

## VIRGINIA WOOLF'S AESTHETICS OF MODERN FICTION: SEARCH FOR FORM IN A SHORT STORY "THE MARK ON THE WALL"

Linara Bartkuvienė

Vilniaus universiteto Literatūros istorijos ir teorijos katedros doktorantė

To develop a better understanding of Virginia Woolf's aesthetics of modern fiction, the complexity of Woolf's pursuit of form, her experimentation with narrative, and ambitions to pursue a technique able to push beyond the socio-descriptive Victorian fiction, this paper will focus on the British formalist aesthetics and its influence on Woolf's literary practice – her shorter fiction and literary criticism. Professor Ann Banfield, a critic who will play a prominent role in the development of the argument, suggests that namely the formalist aesthetics of the Bloomsbury painter and critic Roger Fry, and the Bloomsbury writer and philosopher of art Clive Bell, had a crucial influence upon the formalist structures of Woolf's writing<sup>1</sup> as their theories supplanted visual arts, as well as Woolf's aesthetic *principia* of "modern fiction", with theoretical structures of the *formally significant*. The article will also seek to argue that Woolf's short story "The Mark on the Wall" (1918), as well as her 1917–1921 shorter fiction *in corpore*, integrates the key principles of her aesthetics of modern fiction, and is part of literary post-

impressionist writing which manifests Woolf's early aspirations to discover a new literary form to reveal a different kind of realism, i.e., a realism of emotion, rather than surface, what it feels like from the inside of the mind in the process of the (de)construction of the meaning of reality.

Although, as Woolf writes, the Post-Impressionist movement was confined to painting<sup>2</sup>, I tend to argue that it did enter the house of literature, however, not in the form of a unified theory, but in the form of a narrative experiment, as no mainstream theory of the influence of Post-Impressionism upon literature was ever worked out. Woolf's essays and literary criticism, however, manifest her overriding concern for the need for a new aesthetics as the traditional narrative form was inadequate in the attempt to describe the unobserved world; literature was, therefore, in need of "new forms for new sensations"<sup>3</sup>.

Woolf felt that the formal ontology of the novel's literary realism was outmoded as it disabled the writer to be free, to write what he

<sup>1</sup> Ann Banfield, *The Phantom Table. Woolf, Fry, Russel and the Epistemology of Modernism*, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Roger Fry. A Biography*, HBJ Book, 1968, 172.

<sup>3</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Crowded Dance of Modern Life*, Penguin Books, 1993.

chose, not what he must. Victorian Realism disabled the writer to write in a language “appropriate to the sensibilities of the modern outlook”<sup>4</sup>. In one of her most often quoted passages Woolf writes: “If he [the writer] could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style”<sup>5</sup>. Another early piece of Woolf, too, observes that modern consciousness necessitates the demand to “liven the faded colours of bygone ages” and, therefore, “fresh and amusing shapes must be given to the old commodities”<sup>6</sup>. Woolf aptly marks that any new “peculiar substance” implies a new form of narrative: “you can say in this shape what you cannot with equal fitness say in any other”<sup>7</sup>. Since for Woolf reality lies in individual perception, in subjective experience of consciousness, she willingly accepted the post-impressionist scheme to abandon realism, or, as she put it, “materialism” which, as Woolf saw it, was concerned with the body rather than the spirit, writing of “unimportant things”, spending “immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring”<sup>8</sup>. (It is useful to remember that Post-Impressionism in painting, and Cézanne in particular, was mostly preoccupied with the underlying structures of natural forms rather than surface appearances; Gauguin and van Gogh, too, sought a more personal, spiritual expression of human experience.) “Materialist” writing failed to

convey “life” in its true form: a form which resembles a pattern of a “luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end”<sup>9</sup>. Materialism, as Woolf understood it, was concerned with the fabric of the novel construct, solid in its craftsmanship, and, although, the strict formal conventions of the novel were inadequate to encode subjective experience, the writer, nevertheless, goes on “perseveringly, conscientiously, constructing our two and thirty chapters after a design which more and more ceases to resemble the vision in our minds”<sup>10</sup>. To write modern subjective realism, the writer must abandon the tyranny of convention and pursue a form that can resemble the mental reality, to pursue a form which would enable the writer to eschew materialism and convey the varying, unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, “whatever aberration or complexity it may display”<sup>11</sup>.

Woolf held that “modern fiction” should find a way to reveal the unobserved world, “the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain”<sup>12</sup>. Modern fiction should by no means be a reproduction of the surface appearance of things “making the trivial and transitory appear the true and the enduring”<sup>13</sup>, it should be based on a mental journey “within” the “unobserved”. Woolf’s well-known passage reads: “Look within ... examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Reed (ed.), “Refining and Defining”, *A Roger Fry Reader*, The University of Chicago Press, 1996, 129.

<sup>5</sup> “Modern Fiction”, *The Crowded Dance of Modern Life*, Penguin Books, 1993, 8.

<sup>6</sup> “The Decay of Essay-Writing”, Virginia Woolf, *A Woman’s Essays*, Penguin Books, 1992, 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>8</sup> “Modern Fiction”, 7.

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–8.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

innumerable atoms; and as they fall, they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday”<sup>14</sup>. Woolf believed that the emphasis should lay on “the dark places of psychology”<sup>15</sup>, i.e., on the mind, that in Woolf’s discourse, as professor A. Banfield writes, is “sensitized to the atomization of the world, led by the dancing atoms in random directions”<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, “at once a different outline of form becomes necessary”<sup>17</sup>, incomprehensible and difficult to grasp, a new “visual language of imagination” becomes necessary to produce such a form.

The post-impressionist paradigm in painting at large, and in Fry’s and Woolf’s aesthetics, therefore, made it imperative to produce a form “to arouse emotions which are normally dormant”, to evoke “our latent perception” of things and “enable us to grasp their imaginative significance”<sup>18</sup>. But what measures should be taken to reach this objective? In Fry’s aesthetics of “pure form”, the graphic arts had to discover “the visual language of the imagination”, “to discover what arrangements of form and colour are calculated to stir the imagination most deeply through the stimulus given to the sense of sight”<sup>19</sup> since the world of imagination, as Roger Fry saw it, was “essentially more real than the actual world”, because it had “a coherence and unity which the actual world lacks”<sup>20</sup>. In Woolf’s literary Post-Impressionist aesthetics, too, the need for “the visual language of the imagination” which she calls a language capable to record “the atoms as they fall upon the mind”<sup>21</sup> is reaffirmed. In “The Cinema”, she

asks whether there is “some secret language which we feel and see, but never speak, and, if so, could this be made visible to the eye?”<sup>22</sup> Whereas in “The Mark on the Wall” (1918), one of Woolf’s early exercises with narrative and “visual language” that fully accords with the tenets of the Post-Impressionist paradigm mentioned above, Woolf engages in a practical experiment with texture<sup>23</sup> and sets out to discover what arrangements and underlying structures of form are potentially able to stir the imagination, and to “arouse emotions which are normally dormant”<sup>24</sup>, as is implied in Roger Fry’s, and Clive Bell’s, formalist scheme. When at the very onset of the story the narrator, who cosily sits by the fire on a winter’s day, spots the mark (“Perhaps it was the middle of January in the present year that I first looked up and saw the mark on the wall”<sup>25</sup>), her “dormant” emotions are aroused, her “latent perception” is evoked, and the imagination is stirred. The narrator admits being pleasantly amused by the thought of “how readily our thoughts swarm upon a new object, lifting it a little way, as ants carry a blade of straw feverishly, and then leave it”<sup>26</sup>. The mark on the wall awakens the narrator’s imagination and unlocks her mind to let it

<sup>22</sup> “The Cinema”, *The Crowded Dance of Modern Life*, 57.

<sup>23</sup> Fry immediately recognized the emergence of Woolf’s personal style in the short story “The Mark on the Wall” when it first appeared in 1918 and particularly admired her preoccupation with the texture of prose. He wrote to tell her of his impressions: “I’ve re-read it twice and like it better every time and am more and more delighted with it. Of course there are lots of good writers [...] but you’re the only one now who uses language as a medium of art, who makes the very texture of the words have a meaning and quality”; quoted from Frances Spalding, *Roger Fry: Art and Life*, University of Sussex, 1980.

<sup>24</sup> “Expression and Representation”, 68.

<sup>25</sup> “The Mark on the Wall”, *Virginia Woolf, Selected Short Stories*, Penguin Books, 1993, 53.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Banfield, 2000, 182.

<sup>17</sup> “Modern Fiction”, 10.

<sup>18</sup> “Expression and Representation”, *A Roger Fry Reader*, 69.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>21</sup> “Modern Fiction”, 8.

unfold in random order that turns into a fragmentary collage of unfinished vignettes. And as it turns, it produces a series of multifarious introspections on the nature of life and the weight of reality, the future of literature and the commitments of the writer, the social order of male-governed and military-oriented hierarchic society etc. As the narrator follows the line of her thought, the narrative not only discards the representative element in the narrative discourse, it does away with most of the conventions – plot, character, setting - which are commonly observed by the novelist, and concentrates on the workings of the mind at large, on the eyles, i.e., on “the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain”<sup>27</sup>. To trace and (re)produce them, the narrative of “The Mark on the Wall” tends to clearly defy the accepted form of “gig lamp symmetry”, to leave the description of reality out of the framework of the story, and to attempt at conveying the “varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display”<sup>28</sup>. Woolf aimed at non-representationalism and wanted to move away from both the established order of fiction and the established order of society which was based on the standard, as Woolf says, set by Whitaker’s Table of Precedency: “The Archbishop of Canterbury is followed by the Lord High Chancellor; the Lord High Chancellor is followed by the Archbishop of York. Everybody follows somebody, such is the philosophy of Whitaker; and the great thing to know is who follows whom”<sup>29</sup>. Leaving the description of reality outside the premises of the story, Woolf attempts at distancing herself from the traditional narrative form largely based on “whita-

<sup>27</sup> “Modern Fiction”, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Woolf, 8.

<sup>29</sup> “The Mark on the Wall”, 59.

kerian” precedency, i.e., order of fiction resting both on the progression from cause to effect, and on the two organically inseparable correlatives - plot and character. The “plot” of “The Mark on the Wall”, therefore, seems to be testing the digressive method of the “time-shift”, also known as “looping chronology”, so as to depart from the conventionally linear - sequential development of the story. And although Avrom Fleishman suggests that “The Mark on the Wall” has a controlled linear form (i.e., a form that starts at one place of time or motif and moves through a number of others, arriving at a place, time, motif distinct from those with which they begin)<sup>30</sup>, I tend to argue that the narrative of the story has a circular form – a form which begins and ends with the same or similar elements. The story begins with the narrator’s noticing of the mark on the wall (“Perhaps it was the middle of January in the present year that I first looked up and saw the mark on the wall”<sup>31</sup>), and so does it end (“Ah, the mark on the wall! It was a snail”<sup>32</sup>). Moreover, throughout the narrative of the story Woolf’s narrator does not follow an upward linear path: the action of the narrative loops forward and backward through narrative time to illustrate “the inaccuracy of thought”, “the mystery of life”<sup>33</sup>. The narrator catches the first idea that passes<sup>34</sup>, scrutinizes it, dispenses

<sup>30</sup> “Forms of the Woolfian Short Story”, *Virginia Woolf: Revaluation and Continuity*, University of California, Los Angeles, London, 1980, 53.

<sup>31</sup> “The Mark on the Wall”, 53.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. “The Room of One’s Own”: The narrator sits on the banks of a river at “Oxbridge” musing over the issue of women and fiction. She represents her musings metaphorically in terms of fishing: “thought... had let its line down into the stream” of the mind, where it drifts in the current and waits for the tug of an idea. As soon as she gets a bite, however, she is interrupted by a university security guard who enforces the rule by which women are not allowed to walk onto the grass. She returns to the gravel path, however, she had lost her “little fish” of an idea.

with it, and moves on to other reflection, for instance: “let me catch hold of the first idea that passes ... Shakespeare ... Well, he will do as well as another. A man who sat himself solidly in an arm-chair, and looked into the fire so – A shower of ideas fell perpetually from some very high Heaven down through his mind. [...] – But how dull this is, this historical fiction! It doesn’t interest me at all. I wish I could hit upon a pleasant track of thought”<sup>35</sup>. Woolf’s employing of these “digressions” serve the purpose of emphasizing the nature of the fluid states of mind, to temporarily dissolve time in the consciousness of her narrator, letting associations of ideas – stream-of-consciousness – prevail. Woolf’s stream-of-consciousness narrative rests on her own devised method of interruptions<sup>36</sup> intended to disrupt the conscious thought construct of her narrator, and, at the same time, to slow down or speed up the plot and enhance the narrative, to shift the emphasis from action to awareness of action, from experience of life to reflection and analysis. Her method of disruption incorporates an occasional use of several figures of interruption, such as *anacoluthon*, i.e., a rhetorical mannerism when the beginning of a sentence implies a certain logical resolution, but is concluded differently than the grammar leads one to expect. For instance, “There will be nothing but spaces of light and dark, intersected by thick stalks, and rather higher up perhaps, rose-shaped blots of an indistinct colour – dim pinks and blues – which will, as time goes on, become more definite, become – *I don’t know what*”<sup>37</sup>. Another example reads: “a handful of Elizabethan nails, a great many Tudor clay pipes, a piece of Roman pottery, and the wine glass

that Nelson drank out of – *proving I really don’t know what*”<sup>38</sup>. Such interruption manifests a verbal lack of symmetry, and is characteristic of spoken language or interior thought, and thus suggests those domains when it occurs in writing. Another figure of interruption that Woolf employs is *aposiopesis*: when the narrator breaks off suddenly in the middle of speaking, usually when he/she is overcome with emotion; for example, the narrator of “The Mark on the Wall” reflects on Shakespeare but, all of sudden, she leaves her reveries of Shakespeare aside, breaks off suddenly in the middle of her reflections, and says she wishes she could “hit upon a pleasant track indirectly reflecting credit upon myself, for those are the pleasantest thought”<sup>39</sup>.

Woolf’s method of interruptions also largely rests upon her close attention to rhythm, syntax, accented syllables. Her use of poetic effect – rhythm and its variations – gives power upon the shape of the sentence, the rise and fall of its cadences, the moments of accented intensity and fluid forward movement. For instance, punctuation – numerous ellipses and dashes, semicolons, exclamatory and question marks – helps to manoeuvre the narrative action: to slow it down or to speed it up. To manoeuvre the narrative vehicle of the story, Woolf also uses the oppositions of “static” versus “dynamic” blocks of passages, e.g., the passage dominated by the static objects – “possessions”, “things”, “solid furniture” – precedes the paragraph abundant in flux and dynamic motion – “the Tube”, “fifty miles an hour”, “hair flying back”, “a race-horse” etc. – which, in its turn, is followed by another fragment dominated by “static” nouns – “thick green stalks”, “the cup of the flower”, “the roots of the grass” and so on. Interestingly enough,

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>36</sup> Lucio Ruotolo, *The Interrupted Moment*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986.

<sup>37</sup> “The Mark on the Wall”, 55.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

Woolf builds the construct of her narrative not only on the basis of the contrast between “static” and “dynamic”, but also on the groundwork of the antithesis of “low” and “high”. For instance, she juxtaposes “the roots of the grass” with “the toes of the Giants” etc. Moreover, the use of exclamatory marks as well as the choice of the verbs expressing motion as much as the assonance and the consonance contribute much to the impression of fast speed gained throughout the narrative. The sounds [th], [f], [h], [p], [t] create and reinforce the impression of haste and rapidity: “if one wants to compare life to anything, one must liken it to being blown through the Tube at fifty miles an hour – landing at the other end without a single pin in one’s hair! Shot out at the feet of God entirely naked! [...] With one’s hair flying back like the tail of a race-horse”<sup>40</sup>. Another passage, which is largely based on repetition, and the use of commas and ellipses, produces an opposite impression, i.e., an impression of a smoothly flowing thought: “The tree outside the window taps very gently on the pane ... I want to think quietly, calmly, spaciouly, never to be interrupted, never to have to rise from my chair, to slip easily from one thing to another, without any sense of hostility, or obstacle... I want to sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facets”<sup>41</sup>.

In Woolf’s stream-of-consciousness narrative, with its method of interruptions, the mark on the wall – the controlling motiff of the story – remains the axis of the story, the physical background against which the story is projected. It helps to arouse and sustain our thoughts and feelings, and calls into play our visual imagination: “I looked up through the smoke of my

cigarette and my eye lodged for a moment upon the burning coals, and that old fancy of the crimson flag flapping from the castle tower came into my mind, and I thought of the cavalcade of red knights riding up the side of the black rock”<sup>42</sup>. The mark on the wall, as the element of “setting”, is also the element of place and time which gives us more or less specific point of spatial and temporal reference. Throughout the development of the story it brings us back to the point of the beginning of the story and does not allow us to grope in the flow of thought. The mark is the departure point where the narrator’s mental journey starts and periodically returns to. It is the gateway to the “reality behind”<sup>43</sup>, the world of “unobserved sensibilia”<sup>44</sup>. Woolf uses it to create a single vision out of two realities, to unite the visible to the eyeless. Woolf echoes Fry and reiterates, as professor A. Banfield suggests, what Post-Impressionists aimed at reaching: “Post-Impressionism must reach the unseen world of persisting objects, of enduring forms, to complete Impressionism’s Cartesian project with design”<sup>45</sup>.

Post-Impressionist imperatives expected the artist to discover the truths by constructing the object from different elements, from the sense-data of different perspectives. “The Mark on the Wall” reiterates what Cézanne insisted on: “If in this abstract world these elements are perfectly co-ordinated and organized by the artist’s sensual intelligence, they attain logical consistency”<sup>46</sup>. In “The Mark on the Wall” a multifarious structure of different reveries – elements are, too, coordinated and organized by the

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>43</sup> See Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 1912: [online:www.ditext.com/russell/russell.html](http://www.ditext.com/russell/russell.html)

<sup>44</sup> Banfield, 2000, 52.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>46</sup> Roger Fry, *Cezanne: A Study of His Development*, University of Chicago Press, 1969, 58.



narrator who keeps bringing the mark on the wall into the field of her perspective: “If that mark was made by nail, it can’t have been for a picture”, “but as for that mark”, “and yet that mark on the wall”<sup>47</sup> etc. Gathered into a whole, the reveries attain the form of logical consistency, required by Cézanne. “The Mark on the Wall”, too, testifies to the narrator’s wish to discover the truths by constructing the framework of the form of the narrative from a variety of sense-data viewed from different perspectives, i.e., the mark on the wall, which not only serves as the narrator’s point of departure which is eventually ultimately transformed in her contemplative vision, but also is an essential element of formal design, it helps to assemble the “vision’s shimmering particles”<sup>48</sup>, to discover an “intellectual form in chaotic sense-data”<sup>49</sup> so as to accomplish what Post-Impressionists sought to achieve – to cut away “the merely representative element in art to establish more and more firmly the fundamental laws of expressive form in its barest, most abstract elements”<sup>50</sup>.

The narrative of “The Mark on the Wall”, therefore, seems to be testing what Fry in “The Artist’s Vision” urged the artist to attempt at: he urged the artist to “contemplate the object disinterestedly”<sup>51</sup>; he believed that if the artist relies more upon the detached and impassioned vision, “the (aesthetically) chaotic and accidental conjunction of forms and colours begin to crystallise into a harmony”<sup>52</sup>. Clive Bell in his theory of “significant form”, too, stretched the

detachment of aesthetic appreciation from other sorts of interest we might have in an object.

According to Bell, art must be divorced from real life: “For to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions. Art transports us from the world of man’s activity to a world of aesthetic exaltation. For a moment we are shut off from human interests; our anticipations and memories are arrested; we are lifted above the stream of life”<sup>53</sup>. He used to repeat that a work of art is a world with emotions of its own. Within Bell’s aesthetics emotion had little to do with feelings of love, hate or humanity, but was limited to an intellectual response to form - one purified rather than “clogged with unaesthetic matter (e.g. associations)”<sup>54</sup>.

The narrative of “The Mark on the Wall”, therefore, engages in the post-impressionist pursuit for disinterestedness, and forces the reader into detached and impassioned contemplation in the course of which random reveries “which are normally dormant”<sup>55</sup> begin to crystallize into one harmonic whole. The narrator aims at what Post-Impressionists sought – they sought to explore and express “that emotional significance which lies in things, and is the most important subject matter of art”<sup>56</sup>. Professor Banfield extends the argument and suggests that in the theory of knowledge which Moore and Russel formulated (and which had a profound effect on Woolf’s conception of reality), the objects of sight are dual: “There are sense-data seen with the body’s eyes. There are also directly apprehended abstract objects:

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<sup>47</sup> “The Mark on the Wall”, 53–57.

<sup>48</sup> Banfield, 2000, 274.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> “The Grafton Gallery-I”, *A Roger Fry Reader*, 87.

<sup>51</sup> Roger Fry, *Vision and Design*, Chatto and Windus, 1929, 48.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

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<sup>53</sup> Clive Bell, *Art*, Perigee, 1964, 25.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>55</sup> “Expression and Representation”, 69.

<sup>56</sup> “The Post-Impressionists”, *A Roger Fry Reader*, 82.

universals, propositions, logical forms – “perceptions of relations”<sup>57</sup>. Peter Hylton adds that “truths are perceived with the eye of the mind rather than with the eyes of the body”<sup>58</sup>. For, in the search for knowledge, it is not enough to scrutinize appearances: “One must penetrate to the forms beneath”<sup>59</sup>. In “The Mark on the Wall”, Woolf produces the narrative which allows both the writer and the reader to look at what is deep under the appearances. In her search for knowledge, she penetrates to the forms beneath the surface and observes, as W.Holtby puts it, “how far it was possible to write her prose from within, like poetry, giving it a life of its own”<sup>60</sup>. It is “the eye of the mind” rather than “the eyes of the body” that grows wide at the presence of multifarious forms beneath the appearances of “the objects of sight”; it is “the eye of the mind” that enables the reader to gain a perception of, as Roger Fry put it, “the “treeness” of the tree”<sup>61</sup>. The Russian Formalist critic Victor Shklovsky, too, suggested that it is the mission of art to recover the sensation of life as art exists to make one feel things, “to make the stone *stony*”, to resist the paralysis and automatism of perception as habitualization devours our belongings, clothes, and so on. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known<sup>62</sup>. Roger Fry, as much as Virginia Woolf, thought it was, too, imperative to explore and express

<sup>57</sup> Banfield, 2000, 251.

<sup>58</sup> Peter Hylton, *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*, Clarendon Press, 1992, 197.

<sup>59</sup> Banfield, 2000, 251.

<sup>60</sup> Winifred Holtby, *Virginia Woolf*, Wishart & Co., 1932, 100.

<sup>61</sup> “The Post-Impressionists”, *A Roger Fry Reader*, 82.

<sup>62</sup> Виктор Шкловский, *Искусство как прием*, Москва: Советский писатель, 1990, 63. «Автоматизация съедает вещи, платье, мебель, жену [...] чтобы вернуть ощущение жизни, почувствовать вещи, для того, чтобы делать камень каменным...»

“that emotional significance which lies in things, and is the most important subject matter of art”<sup>63</sup>. Like Shklovsky, and L.Tolstoy, who believed that the task of art is to defamiliarize, i.e., to show the reader common things in an unfamiliar or strange way so as to enhance the perception of what is familiar to him, Fry in his essay on Post-Impressionism (1911) encourages the artists to misrepresent and distort “the sensibilia”: “the artist’s business is not merely the reproduction and literal copying of things seen: – he is expected in some way or other to misrepresent and distort the visual world”<sup>64</sup>. What the narrator of “The Mark on the Wall” does is to misrepresent the snail by giving it an attribute of “the mark on the wall” and disclosing it at the close of the story (structurally speaking, the relation between the *signifier* and the *signified* is finally established, the meaning gap is bridged, as much as the gap between consciousness and subconsciousness). It, therefore, seems that the artist in Post-Impressionist discourse of art, and literature, was expected to deform reality: instead of going, as José Ortega y Gasset aptly notes, “more or less clumsily toward reality, the artist is seen going against it. He is brazenly set on deforming reality, shattering its human aspect, dehumanizing it”<sup>65</sup>. “The Mark on the Wall”, as Woolf implies in “Modern Fiction”, goes against what was expected by “some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant” who had him in thrall, “to provide plot, to provide a comedy, tragedy, love interest”<sup>66</sup>. But “must novels be like this?”, Woolf asks rhetorically, and suggests that “every method is

<sup>63</sup> “The Post-Impressionists”, 82.

<sup>64</sup> “Post Impressionism”, 101.

<sup>65</sup> José Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Writings on Art and Culture*, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956, 20.

<sup>66</sup> “Modern Fiction”, 8.



right, that expresses what we wish to express”<sup>67</sup>. Art, as much as life, offers us a great many infinite possibilities; therefore, “no ‘method’, no experiment, even of the wildest – is forbidden”: “The proper stuff of fiction’ does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; very quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss”<sup>68</sup>.

In “The Mark on the Wall”, Woolf processed the post-impressionist tenets assimilated from Roger Fry, and to some extent from Clive Bell. Her other 1917–1921 stories – “Kew Gardens”, “The Evening Party”, “Solid Objects” and “Blue and Green” – also incorporate Fry’s non-“literary” aesthetics and are, too, based on the post-impressionist exercise with the form of narrative. Since in Woolf’s aesthetics of modern fiction, traditional narrative form was irrelevant to narrate the randomness of life “The Mark on the Wall” can be read as a reaction to a narrative that commences cleanly, unfolds a sequence of events logically and evenly, and concludes unambiguously. “The Mark on the Wall” takes a form of a post-impressionist “exercise in the rendering of consciousness”<sup>69</sup> which rests on a form of stream of consciousness narrative based

on Woolf’s own devised method of interruptions, i.e., on figures of interruption (or figures of grammar, for example, such as anacoluthon and aposiopesis) so as to manoeuvre the vehicle of the narrative to keep up with the pace of thought which in “The Mark on the Wall” assumes a shape of the feminine narrative. The story, too, questions the necessity of all the heavy impedimenta of plot hindering the novelist to reveal the conscious and subconscious workings of the mind. “The Mark on the Wall” is the early Woolf’s narrative which does not not only signify her attempts to radically remake the form, but also, as Frank Kermode says, manifests the tendency to bring it closer to chaos, so producing a sense of ‘formal desperation’<sup>70</sup>. On the other hand, “The Mark on the Wall” is a response to the need to search for a style and a typology: Woolf’s formalist aesthetics owes much to Fry’s, and Bell’s, philosophy of art, in which, as professor Banfield suggests “the visual meets the invisible and abstract”<sup>71</sup>. “The Mark on the Wall” by Woolf does not *report* the world, but *creates* it<sup>72</sup> as much as Fry’s philosophy of Post-Impressionist art which suggests that Post-Impressionists do not seek to imitate form, but to create form, not to imitate life, but to find an equivalent for life.

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>69</sup> *Virginia Woolf. Introductions to the Major Works* (ed. Julia Briggs), Virago Press, 1994, 72.

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<sup>70</sup> Frank Kermode, “Modernisms”, *Modern Essays*, London, 1971.

<sup>71</sup> Banfield, 2000, 26.

<sup>72</sup> John Fletcher and Malcolm Bradbury (eds.), “The Inverted Novel”, *Modernism. A Guide to European Literature 1890–1930*, Penguin Books, 1991, 396.

**VIRGINIOS WOOLF ŠIUOLAIKINĖS PROZOS ESTETIKA:  
FORMOS PAIEŠKOS APSAKYME „DĖMĖ ANT SIENOS“**

**Linara Bartkuvienė**

Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojamos Woolf naratyvo formos paieškos jos apsakyme „Dėmė ant sienos“, kuris yra laikomas vienu pirmųjų rašytojos bandymų atitrūkti nuo tradicinės Viktorijos laikotarpio prozos, grįstos siužeto, veikėjo, vyksmo vietos bei laiko koreliacija. Apsakymo „Dėmė ant sienos“ tekstas pasižymi fragmentuota struktūra: „pasakojimą“ formuoja sąmonės srauto naratyvas, grindžiamas Woolf sukurtu „pertrūkių“ metodu, t. y. įvairių stilistinių figūrų, kaip antai anakoluto ir aposiopezės, vartojimu. Pasakojimo linijškumą pertraukia ir fragmentiškos naratyvo dalys, kurios atskirtos viena nuo kitos svarbiausiu motyvu – dėmė ant sienos. Straipsnio tikslas – ištirti, kaip tapyboje taikomus postimpresionizmo estetikos principus Woolf integruoja į prozos naratyvo lauką ir, tęsdama dialogą su literatūrine tradicija, išgauna naują

postimpresionistinio naratyvo formą, leidžiančią ne tik atsisakyti prozos „realizmo“ (arba, anot Woolf, „materializmo“), bet ir praplėsti šiuolaikinės prozos galimybes. Siekiant rasti atsakymą į šį klausimą, remiamasi britų meno teoretikais ir formalizmo estetikos kūrėjais Rogeriu Fry ir Clive'u Bellu, kurie teigė, kad estetiniam meno kūrinio vertingumui turinio tikroviškumas, idėjiškumas neturi jokios reikšmės, o svarbiausia menė – „grynoji forma“ arba „reikšmingoji forma“. Postimpresionistiniame Woolf kūrybos estetikos sluoksnyje taip pat vyrauja nuostata, kad tikroviškumas būdingas realistiniam menui, o šiuolaikinės prozos siekis – atspindėti sąmonės veikimo mechanizmą, rasti tokią naratyvo formą, kuri leistų atitrūkti nuo tikrovės atvaizdavimo, psichologinių ar istorinių kūrinio apribojimų.

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*Autorės adresas:*  
Literatūros istorijos ir teorijos katedra  
Vilniaus universitetas  
Universiteto g. 5  
LT-01513 Vilnius  
El. paštas: visuot.lit@flf.vu.lt