understood through subjective experience, and the gaps and hesitations of thought reveal the pressures of the era.

Woolf's critique of domestic ideology also emerges through these formal strategies. Domestic settings - especially the Ramsay home - both shelter and constrain, shaping women's labor, emotional responsibilities, and social perception. Yet Woolf also reveals moments of insight and quiet resistance within these limits. Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe, for example, use reflection to recognize inequalities of gender and class, even when they lack space to act on these perceptions. For Morris (2012), such moments of heightened awareness are central to Woolf's realism: they show characters working to perceive the world truthfully despite social constraints. Balossi's (2025) emphasis on Woolf's "economy of character" supports this view, demonstrating how minimal representation of marginal figures forces readers to confront the structures that render some lives visible and others invisible. In line with historically rooted formalism, Woolf's narrative

suggests that social and historical understanding emerges through the very processes of consciousness - perception, and imagination - making these processes political as well as aesthetic.

Taken together, Woolf's attention to gender, class, and structural absence shows how her modernist techniques illuminate socio-historical forces often overlooked in conventional realism. By embedding social critique in both consciousness and narrative form, she reveals that bourgeois experience is not apolitical, but shaped by economic, gendered, and historical conditions. Through this lens, *To the Lighthouse* (1927) demonstrates how modernism can produce socially and historically engaged literature, showing that silence, absence, and interiority can carry as much political weight as explicit commentary.

Historical Rupture and Narrative Form

While Woolf's interior monologues and focus on gendered dynamics show how personal experience is shaped by social structures, the novel's form itself also conveys the sense of historical rupture. The three sections of the novel - *The Window*, *Time Passes*, and *The Lighthouse* - do more than organize the narrative chronologically; they exemplify the social and historical shocks of early twentieth-century Britain, particularly the disruptions caused by World War I and the transformation of domestic and public life. In line with historically rooted formalism, Woolf's structuring of time, rhythm, and focalization becomes a method of representing how historical forces influence lived experience.

The central section, *Time Passes*, exemplifies Woolf's experimental approach. The character-centered narration of *The Window* is abruptly interrupted by impersonal description, elliptical temporal shifts, and parenthetical announcements of death. Perhaps the most striking instance of this structural innovation is the understated notice of 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, 1955, p. 128).

The use of parentheses, the short phrasing, and the restrained tone mark a clear break from nineteenth-century realist narration. Events that carry personal and historical weight - family deaths, the impact of war, and the disruption of domestic life - do not appear as fully developed plot episodes. Instead, they surface as interruptions in the narrative itself. Woolf builds these breaks into the structure of the novel: changes in pace, gaps in narration, and sudden shifts in perspective make readers register the abruptness of death, the movement of time, and the fragility of daily life. In this sense, narrative form becomes the main way the novel conveys historical experience.

This technique aligns with Pericles Lewis's (2007) point that modernist writing often stages the tension between private consciousness and public history, revealing how individual experience is shaped by larger historical forces. In *To the Lighthouse* (1927), the effects of war, social change, and cultural uncertainty move through the novel not through direct commentary but through formal choices. Woolf's interior monologues demonstrate the social anxiety, gendered norms, and unstable identities in postwar Britain - even when the war itself remains largely unmentioned. Within a historically rooted formalist approach, this interplay between unspoken history and inner life shows how consciousness becomes the place where historical pressures are most clearly felt.

Woolf's formal experimentation likewise aligns with Brecht's claim that new realities demand new artistic forms. To rely exclusively on traditional realist conventions, as Lukács (1996)

urged, risks misrepresenting the fractured temporality and instability of postwar life. Realism can account for social structures and relationships, but it cannot fully capture the experiential ruptures of modernity. Woolf responds to this challenge by using structural innovation to represent historical trauma at the level of form. The fragmentation of *Time Passes* - its absence of human voices, intrusion of impersonal natural forces, and sudden announcements of mortality - represents the instability of modern existence. These dislocations mirror the rupture of World War I, allowing readers to experience historical trauma through the temporal and perceptual disruptions of the text.

Throughout the novel, Woolf brings interior monologue together with structural experimentation to show how private perception is shaped by wider historical and social forces. No moment of consciousness stands alone; each one is influenced by cultural expectations, social norms, and the aftershocks of past events. Mrs. Ramsay's death, for instance, has effects that carry far beyond the brief parenthetical announcement. It alters the emotional tone of the narrative, shifts the relationships among the characters, and ultimately changes the direction of the family's story.

These techniques illustrate how modernist form can carry social and historical meaning - an approach that echoes Morris's (2012) account of Woolf's "ethical realism," in which formal choices reveal the relational and ethical dimensions of everyday life.

Woolf also uses structural innovation to highlight the connections between gender, class, and historical change in postwar Britain. In *Time Passes*, the absence of working-class voices and the emphasis on bourgeois perception are reinforced through a distant, impersonal narrative voice. This perspective mirrors the limitations of bourgeois understanding while also exposing them. Woolf's narrative form shows both the apparent calm of domestic life and the deep structural fractures that underlie it. The pacing, ellipses, and fragmented narration in *Time Passes* bring these social and historical tensions to the surface in ways that traditional realism often cannot.

In conclusion, *To the Lighthouse* (1927) shows how modernist techniques can offer rich, historically and socially aware forms of representation. Interior monologue, shifts in focalization, and structural breaks do not turn away from reality; instead, they offer different ways of registering its complexities. Through these formal strategies, Woolf turns consciousness into a space where history, social structures, and personal experience meet. In this sense, the novel exemplifies the historically rooted formalist view that modernism can convey social and historical reality through its very innovations - challenging Lukács's critique and underscoring the socio-political engagement of modernist fiction (Ayers, 2004).

Conclusion

Although *To the Lighthouse* (1927) may not have been written with the explicit aim of exposing capitalism's objectification of individuals, it nevertheless offers a deep engagement with the political, social, and historical conditions of early twentieth-century Britain. Woolf does not attempt to provide a single, unified picture of social life. Instead, she reveals its contradictions and tensions through the shifting and often fragmented nature of consciousness. The movement of her characters' thoughts, the clashes between private impressions and shared social expectations, and the temporal breaks that shape the novel all underscore how difficult it is to portray social reality through the kind of stable coherence associated with traditional realism. In this sense, Woolf's formal choices respond directly to the experience of modernity, acknowledging that everyday life

is marked by disrupted time, uncertainty about what can be known, and the pull of competing social pressures (Lukács, 1996; Lewis, 2007).

From the perspective of historically rooted formalism, Woolf's techniques do not retreat from political or social concerns. Instead, they emphasize that shared social realities are understood through the perceptions, emotions, and ethical judgments of people situated within them. Interior monologue, perspectival shifts, and structural disjunctions - examined in the preceding sections on social perception, gender and class, and historical rupture - demonstrate how consciousness becomes a medium through which socio-historical forces are felt and interpreted. Mrs. Ramsay's reflections on inequality, Lily Briscoe's efforts to reconcile what she sees with what she understands, and the impersonal yet unsettling announcements of death in *Time Passes* all show how historical and social pressures are felt within the characters' inner lives. In Morris's (2012) terms, Woolf develops a mode of "ethical realism" in which attention, relational awareness, and perception form the basis for grasping what is real.

Woolf's formal innovations thus align with Brecht's insistence that new historical conditions demand new artistic forms (Brecht, 1977). Where Lukács views experimental narrative as a withdrawal from reality, Woolf uses experimentation to make reality intelligible in new ways. The fragmentation of *Time Passes*, the juxtaposition of gendered silences with hollow bourgeois discourse, and the subtle interplay of rhythm, absence, and interruption illustrate how form itself becomes a vehicle for historical consciousness. Far from being apolitical or detached from history, Woolf's modernism gives form to the pressures of war, social hierarchy, and gendered constraint through its stylistic and structural choices (Ayers, 2004; Lewis, 2007). Woolf also suggests that historical understanding does not come only from explicit political discussion; it takes shape through the emotional, perceptual, and ethical work of consciousness. The absence of working-class voices, the restrictions imposed by domestic ideology, and the muted but constant presence of war all contribute to a mode of historical awareness that is understated yet deeply resonant. *To the Lighthouse* (1927) shows that history is registered not only in public events but in how individuals notice, misread, absorb, or push against the forces shaping their everyday lives.

Ultimately, the novel demonstrates that modernist writing can engage closely with social and historical realities without relying on straightforward representation or overt moral messages. Through interior monologue, narrative fragmentation, and formal experimentation, *To the Lighthouse* (1927) portrays the complexities of postwar British society as they are lived and felt. By tracing the interplay of consciousness, class, gender, and history, Woolf challenges critiques of modernism and highlights the role of innovative form in exploring social and historical questions. Her fiction shows how modernist technique can illustrate the deep ties between individual thought and social life, offering a clear, ethically alert, and historically grounded account of human experience.

Limitations

This study offers a historically rooted formalist reading of *To the Lighthouse* (1927), with particular emphasis on interiority, focalization, and narrative structure as the primary means through which

social and historical meaning emerges. This focus necessarily leaves other relevant avenues—such as archival materials, material culture, or wider intertextual connections—largely outside the scope of the analysis. Because the argument is developed through a close examination of a single novel, future work could explore whether the dynamics identified here also appear elsewhere in Woolf's writing or within modernist fiction more broadly.

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