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Cover Page Footnote

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A Study of Materialization Through the Symbolism of the Lighthouse in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*

Virginia Moscetti

For art history theorist T.J. Clark, “modernism and materialism go together” (139). Modernism describes a literary, artistic, and intellectual period that emerged in the aftermath of World War I and the Industrial Revolution in the 20th century. Modernism is revolutionary in nature and describes a departure from traditional Victorian literary and artistic forms into experimental structures and abstract topics. For instance, while the Victorian era was concerned with the social nuances of the sitting room, dining table, and foyer, Modernism was concerned with the ambiguities of human consciousness and experience. Materialism, on the other hand, is a school of thought which places matter at the center of everything. According to materialism, all substances, including mental states, are constituted and caused by matter.

Modernism, an abstract experimental genre, and Materialism, a literal-minded and reductive intellectual approach seem to have, at first glance, as little in common as apples and oranges. In fact, Clark acknowledges that the “fellowship” he describes between modernism and materialism did not constitute a kind of literary, artistic, or otherwise conceptual “tradition” nor was it necessarily embraced by artists, thinkers, and writers of the

time period. Despite this, he contends that modernist works strain towards making abstracts materially determinate and literal. Like Freud who, in his "Project or a Scientific Psychology," aimed to represent "psychic processes as quantitatively determined states of specifiable material principles", modernism for Clark is to some extent inclined towards literalizing the ambiguous workings of the subconscious into something that can be "quantified" or grasped (Clark 139).

In his critical work "Freud's Cézanne," Clark tracks this modernist impulse towards materialization through Paul Cézanne's several versions of his painting *The Bathers*. In each of these versions, Cézanne's tactical use of shading and subject-placement transform the work into a space of Freudian phantasy and desire, such that what is repressed and backgrounded into the subconscious for Freud becomes foregrounded and materially literal in *The Bathers*. For Clark, this process occurs most notably with respect to Cézanne's representation of what Clark terms a "double figure." In *The Bathers*, Cézanne depicts a woman whose arms appear to be the legs and buttocks of another woman standing behind her. Although both women are seemingly distinct subjects, they can also be seen as a single, unified body. Clark describes these figures collectively as the "double figure" or a figure with two symbolic connotations (i.e., one discrete subject or two independent ones) that never quite coalesce.

In Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf similarly renders the ambiguous processes associated with desire and our experience of "selfhood" materially literal through the symbolic figure of the lighthouse. In this paper, I explore how the lighthouse operates in the same way as Clark's "double figure."

By referencing philosopher Martin Heidegger and Theodore Adorno, I argue that the lighthouse, through its solidity, comes to represent a process of self-solidification or grouping together of Mrs. Ramsay's self into a "solid" during her private hours. Secondly, I argue that the lighthouse simultaneously represents how Mr. Ramsay's desire for sympathy leads him to distort the image of his wife, Mrs. Ramsay, into a sort of "lighthouse" signal for domestic sanctuary. While in both instances the symbolism of the lighthouse revolves around Mrs. Ramsay, in each, Woolf literalizes distinct subconscious processes related respectively to selfhood and desire. Finally, by showing us how objects are reconstituted into representation by the

powers of mind and desire, I argue that Woolf literalizes what metaphors do and how they fit in to our human experiences.

On pages 62–63 of *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay is described knitting by herself in the privacy of the evening hours:

Now she need not think about anybody. She could be herself by herself . . . And that was what now she often felt the need of . . . to be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others . . . Not as oneself did one find rest ever, in her experience (she accomplished here something dexterous with her needles) but as a wedge of darkness. (Woolf 52)

Here, Mrs. Ramsay is undergoing a process of condensation. The extraneous properties of her personality—that which is “glittering” and externalized towards the world—evaporate as she shrinks down into a solid and compact “wedge of darkness.” In one sense, this process is reductive. It implies discarding the flubber of daily performances of personality and receding into some originary point of the self.

For philosopher Martin Heidegger, every person is a particular kind of entity which he terms *Dasein*, meaning “being there” (*Being and Time* 78). Our “being-there” (or *Dasein*) is the first and most primordial state of our existence. Simply put, it is nothing more than our corporeal presence in the world. Within Heidegger’s philosophy, personality is something we tack onto our *Dasein* (our “being-there”) such that we always have the capacity to enact or be whichever self we choose to be within the constraints of our world (for example, in this world, it is impossible for me to be a pegasus, but it is possible for me to be an astronaut or a doctor)¹. This capacity to enact whichever self we choose is, for Heidegger, the originary capacity of *Dasein* (*The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* 152). Receding into a point of no personality, of a complete and total absence of her “self” as she understands it, Mrs. Ramsay appears to recede into her *Dasein* (or her physical state of “being-there”) that is the most basic and fundamental level of existence. Receding into this point, Mrs. Ramsay also condenses into a point of infinite possibilities for self-making and self-enacting that are originary to her *Dasein*. Thus, this process of condensation into a solid “wedge of darkness,” is also a

1 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pg. 78 (see comportment and The They)

process of expansion into limitless depths. As she descends into this wedge, she senses that “it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is unfathomably deep . . . her horizon seemed to her limitless” (Woolf 52). The unrealized possibilities of her life, the selves she could have enacted, become visible and available to herself in this descent, “this core of darkness could go anywhere . . . there were all the places she had not seen; the Indian plains; she felt herself pushing aside the thick leather curtain of a church in Rome” (52). Like the singularities in our galaxy in which gravity is so intense that time and space can no longer exist, Mrs. Ramsay contracts through the wedge of darkness into a point of infinite density; she no longer is the person who exists in her regular, every-day time nor is she the person that occupies her regular every-day spaces, she just, and simply, “is.”

Quoting Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind*, Theodor Adorno writes in his critical work *Minimalia Moralia*, “the life of the mind only attains its truth when discovering itself in absolute desolation. The mind is not this power as a positive which turns away from the negative, as when we say of something that it is null, or false, so much for that and now for something else; it is this power only when looking the negative in the face, dwelling upon it” (16). For Adorno, a subject discovering itself in “absolute desolation” refers to a subject encountering itself in the absence of a historical moment. Historical moments describe the particular time, place, and socio-historical situation that we find ourselves in during our lifetimes. Importantly, they constitute the specific set of norms we perform and adhere to in our daily lives. For instance, a woman living in the Midwest during the 1950s likely adhered to norms such as being responsible for domestic chores, caring for children, and possessing a particular social role. By contrast, a woman living in a metropolitan city in the 2000s might adhere to different norms, such as going to work, generating income, and others. In both cases, the women’s historical moments provide them with a particular objective placed-ness in the world that defines and predicts (to an extent) what social roles they occupy and how they might act. Adorno terms this self-objectivity derived from historical moments the “in-itself,” or the objective, historical husk that a particular subject is “in.”²

2 Other philosophers, such as Merleau-Ponty, employ the term “in-itself” to refer to the physical body. The “in-itself” could also be understood in terms of Heidegger’s *Dasein* as a corporeal placed-ness. In any case, the term is used to describe the subject’s objective situation or placement within the world, as opposed to their consciousness or psyche.

For Adorno, consciousness and subjective interiority are described as the “for-itself,” or the aspects of selfhood that are both uniquely “for” and “of” the subject itself.

In his work, Adorno argues that individuals phased into history during and after the destruction of World War II, the inhuman violence of concentration camps, and a culture of commodification, are confronted with a historical moment that consists in the “dissolution of the subject.” For Adorno, a subject is constituted by its historical moment and that moment’s associative social norms, cultural realities, etc., as well as its consciousness or psyche (i.e., the “in-itself” and the “for-itself”). Individuals living during and in the aftermath of World War II were confronted with significant social changes. For instance, the normative ethics of the time were challenged by mass destruction and genocide and national identifications, following German invasions, were constantly in flux. While, for Adorno, the subject may continue to exist in these present circumstances in the same way it did in the past as the “for-itself,” insofar as it exists in the present as a consciousness, a psyche, the subject’s past “in-itself” or existence as an objective entity, constituted (for Adorno) by the historical moment in which that subject exists, has been destroyed by post-war circumstances. In the aftermath of World War II, the subject’s past “in-itself” no longer exists. The subject can no longer understand itself as located in the world in the pre-war sense as it did in the post-war sense. Thus, “subjective reflections” which locate the self “in the old subject, now historically condemned, which is still for-itself, but no longer in-itself” are inauthentic and sentimental because they refuse to recognize that the old self no longer exists in the historical moment in which it once did and is, therefore, no longer that same in-itself (Adorno 15–16). For Adorno, authentic self-reflection consists in “looking the negative in the face” and understanding the absence of an “in-itself;” of the loss of the old self’s historical moment in which it was once grounded.

While Mrs. Ramsay’s “descent” into the wedge of darkness involves “looking the negative in the face,” this descent should not (and could not) definitively be read as representative of the post-war subject’s confrontation with its dissolution, both because *To the Lighthouse* was published roughly twenty years before World War II and Mrs. Ramsay’s instance of self-reflection precedes (in the novel) the start of World War I. However, by sinking slowly into the wedge of darkness, Mrs. Ramsay seems to similarly “discover” herself in complete desolation, or in a moment outside of

objective socio-historical forces that characterize her “in-itself” for Adorno. By “dwelling on the negative,” Mrs. Ramsay transcends socio-historical objectivity towards discovering herself as a pure consciousness. However, condensing and contracting in the wedge, we are watching Mrs. Ramsay’s “for-itself” (her consciousness; her subjective existence) gain a literal and material kind of solidity, or the kind of “objectivity” associated with objects. In this light, she becomes an “in-itself,” but in terms of material or object-objectivity rather than historical objectivity. In other words, the “wedge” ultimately gives her consciousness a material placed-ness (i.e., an “in-itself”) in the same way that historical forces do.

As Mrs. Ramsay’s for-itself gains a material solidity through the wedge of darkness by descending into a moment of “desolation” or the absence of an in-itself, her personality, that wispy trail which emanates from her Dasein, is mapped onto the lighthouse’s light-beam. Through this mapping, Mrs. Ramsay’s selfhood comes to assume the architectural configuration of the lighthouse.

Mrs. Ramsay looks out “to meet that stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of the three, which was her stroke . . . watching them in this mood always at this hour one could not help attaching oneself to one thing especially of the things one saw; and this thing, the long steady stroke, was her stroke” (Woolf 53). Attaching herself to the light beam emanating from the lighthouse, the “wedge of darkness” seemingly becomes the conical figure of the lighthouse tower and the entire lighthouse structure becomes a figure representing the totality of Mrs. Ramsay. Consciously attaching herself to the light beam, such that the light beam becomes her “eyes” and the self which is conducting the act of introspection into the “wedge of darkness,” the light beam seems to become a figure for her conscious self, or the self that she enacts in her daily life and is who she understands herself to be. This is evident in how the “light beam” purges and censors her rambling thoughts. On page 53, Mrs. Ramsay spontaneously blurts, “We are in the hands of the Lord.” She immediately becomes annoyed and looks back up to the “third stroke and it seemed to her like her own eyes meeting her own eyes, searching as she alone could search into her mind and her heart, purifying out of existence that lie, any lie” (53). Not actually believing that the Lord keeps us safe, her conscious mind—embodied by the light beam—strikes that thought out of existence as incoherent with how and who she understands herself to be. By contrast, the wedge of darkness, from which this pesky thought

seems to have emerged, appears to be a figure for that which is amorphous, unrealized, and incomprehensible within herself. In other words, that which is not her personality, or who she understands herself to be, but the blank slate upon which that personality is superimposed and the material “in-itself” over and through which the “for-itself” operates. Accordingly, just as our conscious personality is a small sliver that peaks through and over our unconscious “being-there,” the lighthouse’s light beam emerges out of its opaque and darkened tower.

By mapping this ambiguous duality within selfhood of a conscious personality and an unconscious “being there” (that contains within it absolutely nothing of our “selves” except the fact that we exist) onto a physical object, Woolf renders this duality material, and as it were, “quantifiable.” Through the representative figure of the lighthouse, we can parse through, separate, and grasp the abstract processes and features that constitute our “self-hood.” Additionally, by representing Mrs. Ramsay’s descent into herself as the descent into a physical “wedge of darkness,” or darkened lighthouse tower, Woolf literalizes the kind of condensation, or grouping together of ourselves into a contracted point, that occurs in moments of absolute privacy when we are no longer occasioned to perform our personality for others.

Through Mrs. Ramsay’s descent into the wedge, Woolf also seems to privilege the objectivity of objects (i.e., material objectivity) over the objectivity of historical forces as a figure for rooting our sense of self within the world. Whereas historical forces tether us abstractly to a certain expansive, historical “moment,” material objects, by summoning us into a physical and embodied engagement with our environments, tether us literally and immediately to a present. For instance, a hammer brings me into an immediate physical engagement with the nails and picture frames in my environment, thereby enmeshing me, as an embodied entity, into a particular context. Conversely, historical forces dictate the cultural instance that I am a part of and how I will interact with others as well as my environment, thereby bringing me into engagement with my environment in terms of an abstract impulse to perform a historical placed-ness rather than a physical action that immediately links me to and places me within a material world. In other words, historical forces advance a notion of self-rootedness in a particular context that is not as literal or immediate as that which is granted by material objects. Moreover, historical forces are constantly in flux and contingent. While I will not pursue this further, the fact of changeability

and the possibility of contingency alone seem to render historical forces as unstable grounds upon which to root our “in-itself” and, thus, a less effective symbolic figure with which to literalize the ambiguity of possessing a “self-hood.” In this way, Woolf’s description of Mrs. Ramsay’s encounter with the “desolation” of an objective self could be read as an encounter with the inability of abstract historical forces to grant a stable “in-itself” and a descent into the material world, which, by promising physical engagement, roots Mrs. Ramsay literally and immediately within a certain present. The material wedge also provides Woolf with a solid, literal figure with which to represent self-hood in a way that historical forces cannot.

As these ambiguous processes of self-solidification and self-rootedness are rendered literal through the lighthouse, the lighthouse itself loses its literal meaning. Instead, doused in the symbolism of Mrs. Ramsay’s selfhood, it takes on representative and symbolic connotations that reconfigure it into a symbol for Mrs. Ramsay. In other words, the material lighthouse becomes “remade in representation.”

Similarly, in Clark’s “Freud’s Cézanne,” Clark aims to show us how Cézanne’s painted bodies in *The Bathers* are:

thoroughly subject, as we agree they must be, to the play of phantasy; that is, deformed and reconstituted at every point by the powers of mind. But let them appear as they would in a world where all the key terms of our endless debate—“imagination,” “mind,” “body,” “phantasy,” and so on—would be grasped, by the bodies and imaginations themselves, as descriptions of matter in various states. Then the world would be truly remade in representation. (147)

Just as Cézanne’s painted bodies are “deformed and reconstituted at every point by the powers of mind,” so is Woolf’s lighthouse. While its solidity (in its identity as a lighthouse and as a physical object) gives legibility and materiality to the features and experiences of selfhood and placement it represents, it also loses that solidity as its identity as a lighthouse is reconstituted into a representation. Additionally, while this representation is one of human selfhood, it is also a representation of Mrs. Ramsay as a character. To this extent, the lighthouse becomes a metaphor for Mrs. Ramsay. But contrary to how we usually encounter metaphors, such that one object is described as another (“the moon is an apple” would be one such metaphor), we are introduced to the metaphor of the lighthouse for Mrs. Ramsay

through an extended process in which she gradually becomes the lighthouse and in which she is gradually granted “placed-ness” or characterized in the novel as that lighthouse. For when Mrs. Ramsay settles into the “wedge of darkness,” she slowly settles into the forms and figures of the lighthouse tower and lighthouse beam themselves. In doing so, Woolf, like Clark argues on behalf of Cézanne, “literal[izes] [the work of] metaphor” (Clark 158); she makes legible the process by which an object becomes a symbolic stand-in for another. Additionally, by configuring Mrs. Ramsay into a “lighthouse,” Woolf establishes Mrs. Ramsay’s “place” and physical “in-itself” in the novel. The lighthouse becomes Mrs. Ramsay’s objective husk at the same time that it operates as a representation of her subjectivity.³

This metaphor for Mrs. Ramsay is reinforced by how other characters regard and encounter her as a “lighthouse,” particularly her husband, Mr. Ramsay. In the beginning of the novel, Mr. Ramsay, while contemplating some complex philosophical problem,

looked once at his wife and son in the window, and as one raises one’s eyes from a page in an express train and sees a farm, a tree, a cluster of cottages as an illustration, a confirmation of something on the printed page to which one returns, fortified, and satisfied, so without his distinguishing either his son or his wife, the sight of them fortified him and satisfied him and consecrated his effort to arrive at a perfectly clear understanding of the problem . . . (Woolf 29)

Immediately, Mr. Ramsay regards Mrs. Ramsay as a sort of static image of domestic comfort, which, regardless of where his mind travels, eternally confirms a path and possibility of return to the domestic sphere. Observing this emblem of domestic return, Mr. Ramsay feels fortified to pursue his philosophical adventures. Importantly, it is not Mrs. Ramsay herself that makes him feel fortified. As the passage describes, Mr. Ramsay does not perceive her with any distinction. Instead, it is the solidity and stability of the image that reassures Mr. Ramsay that he may always be able to return to the

3 The human body could be said to operate in a similar way: just as our bodies make us encounterable to others and designate a particular spatio-temporal location, they also indicate and express the possession of a subjective interiority. Likewise, the lighthouse could be read as a signal (pun intended) of where we might encounter Mrs. Ramsay spatio-temporally (always as a character and within the scheme of the novel), while also expressing and representing her subjectivity and selfhood.

home. Thus, Mr. Ramsay gleans reassurance from his wife by transforming her into an immutable symbol of perpetual return or a lighthouse.

Upon reaching the lighthouse during the family's final journey there, Mr. Ramsay,

sat looking back at the island. With his long-sighted eyes perhaps he could see the dwindled leaf-like shape standing on end on a plate of gold quite clearly. What could he see? Cam wondered. It was all a blur to her. What was he thinking now? she wondered. What was it he sought, so fixedly, so intently, so silently? . . . He sat and looked at the island and he might be thinking, We perished, each alone, or he might be thinking, I have reached it. I have found it; but he said nothing. (Woolf 174)

The journey to the lighthouse is significant to the family for various reasons. First, it was the journey that Mrs. Ramsay desired for her children that remained unfulfilled at the time of her death. The question of whether or not the family would venture to the lighthouse also incited (what appears to be) one of the final arguments between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. Thus, returning to the lighthouse and completing the journey seems to represent a fulfillment of Mrs. Ramsay's final wishes and a reconciliation between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. However, upon reaching the lighthouse, Mr. Ramsay does not look forward, but rather, looks back to his home on the island. One may even imagine that he is searching for the window where Mrs. Ramsay and James once sat together. While Woolf does not provide us with an explicit access into his thoughts, in looking back, with the literal lighthouse looming over him, it becomes apparent that Mr. Ramsay's lighthouse—the static stable object that illuminates the path to sanctuary—is the image of domesticity that Mrs. Ramsay embodies for him.

Interestingly then, in both instances of this symbolism, the lighthouse is used as a figure to represent Mrs. Ramsay as a solid, material object. However, with respect to the lighthouse as a figure for Mrs. Ramsay's selfhood, the lighthouse comes to represent (and give material solidity, legibility, and placed-ness to) the ambiguous composition of her "self," whereas in this second instance, Mrs. Ramsay comes to represent the features associated with lighthouses. By extension, she becomes characterized as and functions to others as an object (i.e., a lighthouse). This latter function of the

lighthouse metaphor is unsurprising since, without access to her interiority⁴ Mr. Ramsay is inevitably constrained to encountering Mrs. Ramsay as a body to be engaged with physically and materially. Condensed into and located in the novel as a “lighthouse,” Mrs. Ramsay’s body becomes encounterable in the novel specifically through this object. However, there is something else at play here. While Mrs. Ramsay’s process of condensation into the lighthouse is motivated by and literalizes a process of intimate self-reflection, Mr. Ramsay’s reconfiguration of Mrs. Ramsay into a lighthouse is, instead, motivated by and literalizes his desire for sympathy, which he fulfills from inhabiting and perceiving the domestic environment that Mrs. Ramsay creates.

However, he rarely describes this desire explicitly himself, which implies that it is repressed somewhere (or at least backgrounded) within him. James Ramsay is especially sensitive to his father’s desire for sympathy. In a scene described from his perspective, Woolf writes:

[Mr. Ramsay] wanted sympathy. He was a failure, he said. Mrs. Ramsay flashed her needles . . .

He wanted to be assured of his genius, first of all, and then to be taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed, to have his senses restored to him . . . He was a failure, he repeated. Well, look then, feel then. Flashing her needles, glancing round about her, out of the window, into the room, at James himself, she assured him, beyond a shadow of a doubt, by her laugh, her poise . . . , that it was real; the house was full; the garden blowing. If he put implicit faith in her, nothing should hurt him; however deep he buried himself or climbed high . . . so boasting of her capacity to surround and protect, there was scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by; all was so lavished and spent. (Woolf 32)

Thus, Mr. Ramsay gathers sympathy from the domestic environment Mrs. Ramsay weaves together through the “clicking of together” of her needles. The needles seem to operate as a kind of phallic imagery, which in

4 This cannot be exclusively attributed to our general inability to fully access another person’s interiority. Throughout the novel, Mr. Ramsay yearns to gain entrance into Mrs. Ramsay’s personal thoughts, which she constantly denies in order to seemingly shelter him from her deep-set sense of melancholy and thereby preserve the image of domesticity and sanctuary that Mr. Ramsay imposes upon her (Woolf 55–60).

clicking together, evoke a desire for the phallus in two ways. First, sympathy, as Clark suggests, “is intercourse lightly disguised” (158). The desire for sympathy can be viewed as the desire for quasi-phallic entrance; a desire to have someone “try you on” and commune with your experiences. Secondly, Mr. Ramsay’s entrance into the room is described as a kind of sterile or failed sexual intercourse: “into this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself, like a beak of brass, barren and bare” (Woolf 32). Sympathy, or the clicking together of Mrs. Ramsay’s needles, is the remedy for this sterility; it is the only thing that can fortify and reinvigorate Mr. Ramsay in the otherwise sterile pursuit of his philosophical endeavors. The presence of the needles makes the ambiguous implications of a desire for sympathy materially literal. Through the needles, the desire for sympathy becomes legible as a desire for intimate entrance as well as a desire for recuperating a sense of fertility or capability in being soothed by this entrance. The clicking of the needles and the static image of Mrs. Ramsay with James in the window communicate to Mr. Ramsay the sympathy he desires by virtue of the fact that they signal the fertile domestic environment that Mrs. Ramsay embodies. However, in the preceding passage as in the majority of the novel, Mr. Ramsay does not himself articulate his desire for sympathy. Instead, it is something that emanates from him and, as such, is readily apparent to other characters. Still, by reconstituting Mrs. Ramsay into a “lighthouse” that signals that this domestic environment exists and reassures him of his capacity to return to it, Mr. Ramsay’s sublimated desire for sympathy becomes explicit—even in the sections described from his perspective. By literalizing this act of sublimation through the lighthouse, Woolf legibly and literally discloses to us how bodies and objects are “deformed and reconstituted at every point by the powers of mind” and desire (Clark 147). Ultimately, through the symbolic figure of the lighthouse, Woolf literalizes two distinct processes of objectification: the first in which an individual gains material object-objectivity and place-edness, and the second in which an individual is warped and re-made by the forces of desire precisely into an object of desire.⁵

5 This could be additionally construed as a metaphor for embodiment overall: insofar as we have and gain possession of a body (the primary condition of gaining a presence in our world), we become an objective feature of the world. We become encounterable in space. In becoming so encounterable, we simultaneously become vulnerable to objectification by those who encounter us.

While Mrs. Ramsay and Mr. Ramsay both use the figure of the lighthouse to represent Mrs. Ramsay, they clearly do so in distinct ways (and to distinct ends). What emerges is two versions of the same symbol that never quite coalesce into a single one. Clark describes this phenomenon as the “double figure.”



Paul Cézanne, *The Large Bathers*, 1904–1906

In "Freud's Cézanne", Clark focuses particularly on the two rightmost figures of the last version of *The Bathers*, *The Large Bathers* (pictured above): the squatting woman and the woman walking away above her. While each of these figures appear somewhat distinct (as demonstrated by the stark black lines that seemingly divide them), they also converge into a singular body in an interesting way. For example, the bottom woman's shoulders could be perceived both as shoulders and as the buttocks, and thus an extension of the figure above her (Clark 154). The configuration presents a complicated, almost interpretively inhibiting, duality. Viewing the figure as divided into two discrete figures implies suppressing the sense that they are unified (and ignoring the blatant buttock-like quality of the shoulders) while viewing them as one implies visually suppressing the head placement and intersecting lines that distinguish the squatting figure from the one above it (Clark 154). As such, the configuration never quite coalesces into a static single body or two bodies, but instead captures a state of in-betweenness, change, and movement that evokes embryonic or sexual differentiation, the shifting of bodies in space, the desire for new identities, and/or the desire for physical or abstract entrance via empathy into another body (Clark 154–155).

Similarly, the symbolism of the lighthouse in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* can be viewed as a double figure. While in both Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's cases the lighthouse is a representative figure for Mrs. Ramsay, in the latter case it is both a figure for Mrs. Ramsay's self entering an instant of condensation and sedimentation into the most originary point of self-hood as well as a figure architecturally representing the dual-configuration (i.e., personality and "being-there") of her "self" through the lighthouse's tower base and light beam head (such that this "self" gains a material placed-ness). As such, this instance of the lighthouse figure represents Mrs. Ramsay as she is in an extremely private moment, while Mr. Ramsay's figure of the lighthouse for Mrs. Ramsay represents her (reconfigured by his desire for sympathy) as a domestic object. Mrs. Ramsay is aware of this role that she serves to others and plays into it.

Indeed, [she thinks to herself while reflecting on the large quantity of guests entertained in her home] he had the whole of the other sex under her protection; for reasons she could not explain, for their chivalry and valor, for the fact that they negotiated treaties, ruled India, controlled finance; finally for an attitude towards herself which no woman could fail to feel or to find agreeable, something trustful, childlike, reverential . . . (Woolf 6)

Mrs. Ramsay recognizes and performs her role of signaling and creating a domestic sanctuary for others. However, while she may enact this lighthouse function, this figure of the lighthouse does not coalesce with the figure of the lighthouse that represents her materially as herself. And yet, both figures, insofar as they are rooted in Mrs. Ramsay, are superimposed upon—perhaps even lightly connected—to each other. They extend from each other in such a way that a doubleness and an in-betweenness in her character is invoked. Asking ourselves—as Lily Briscoe frequently does—where do we locate Mrs. Ramsay as a character? Who is she? The double figure of the lighthouse replies: as both an object reconfigured by the desires for sanctuary and sympathy and as an infinitely dense wedge of darkness shot through with the light beam of conscious personality.

As Clark writes, Cézanne's configuration calls to mind two Freudian notions, "'condensation' and 'displacement.' And no doubt 'condensation' is the word we want—one figure, that is, standing for more than one possible dream-content" (154). Similarly, the lighthouse contains compacted and condensed within it two symbolic connotations that revolve around the same

individual. By representing the lighthouse as representative of two, seemingly contradictory, connotations, Woolf communicates and literalizes the notion of condensation. Additionally, understood more literally, the notion of condensation as a vapor becoming liquid or an object contracting into a point of increasing density describes the process by which Mrs. Ramsay settles and descends into herself and into the material symbolism of the lighthouse. It also describes the process by which Mr. Ramsay's vaporous and unformed desires condense into a solid image of Mrs. Ramsay as a domestic sanctuary and guiding light to home.

As Clark continues, "the notion of displacement will [also] never . . . entirely go away" (154). In the Freudian sense, displacement is when feelings connected with one object are displaced onto another. In Mr. Ramsay's case, the desires for home and sympathy (while it is unclear from where they originate) that he experiences are displaced onto Mrs. Ramsay and reconfigure her into a "lighthouse" to home. However, "even when [Woolf] wants to show us the body's interminable shifting and reconstruction in the space of desire, [she] wants the space to be literalized and the body's states to be individually solid as a rock" (Clark 154). The lighthouse, in its various adumbrations throughout the novel, makes these spaces solid and legible. It renders Mr. Ramsay's desires material and Mrs. Ramsay's amorphous sense of self literal. Even though these spaces do not quite coalesce into a single figure of the lighthouse such that there is a "sense - in which you go on seeing the one reading [of these spaces] as suppressing or getting in the way of the other," they do not become less determinate as a result. Returning to Adorno, because Woolf defines Mrs. Ramsay's "in-itself" or objective presence in the novel as a lighthouse, such that, despite the lighthouse's varying symbolic connotations, Mrs. Ramsay's physical and symbolic presence remains tethered to the same object, each connotation is never quite compromised or lost. Instead, they each remain unapologetically solid, like different static snapshots of the same body.

At once, Woolf's lighthouse configuration literalizes displacement and condensation (both in terms of the Freudian notions and regular meanings of these words) such that the lighthouse cannot definitively be read as a symbol for Mrs. Ramsay's "self" or Mrs. Ramsay as the domestic sanctuary, nor as a proper combination of both, but as a symbol that shifts interminably between these two connotations. This, the lighthouse, is the double figure: a figure that is fundamentally "multiplied by . . . imagined acts, by the

plurality of [the] experience of [a] body getting beyond us" into spaces of desire and into the various imaginations of what it means to be a self and what it means to be and possess that self (Clark 157). Despite its shifting, the lighthouse's doubleness—its various apparitions in the novel—remain solid and literal. What we gain, besides a material sense of ambiguous subconscious processes, is a sense of how these processes reconstitute objects into representative figures. In sum, we learn how metaphor operates and how it structures the physical totality of our world.

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