The Aesthetic Subjectivity and Political Agency of Women and Nonhumans in Virginia Woolf's "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" and "Solid Objects"

Park, Shin-hyun (Konkuk University, Research Professor)

〈목 차〉

Ⅰ. From Aesthetic Subject to Political Agency
Ⅱ. Existence as Aesthetic Feelings: A Woman of Flesh and Blood in "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" and "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown"
Ⅲ. The British Women's Suffrage Movement and the Democracy of Objects on the Mantelpiece
Ⅳ. Aesthetic Subjectivity as Ongoing Resistance

Abstract

In traditional aesthetics, the subject of aesthetic experience is limited to human beings, and nonhumans are seen as mere objects of appreciation. Recently, however, there has been a growing movement among scholars of speculative realism that questions Kant's idea, arguing that nonhumans can also have aesthetic experiences and be the subject of aesthetic feelings. Kant's human-centered interpretation of aesthetics is the most actively challenged and overcome by posthuman aesthetics of Steven Shaviro, Graham Harman, and Timothy Morton. For these thinkers and Virginia Woolf alike, aesthetic experiences operate on an ontological level, not just an epistemological one. Accordingly, this paper aims to explore how the

www.kci.go.kr

탈경계인문학TRANS-HUMANITIES, Vol.17 No.1 35집, April 2024, 73~114
ⓒ 2024 이화인문과학원

existence of all beings, which interact aesthetically with each other, is forged and altered by their aesthetic experiences in Woolf's two short stories, "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" (1929) and "Solid Objects" (1920). Additionally, it examines how the boundaries between human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate beings as aesthetic subjects are blurred, and at a deeper level, this aesthetic subjectivity of diverse species symbolizes women's suffrage, thereby subverting both androcentrism and anthropocentrism. The aesthetic subjectivity of nonhumans and women is closely associated with their political agency, disrupting the society's hierarchical structures.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf, aesthetics, speculative realism, posthuman, Steven Shaviro, Graham Harman, women's suffrage, "The Lady in the Looking-Glass", "Solid Objects"

Ⅰ. From Aesthetic Subject to Political Agency

Virginia Woolf, in her autobiographical essay "A Sketch of the Past" (1939), tells an interesting story about how two strong memories of aesthetic feelings aroused by sights and sounds in her childhood are still "more real than the present moment" (*Moments* 67). Describing the feelings as "the purest ecstasy" (65), and "a complete rapture of pleasure" (66), she implies that such highly sensual color-and-sound impressions significantly affected the formation of her selfhood. If we refer to the following passage, "I am hardly aware of myself, but only of the sensation. I am only the container of the feeling of ecstasy, of the feeling of rapture" (67), it seems evident that both Woolf and the characters in her novels, can be understood as an aesthetic subject whose subjectivity relies heavily on her aesthetic experiences.

www.kci.go.kr

For Woolf, the aesthetic subjectivity of her characters can be seen as the realization of not only her new style of "character-creating" (*Essays* 3: 384) but also her ontological and socio-political ideas. The aesthetic subjectivity in her novels seems inseparably intertwined with her concern for social reform, that is, her quest for a liberated society in which women's literary and sociopolitical abilities are duly recognized. Furthermore, in Woolf's novels, this aesthetic subjectivity is also for non-humans, not just for humans, as non-humans, too, experience aesthetic feelings and are affected by them. Woolf's ideas about democracy and equality become more complete when they are extended to the non-human world.

In Woolf's novels, the subjectivity of the protagonists decisively depends on the aesthetic state in which the aesthetics of the beautiful and the sublime are simultaneously and consecutively experienced. Their presence consists of their aesthetic intersubjectivity, which is grounded on their contact with the other subjects or things that they consume, collect, and possess. Accordingly, this study refers to the figures in her novels who truly come into existence, heavily reliant on their exquisite aesthetic experiences, as 'aesthetic subjects.' These subjects also include non-humans, both animate and inanimate, who experience aesthetic feelings.

In traditional aesthetics, the subject of aesthetic experience is limited to human beings, and nonhumans are seen as mere objects of appreciation. Previous scholars have noticed that in Immanuel Kant's discourse in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790),

www.kci.go.kr

beauty is reserved only for human beings and aesthetic experience presumes a human beholder. Recently, however, there has been a growing movement among scholars of speculative realism and new materialism that questions Kant's idea, arguing that nonhumans can also have aesthetic experiences and be the subject of aesthetic feelings. Kant's human-centered interpretation of aesthetics is the most actively challenged by speculative realists, such as Steven Shaviro, Graham Harman, and Timothy Morton and overcome by their posthuman aesthetics. Specifically, they attribute feelings and aesthetics to all beings, including animate and inanimate non-humans and emphasize that aesthetics is a universal mode of contact between all beings, not just humans.

Among the various branches of speculative realism, object-oriented ontology was initially articulated by Graham Harman and later supported by other thinkers such as Timothy Morton. In their view, we can speak of the interaction between hailstones and tar, or between cotton and fire in the same way as the relationship between humans. Harman and Steven Shaviro both, credit the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) as the essential root of this posthuman thought in that he refuses to privilege human perception and instead envisions a world where things perceive each other rather than only being perceived by human beings, and all beings, whether human or nonhuman, interact with each other in the same ways.

Whitehead states that all beings interact by "feeling" one another, even in the absence of knowledge, and that what a

www.kci.go.kr

being feels is what that being is (166, 176). According to him, all beings encounter one another not only cognitively but also aesthetically, before knowing one another. Thus, it is proper to say that every relationship between beings is aesthetic. In reconsidering Whitehead's thought in the light of speculative realism, Shaviro in his book, *The Universe of Things* (2014), emphasizes that when objects encounter one another, the basic mode of their relation is neither epistemological nor practical but aesthetic (52). It is important to note that for these thinkers, the term 'aesthetics' is defined in its broadest sense. It is for this reason that it can be said that the primordial form of all experience and relation is an aesthetic one (Shaviro 156).

From this perspective, aesthetic experience is being itself, which may also true for Virginia Woolf, in particular. For these thinkers and Woolf alike, aesthetic experiences operate on an ontological level, not just an epistemological one. Accordingly, this paper aims to explore how the existence of all beings, which interact aesthetically with each other, is forged and altered by their aesthetic experiences in Woolf's two short stories, "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" (1929) and "Solid Objects" (1920). Additionally, it examines how the boundaries between human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate beings as aesthetic subjects are blurred, and at a deeper level, this aesthetic subjectivity of diverse species symbolizes women's suffrage, thereby subverting both androcentrism and anthropocentrism.

In "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" and "Solid Objects," every being immanently experiences aesthetic feelings, although

www.kci.go.kr

not necessarily consciously, and it continues to change and reconstitute itself by aesthetic encounters. This approach to subjectivity grounded on aesthetic intersubjective dynamics in Woolf's novels may be true to her vision of a new novel with a new method for "the creation of human character" (*Essays* 3: 384), which is affirmed in her essays "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" (1923) and "Modern Fiction" (1925). In "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown," Woolf asserts that for creating "living, flesh-and-blood Mrs Brown," a writer should let her solidity disappear, and "character" is "the way that Mrs Brown [···] reacts to her surroundings" instead of "what we are told about her" (387-88). She also claims in "Modern Fiction" that "[t]he mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent," so the task of novelist is to convey this varying spirit (*Essays* 4: 160).

In both essays, Woolf explains how the fixity and solidity of a character created by existing novels fail to make the character truly alive with flesh and blood. Woolf criticizes existing novels' sole focus on the external surface of a subject and the tangible facts about a character and suggests that a novelist should let the identity of a character be fluid and abundant, grounded on her various exquisite sensual experiences. Woolf's view of literature declared in these 1920s essays was successfully embodied in her short stories published in the 1920s, which I deal with in this paper.

"Solid Objects" was published in *The Athenaeum* (1920), shortly after British women over 30 gained suffrage in 1918, and "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" was published in *Harper's*

www.kci.go.kr

Magazine (1929), shortly after the suffrage was expanded to women over 21 in 1928. Thus, we must consider that in these stories, the aesthetic subjectivity of nonhumans is closely associated with women's political agency. For Woolf, the aesthetic subjectivity of marginalized groups, such as nonhumans and women, is directly linked to their political agency.

In this sense, this paper argues that "Solid Objects" should be read within the context of the early 20th-century women's suffrage movement and the development of life sciences. In this story, Woolf subtly integrates her interest in politics and science with her art by incorporating the post-World War I British women over the age of 30 who gained suffrage; the liberal political thinker John Stuart Mill and his wife Harriet Taylor, who worked on women's suffrage and domestic violence issues; Charles Darwin's *Beagle* exploration which established evolutionary theory; and morphology, a branch of biology dealing with the study of the form and structure of organisms.

Therefore, this article suggests "Solid Objects" is related to the women's suffrage movement in Britain, which began in 1867, and that the community of diverse objects on the mantelpiece in the protagonist John's room symbolizes the democratic society comprised of women over 30 who finally gained suffrage in 1918, just after the First World War.[1] Woolf appears to have partially modeled the reform-minded John

1) Bill Brown positions "Solid Objects" on the periphery of "British literature of World War I" but only analyzes it in relation to themes of "wartime scarcity and postwar depression" (402, 422).

www.kci.go.kr

after the liberal MP John Stuart Mill, who advocated women's suffrage. Furthermore, it is important to note Woolf's awareness of the shift in the contemporary life sciences within "Solid Objects" as the story implies significant changes that occurred in the life sciences during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this period, evolutionary theory was a focal point of ongoing study and debate, and there were concurrent developments, such as the new biology of morphology and physiology, which also meant a challenge to anthropocentrism for Woolf.

In the following, I would analyze "The Lady in the Looking-Glass," and "Solid Objects," focusing on the interrelation that all beings, as 'aesthetic subjects,' have with one another, and the ontological change grounded on their aesthetic feelings, which ultimately reveals Woolf's vision not only for the new creative novel but also for the political agency of both women and non-humans.

II. Existence as Aesthetic Feelings: A Woman of Flesh and Blood in "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" and "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown"

> it is impossible that any woman of flesh and blood
> [···] should be really a wreath or a tendril.
> (Woolf, "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" 222)

www.kci.go.kr

> it is from the gleams and flashes of this flying spirit
> that he must create solid, living, flesh-and-blood Mrs Brown.
> (Woolf, "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" 388)

Woolf's short story, "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection"[2] is replete with the aesthetic gaze of the narrator who places the protagonist of this fictional piece—Isabella Tyson—in the position of an aesthetic object, in an endeavor to approach the true self of "the mistress of the house, Isabella Tyson" (*Complete* 222). The story begins with a sharp contrast between the reality of her drawing room which, akin a human being, never stays the same, and the world reflected by the looking glass in the hall, which is held so fixedly. Woolf, saying "[i]t was a strange contrast—all changing here, all stillness there," opposes "the voice of the transient and the perishing" in reality to things lying "still in the trance of immortality" in the looking glass (221-22). In short, it can be easily assumed that the mirror's frame represents a work of art which is suspended, stilled, and finished. It seems evident that by comparing the perpetually changing reality and a suspended world in the looking glass, Woolf figuratively develops her own view of art.

Some critics have asserted that the story concerns a comparison of different art forms. For instance, Julia Briggs suggests that the contrast in fiction should be seen as a comparison between literature and paintings or post-Impressionist art and photography (176, 178). Additionally, Abbie Garrington

2) Hereafter, it will be abbreviated as "The Lady."

www.kci.go.kr

proposes that this fiction should be read in light of Woolf's essay "The Cinema" (1926), given their common language, imagery, and concerns (217).

Unlike these interpretations, this paper maintains that "The Lady" embodies a new method of 'character-creating,' which Woolf affirms in her essay "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown." Specifically, this approach seeks to portray how existence is truly created and altered as an aesthetic subject by its aesthetic feelings and demonstrate that even nonhumans exhibit such aesthetic subjectivity. I suggest that this fiction should be read in relation to her earlier essay, "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown,"[3] since there is a notable correspondence between Isabella, a "woman of flesh and blood" (*Complete* 222) in the fiction and "flesh-and-blood Mrs Brown" (388) in the essay. In other words, Woolf's fiction, "The Lady" is graphically illustrated in accordance with her essay, "Mr Bennett." However, in this story, Woolf not only focuses on the aesthetic subjectivity of the human character, but also pays attention to the vitality and agency of inanimate objects, thus blurring the boundaries between inanimate objects and living creatures and between non-human and human beings as aesthetic subjects.

This story, which represents an expedition into Isabella's inner truth, demonstrates how the individual's identity is formed depending on various aesthetic experiences, mediated by external objects. It illustrates how a fictional character is built by her aesthetic encounter with animate and inanimate

3) Hereafter, it will be abbreviated as "Mr Bennett."

www.kci.go.kr

things as well as an observer's aesthetic imagination. By applying a new method for the creation of human character to this fiction and graphically introducing the aesthetic subjectivity of her protagonist, Woolf defiantly asks if the existing novels employing traditional literary techniques, for example, the Edwardian fictions written by Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, and John Galsworthy, can successfully represent a subject's identity only with "superficial" facts (*Essays* 3: 386). She appears to say that a novel employing new styles may come closer to the truth of an individual's subjectivity, thereby exceeding the representation of superficial facts. Specifically, Woolf implies that the identities of the figures in her novels lie in an aesthetic subjectivity characterized by fluidness and richness, which is produced by diverse aesthetic experiences, while the identify of a figure created by the old method is deemed fixed, static, or simply "empty" (*Complete* 225). Thus, what she really emphasizes by displaying such comparisons in this story is that the representation of conventional novels, which is "idle and superficial," and "cruel even," does not enable us to know the true Isabella (222).

Woolf opens "Mr Bennett" by quoting the famous Edwardian novelist Bennett's remark that "[t]he foundation of good fiction is character-creating, and nothing else," but younger novelists fail to create character because "they are interested more in details than in the full creation of their individual characters" (*Essays* 3: 384). Woolf also agreeably asserts that if "this essence, this character-making power" should evaporate, novels are like "soulless bodies" (384-85).

www.kci.go.kr

However, she advocates for the method of young novelists, called Georgians, and disputes Bennett's criticism. In this essay Woolf, criticizing the character-making of the Edwardian fictions, points out that there is "something plausible, superficial, unreal" in all the abundance. She contends that in all the pages "there is not a single man or woman we know" because the Edwardian novelists deal with character only in its more generalized aspects, thus giving us a vast sense of things in general but a very vague one of particular things (385-87).

Since the identity of a subject is something "trembling between one's eyes and the truth," it seems proper to say that the character-creating of the conventional novels that attempt to portray the truth about someone so accurately, so determinately, only with generalized facts, is idle and superficial. Thus, the narrator (observer) of "The Lady" admits that "it is impossible that any woman of flesh and blood of fifty-five or sixty should be really a wreath or a tendril," and "it was strange that after knowing her all these years one could not say what the truth about Isabella was" (222). Moreover, "[a]s for facts" about Isabella, the narrator delineates only fragments of information, which may be correct or incorrect as an outward manifestation of her lifestyle (e.g., she is a spinster, rich, and has many friends) (222). Through the observer's mention, "if facts were what one wanted," there could be "another fact" (222), Woolf implicitly states how difficult it is for us to grasp the essence of her existence only with this kind of shallow facts.

Therefore, to know her better, Woolf proposes shifting the

www.kci.go.kr

focus to possessions such as rugs, chairs, and cabinets that Isabella collected with her own hands in the corners of the world. Usually, things in a collection mirror "their owner's ego" (Hoberman 82, 88). Thus, Woolf suggests that to reach "her profounder state of being" located behind "the mask-like indifference of her face," we should carefully observe these things (*Complete* 222-24). To put it more concretely, "her profounder state of being" (224) consists in her aesthetic subjectivity, which is forged by the close relationship Isabella has with the collected objects.

Furthermore, the narrator, personifying the rugs, the chairs, and the cabinets, says that they "now lived their nocturnal life before one's eyes," and "[s]ometimes it seemed as if they knew more about her than we, who sat on them, wrote at them, and trod on them so carefully, were allowed to know" (*Complete* 222). Here, Woolf suggests that in the aesthetic relationship between Isabella and things, these inanimate objects can experience her from the position of the subject. She affirms the vitality of objects and describes their independent lives and inner experiences.

In fact, in the beginning of this story, the narrator likens herself to "one of those naturalists who, covered with grass and leaves, lie watching the shyest animals—badgers, otters, kingfishers" (*Complete* 221), thereby blurring the distinction between the inanimate objects in the drawing-room and living creatures. The narrator, like a naturalist observing living organisms, watches the room "full of such shy creatures, lights and shadows, curtains blowing, petals falling" (221) and the

www.kci.go.kr

things within it, and finds that they are alive. The description, "[t]he quiet old country room with its rugs and stone chimney pieces, its sunken book-cases and red and gold lacquer cabinets, was full of such nocturnal creatures" (221), seamlessly blends reality with the narrator's aesthetic imagination, illustrating how vitality naturally flows between the inanimate and the living. Woolf, prominently featuring inanimate objects, including the "house" and the "room," as significant agencies, even says "the room had its passions and rages and envies and sorrows coming over it and clouding it, like a human being" (221). This anthropomorphism highlights the aesthetic subjectivity of nonhuman entities.

Woolf indicates that the depth of Isabella's existence might be found in her accumulated aesthetic feelings experienced in encounters with these objects. Whitehead and Shaviro explain that aesthetics is "feeling an object *for its own sake*" beyond understanding, and "[a] feeling always involves some alteration of the one who feels" (Shaviro 53, 55-56). This means that when one feels other existence, it affects her and changes her. Novelty arises from this: each time an existence becomes aesthetically in response to other existence, something new is created. Thus, whenever Isabella encounters an object in her room, her existence is reconstituted.

Furthermore, as Whitehead and Shaviro state, "feeling and aesthetics are universal structures, not specifically human ones" (Shaviro 61). Feeling and aesthetics are not merely human attributes but extend to all beings in the world. Every entity feels the other entities with which it comes into contact (61).

www.kci.go.kr

Harman also proclaims that aesthetics is not "a local phenomenon of human experience," but rather "the root of all relations," and aesthetics as a mode of contact between beings "belongs to ontology as a whole, not to the special metaphysics of animal perception" ("Vicarious" 205). In "The Lady," both the room and the inhuman things within it are aesthetically in contact with Isabella, constantly altering her and making her anew.

In her essay, Woolf defines the meaning of character as "the way that Mrs Brown [···] reacts to her surroundings," and suggests that for searching out the "real meaning" of Mrs Brown, we should "cease to believe what we are told about her" (*Essays* 3: 387). Woolf goes on to explain that a writer should let her solidity disappear and her feature crumble and then reconstruct her character from the ruins and splinters, asserting that "it is from the gleams and flashes of this flying spirit that he must create solid, living, flesh-and-blood Mrs Brown" (388).

In accordance with this remark, the construction of Isabella's being is no longer presented in a habitual and traditional way. Instead, Isabella's real self is pursued in an indeterminate manner by decoding the meaning of the objects in the room. Woolf writes, "[u]nder the stress of thinking about Isabella, her room became more shadowy and symbolic; the corners seemed darker, the legs of chairs and tables more spindly and hieroglyphic" (*Complete* 223). Rooms as aesthetic subjects that think, feel, and know their owner well, can be also found in Woolf's novel *Orlando* (1928). Woolf discusses

www.kci.go.kr

how the rooms and Orlando have been engaged in a reciprocal aesthetic relationship, exchanging roles as subject and object, saying "[t]hey had known each other for close on four centuries now. They had nothing to conceal. She knew their sorrows and joys," and "They, too, knew her in all her moods and changes. She had hidden nothing from them" (*Orlando* 218). The passage "she knew where the heart of the house still beat. [···] the frail indomitable heart of the immense building" (218) illustrates Orlando's conviction that her house possesses intrinsic vitality, demonstrating her deep connection to the essence of the building.

In creating the characters in her novels, Woolf seems to find it essential that the identity of a character should be something that we are incapable of grasping hold of, something that always escapes our understanding. This is similar to Isabella's attitude toward the letters on her marble table. After a postman leaves the letters, the narrator imagines that if she could read them, she could know everything about "Isabella, yes, and about life, too" because they look like "tablets graven with eternal truth" (*Complete* 223). However, she goes on to imagine that Isabella would "tie the letters together and lock the cabinet drawer in her determination to conceal" what she does not wish to be known (223). Similarly, for Woolf, the truth of the character must always be hidden. Moreover, without making any thoughts precise, she makes her character appear filled with them.

Thus, Woolf lets the narrator guess that Isabella is "one of those reticent people whose minds hold their thoughts

www.kci.go.kr

enmeshed in clouds of silence" (*Complete* 224). This depiction recalls Woolf's remarks in her essay "Mr Bennett," in which she argues that a writer must "allow that the lady still escapes him. Dismally he must admit bruises received in the pursuit" (*Essays* 3: 388). Hence, although hinting at Isabella's aesthetic subjectivity through her sartorial items, including her shoes, which are fashionable and exquisite, as well as the rugs and blue pots she bought while traveling in Turkey and Persia, respectively, Woolf wants to leave "her profounder state of being that one wanted to catch and turn to words" unavailable, unapproachable, and indeterminable.

Accordingly, in a similar vein, she claims in her other essay, "Modern Fiction," that the task of the novelist is "to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display," and proposes "the inconclusiveness of the Russian mind," which is the sense that "there is no answer," and "life presents question after question" (*Essays* 4: 160, 163). This view of literature is embodied in "The Lady" as follows: "Her mind was like her room, in which lights advanced and retreated, [···] and then her whole being was suffused, like the room again, with a cloud of some profound knowledge, some unspoken regret" (*Complete* 225). Just as her cabinets are full of locked drawers, stuffed with letters, Isabella, as an aesthetic subject, remains neither finalized nor determined.

In this context, it is necessary to discuss the meaning of the reversal at the end of this fiction. The narrator, suggesting "[o]ne must imagine—here was she in the looking-glass. It

www.kci.go.kr

made one start" (*Complete* 225), announces that she would approach Isabella in such a manner that would make us perceive Isabella utterly differently. Woolf presents this different way of approaching as a different method of character creation. The moment Isabella stands before the looking glass, the observer says "[h]ere was the woman herself. She stood naked in that pitiless light. And there was nothing. Isabella was perfectly empty" (225), thus highlighting the vacancy of Isabella's being. However, does this really "leave only the truth" (225) about her? Does Woolf actually want readers to believe the existence of Isabella is empty or nothing?

This paper would like to argue that what Woolf really intends to express is that the looking glass view at the end of this fiction stands for the conventional method of character-creating, and this is what makes a character "empty" and "unessential" (*Complete* 225), or a "soulless" body (*Essays* 3: 385). Woolf never means to tell that this is the truth, or that is not the truth regarding Isabella's identity, and she never concludes that the emptiness or vacancy of Isabella is only the truth. Nevertheless, for many critics, the interpretation has focused on whether one view or the other of Isabella is correct (Hoberman 88). For example, Dean R. Baldwin and R. T. Chapman argue that the looking glass is right, for it provides the insights aesthetic detachment and framing allow; on the other hand, Shuli Barzilai and Susan Dick contend that the dialectic is not resolved by the story's conclusion, claiming that the looking glass view is merely another aspect of the onlooker's viewpoint and no more authoritative than her

www.kci.go.kr

imaginative version (qtd. in Hoberman 88). Differently from these critics, the current article maintains that through the reversal, Woolf intends to reveal that the traditional techniques for character-creating are bound to confront limitations, only making a character "dead" and "nothing" (*Complete* 225), and instead, enunciate her own vision of a new method of character-creating. Indeed, the ending scene can be closely associated with the following line in her essay, "Mr Bennett": "it is because this essence, this character-making power, has evaporated that novels are for the most part the soulless bodies" (*Essays* 3: 384-85).

Taking a close look at this scene, particularly Woolf's choice of words, we can find that by describing "[s]he stopped dead," "[s]he stood perfectly still," and "a light that seemed to fix her" (*Complete* 225), Woolf seems to emphasize that Isabella's presence is suddenly reduced to a lifeless, spiritless body. At the moment everything, such as "clouds, dress, basket, diamond" (225) drops from Isabella, Woolf questions whether without these things a character could become the "living, flesh-and-blood Mrs Brown" (*Essays* 3: 388). In this scene, Woolf illustrates how the fixity and solidity of a character created by existing novels fail to make it truly alive with flesh and blood. Thus, it seems reasonable to say that in this story, Woolf criticizes existing novels for focusing only on the external surface and tangible facts about a character and demonstrates why a novelist should make a character fluid and abundant, grounded on her aesthetic experiences.

This interpretation corresponds with the fact that Woolf, in

www.kci.go.kr

her other writings, sees freedom as the essence of our being, expressing that whether it is the identity of a person or the meaning of words, pinning it down to one thing signifies its 'death': she, in her essays, "Montaigne" (1925) and "Craftmanship" (1937), asserts that "[m]ovement and change are the essence of our being; rigidity is death" (*Essays* 4: 75) and "when words are pinned down they fold their wings and die" (*Collected* 251). Accordingly, the phrase "[s]he stopped dead" (*Complete* 225) may be also connected with Woolf's idea that the fixation and rigidity of identity signify death, while change and fluidity signify being alive.

Furthermore, Arnold Bennett, who adhered to a method of character creation that fixes characters' identities, published a writing that disparaged women's intellectual capacities from a deterministic viewpoint in 1920 (*Congenial* 123). To dispute the writings of Bennett and Desmond MacCarthy who claimed that women are intellectually inferior to men and they are not improved by education and liberty, Woolf sent two letters to *The New Statesman* in October 1920 (123). That Woolf strongly reacted against Bennett's writing, discussing the infinite possibilities for women's changes, suggests that her new method of character creation can be related to the political agency of women. In this sense, around 1929, when women's suffrage was expanded, for Woolf, the method of character creation based on aesthetic subjectivity can lead to a rhetoric on the indeterminate potential of women, both socially and ontologically.

www.kci.go.kr

Ⅲ. The British Women's Suffrage Movement and the Democracy of Objects on the Mantelpiece

In "Solid Objects," two young male members of Parliament, John and Charles, appear. The overall narrative revolves around John, who, disillusioned with politics, becomes increasingly fascinated with collecting broken objects of various shapes after discovering a large, irregular lump of glass on a beach, leading to his isolation from others. This paper argues that the diverse inanimate objects John collects are recognized as vital beings equal to various biological species, and the democratic community of individual inanimate objects symbolizes the British women who gained suffrage after World War I. Unlike preceding studies grounded on anthropocentric aesthetics that focused mainly on the active agency of the human beholder, the current article articulates how this story overcomes anthropocentrism by portraying nonhuman's aesthetic subjectivity and creative agency, and in a deeper sense, overcomes androcentrism by implicitly advocating for women's political rights.[4)]

4) Brown is right to say that the life of things is made manifest in the time of misuse, and by dislocating an object from the typical circuits, we have the chance to sense its presence as though for the first time (399). Douglas Mao in *Solid Objects* (1998), associates Woolf's fictions, which bring out clearly the modernist encounter with physical objects, to the existential crisis of her era (17). Ruth Hoberman states that John's neglecting to reinsert his objects into the world of human discourse is problematic, by which Woolf warns the solipsism of traditional modernist writers (85-87). Judith Allen, liking the creations on the mantelpiece to collage, assemblage, and Cubism, asserts that these modernist art forms of the early twentieth century represent important contexts for the story. However, all of these readings are premised on anthropocentric aesthetics.

www.kci.go.kr

Indeed, from the outset, "Solid Objects" subverts anthropocentrism as the speaker, with a broader perspective than humans, approaches two young men from afar. The speaker describes inanimate objects as if they were alive, referring to "the ribs and spine of the stranded pilchard boat," while likening parts of the two young men's bodies to insect limbs and mouths, as in "his spot possessed four legs" and "the tiny mouths of the little round heads" (*Complete* 102). As the speaker's gaze, with its grand scale, approaches the seemingly insignificant two individuals, just as we sometimes unexpectedly discover vitality and liveliness from small things we have considered lifeless, the speaker transcends anthropocentrism by uncovering "an unmistakable vitality" and "an indescribable vigour" in them. The sentence "[t]his was corroborated on closer view" (102) suggests to the reader that becoming a careful observer is necessary to discover the vitality of the object.

The speaker emphasizes the animalistic nature of the two bodies, still describing them akin to insects, stating, "nothing was so solid, so living, so hard, red, hirsute and virile as these two bodies" (*Complete* 102). By initially categorizing the two individuals as "two bodies" rather than immediately classifying them as human, the speaker approaches the ambiguity of the boundary between human and non-human, organic and inorganic, suggesting the indeterminacy of the boundary between the two.

Charles, on the right-hand side, who cuts long straight stripes on sand with a walking stick, embodies a conservative

www.kci.go.kr

and rigid mindset, adhering to belief, meaning, words, and boundaries. He only needs flat stones to throw over the water for a moment. In other words, nonhuman objects are simply functional and practical tools; therefore irregular or broken objects do not attract his interest. He is a human-centered thinker who believes that nonhumans have no connection to politics or human society, strictly dividing the boundary between human and nonhuman. On the other hand, John, "on the left-hand side" (*Complete* 102), who burrows his fingers down into the sand, adopts an exploratory attitude towards nonhuman entities. Fascinated by irregular, broken, and accidental forms, he acknowledges and respects the singularity of nonhuman beings.

While it may appear that only two male politicians, John and Charles, drive the narrative, in reality there is a subtle dominance of interest in women's rights in this short story. John's imagination, sparked by a lump of glass, conjures "a dark Princess" and "Elizabethan treasure-chest" (*Complete* 103), which are evocative of historical women with political power. Similarly, his musings while searching for broken china, imagining "a woman of such reckless impulse and passionate prejudice that she flings her jar or pot straight from the window without thought of who is below" (105), evoke the violent protests of the Suffragettes.

Therefore, this work should be read in the context of the atmosphere of change in Britain following the First World War, where new opportunities in the world of work were opened up to women, the right to vote was expanded to females, and

www.kci.go.kr

labor unions experienced significant development, all contributing to the loosening of the hierarchical order. From this perspective, the democratic community of objects on the mantelpiece in John's room symbolizes the political empowerment of marginalized groups, such as women and blue-collar workers since the First World War, who had been politically sidelined in Britain. The situation in which nonhuman objects gradually exert powerful aesthetic agency, facilitated by the liberal politician John, signifies the destabilization of society's hierarchical structure and marginalized groups' gradual attainment of political agency in post-World War I Britain.

Comparing John' impulse to keep a lump of glass to a child who picks up one pebble on a path, Woolf says that "the heart of the stone leaps with joy when it sees itself chosen from a million like it, to enjoy this bliss," and the stone cheers delightfully, "it was I, I, I!" among millions of stones (*Complete* 104). It is noteworthy how the story acknowledges the life and vitality of pebbles. Rather than a modern dichotomous view of demystified nature, this work describes the child's mind with a magical worldview of nature without distinguishing between human and nonhuman, as in John's mind. It reveals the vitality and agency of inanimate nonhumans, depicting the stone with a heart, the pebble that rejoices and desires. Woolf portrays nonhumans who undergo internal experiences and grant great significance to the relationships they form with humans. She implies that millions of stones are not all identical and anonymous; even inanimate non-humans possess their own

www.kci.go.kr

subjectivity, exclaiming "I, I, I!" and creating their own histories within relationships with humans. Furthermore, this exclamation "I, I, I!" joyfully uttered by the chosen pebble, can be seen as the jubilant cry of women who, upon finally obtaining suffrage, are acknowledged as political subjects in society.

The First World War (1914-1918) brought immense change in the lives of British women.[5] It provided all classes of women with important opportunities to work outside the home (e.g., munition workers, bus conductresses, police officers, doctors and nurses). Furthermore, the Suffragist Movement, launched in 1867, gathered unstoppable momentum, leading to the passing of the Act of 1918, which granted women the right to vote at 30 and men at 21. However, it was not until the 1928 Act, which permitted both sexes to vote at 21, that Britain saw full adult suffrage for the first time. This story reflects Woolf's interest in this sociopolitical context.

A mantelpiece is a wooden or stone shelf at the top part of a frame surrounding a fireplace. Because John places the lump of glass on the mantelpiece in his room, the glass and mantelpiece physically meet each other. Following that, other broken objects "thrown away, of no use to anybody, shapeless, discarded" (*Complete* 104), such as a piece of broken china, and a remarkable piece of iron, also find their place on the mantelpiece. Woolf emphasizes these pieces of glass, broken

5) This refers to the following sources: Byles, Joan Montgomery. "Women's Experience of World War One: Suffragists, Pacifists and Poets." *Women's Studies International Forum* 8.5 (1985): 473-87. and "12 Things You Didn't Know About Women In The First World War." https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/12-things-you-didnt-know-about-women-in-the-first-world-war

www.kci.go.kr

china, and iron as possessing an aesthetic agency so powerful that the human protagonist, John, is irresistibly allured by these useless 'broken tools.' Specifically, she writes that "John found himself attracted to the windows of curiosity shops" (104) merely because of other objects reminding him of the lump of glass, and the contrast between the glass and the china "fascinated him" (105), and "always some gleam of hope, some piece of china or glass curiously marked or broken, lured him on" (107).

For Harman, *allure* is "the attraction of something that has retreated into its own depths," and an alluring object "insinuates the existence of something deeper, something hidden and inaccessible" (Shaviro 42). Broken china is more attractive because John cannot fully grasp its existence. This goes beyond his sensations and imagination. As Harman, denying two different kinds of experience, the aesthetics of the beautiful and the aesthetics of the sublime, says that the alluring object "has features of both" (*Art* 47), the lump of glass "pleased him; it puzzled him" (*Complete* 103) simultaneously. This means that the broken object evokes both the aesthetics of beauty and the sublime in John, alluring him.

Remarkably, the objects John discovers are more alive because they have been broken. Harman, interpreting Martin Heidegger's analysis of 'tools' and 'broken tools,' even calls "all beings" tool-beings (*Tool-Being* 44). This nature of "tool-beings" is best epitomized by the form of "broken tools" (Shaviro 50). When a tool fails to function as expected, the excess of its being is suddenly revealed to us, and the tool stands forth too

www.kci.go.kr

actively and aggressively for us to grasp (Shaviro 50). Thus, each object, as a broken tool, seduces John, revealing its excess. Indeed, it is when tool-beings malfunction, the eruption of their singularities can be observed most clearly. Hence, each broken object erupts into view, compelling John to pay attention to it. Importantly, these useless objects, which have independent lives of their own and the autonomous power to mesmerize John, symbolize socially marginalized individuals who have been politically empowered. The previously discarded objects elevated by John parallel the rise in the political status of women and the working class.

World War I also positively impacted the collective activities of the working class. The demand for labor during wartime bolstered its economic and political strength.[6] The Labor Party's position improved due to the significant growth of trade unions, coupled with increased acceptance of collectivism resulting from state intervention in the economy. UK trade unionism nearly doubled in membership density between 1900 and 1913 and again by 1920. Thus, the unions could effectively negotiate higher wages and improve working conditions.

There is further interesting evidence to interpret "Solid Objects" in relation to the rise in status of women and the working class after World War I. In the story, the one on the left-hand side of the two young men appears to embody a

6) This refers to "Labour, Labour Movements, Trade Unions and Strikes (Great Britain and Ireland)." by Chris Wrigley https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/labour_labour_movements_trade_unions_and_strikes_great_britain_and_ireland

www.kci.go.kr

progressive politician envisioning social reform. Woolf seems to have intentionally used the name John, reminiscent of the liberal philosopher and member of Parliament for the Liberal Party, John Stuart Mill, who petitioned for women's suffrage in 1868. Mill, the author of the pioneering feminist work *The Subjection of Women* (1869), was a key advocate for women's rights. Serving as a MP from 1865 to 1868 under the Liberal Party, Mill actively supported the right of women to vote. In 1868, he presented Parliament with a petition for female suffrage signed by 21,557 individuals. Additionally, he championed various social reforms such as the establishment of labor unions and farm cooperatives.

Furthermore, in "Solid Objects," Woolf implicitly evokes the strong influence that Harriet Taylor, Mill's wife, had on him regarding women's political rights. Remarkably, Woolf sent two letters to the editor of *The New Statesman* on October 9 and 16, 1920, to counter the writings of Arnold Bennett and Desmond MacCarthy, who claimed "women are inferior to men in intellectual power" (*Congenial* 123). In a letter dated October 16, she mentioned that Mill himself acknowledged that his wife, Harriet Taylor, was superior to him in every way.[7] The fact that "Solid Objects" was published in The *Athenaeum* on October 22, 1920, around the same time as these letters, further supports this paper's argument that Woolf depicted the

7) Woolf writes, "'Affable Hawk' [Desmond MacCarthy's pen name] will, I hope, not accuse me of cowardice if I do not take up your space with an equiry into the career of Laplace, Faraday, and Herschell, nor decide whether it was Mill or his friend who was mistaken about Mrs Taylor." (note. The philosopher thought her his superior in every way, but his friends disagreed with him.) (*Congenial* 126)

www.kci.go.kr

politician John in this short story with John Stuart Mill in mind.

Mill married Taylor in 1851, and she significantly influenced his work and ideas throughout their marriage, reinforcing her husband's advocacy for women's rights. He stood against domestic violence and supported women's rights primarily on behalf of his wife. Indeed, Mill credited her influence in the final revision of his work *On Liberty* (1859), which was published shortly after her death. Mill's *The Subjection of Women*, an essay for gender equality, also reflects the ideas he developed in collaboration with his wife. However, despite Mill's best efforts, women's suffrage was not achieved during his time and took much longer to be realized. The fictional character John's failure in social innovation subtly implies the historical facts of Mill's failure at the time, as well as the postponement of women's full suffrage.

There is an allegorical depiction of the destruction brought about by the violence of World War I in "the places which are most prolific of broken china, such as pieces of waste land between railway lines, sites of demolished houses" (*Complete* 105) haunted by John. Moreover, within the remark "china is seldom thrown from a great height; it is one of the rarest of human actions. [···] Broken china was to be found in plenty, but broken in some trifling domestic accident" (105), there is a subtle implication of violence against women. Here, "domestic accident" can be imagined in various ways and may be connected to patriarchal violence against women in the household or linked to broader societal violence, reflecting the

www.kci.go.kr

historical injustice wherein British society denied women political participation rights. This interpretation is further supported by the historical fact that 'John' Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor, who were well aware of the problem of domestic violence, authored a series of newspaper articles and pamphlets on the topic between 1849 and 1853.

In this context, it can be inferred that various forms of broken objects symbolize those women over 30 years of age who gained the right to vote in 1918 as the fruition of the women's suffrage movement. In the same vein, the process by which broken inanimate objects, previously unrecognized in their agency and subjectivity, come to be acknowledged for their vitality and aesthetic agency can be seen as a representation of the process through which women gained the right to vote in Britain. John's astonishment of the diverse forms, qualities, and designs of the broken china signifies the bewildering sight of various beings, including women and workers, who had been regarded as passive and weak entities without political capability, surpassing his expectations and exhibiting vibrant political agency.

Moreover, the fact that John is amazed, "by the immense variety of shapes" and wonders at "the differences of qualities and designs" (*Complete* 105) while finding pieces of broken china reflects the scientific approach of the new biology, which "shifted attention from the classification of endless species to subjects such as morphology and physiology, the study of the structure and functioning of organisms" (Alt 3). Throughout much of the nineteenth century, taxonomic natural history,

www.kci.go.kr

which involved the collection of specimens and the classification of species, had been the primary focus of British naturalists; however, in the closing decades of the century, this taxonomic tradition was replaced by the new biology of the laboratory as the predominant approach to the study of nature (Alt 2-3). Woolf was familiar with the new biology and evolutionary theory. It is well known that she was interested in female botanist Marie Stopes, and painter Gwen Darwin, the granddaughter of naturalist Charles Darwin, was one of Woolf's old friends.

Woolf emphasizes the originality and diversity of beings that take even stranger forms through the contingent and emergent nature of the creative process, saying "how had the piece of china been broken into this remarkable shape? [···] the star shape was accidental, which made it all the more strange," and "it seemed unlikely that there should be another such in existence" (*Complete* 105). In doing so, she criticizes the outdated taxonomy seeking to classify endlessly diverse nonhuman species, and demonstrates a determination to closely observe the natural world through the lens of the new biology of the laboratory and evolutionary theory.

John's search and observation echo naturalist Charles Darwin's *Beagle* expedition. Young Darwin explored various parts of the world aboard the British naval survey ship HMS Beagle from 1831 to 1836 and in 1859 published *On the Origin of Species.* He explored many sites, including the Galapagos Islands, where he directly observed scientific phenomena previously encountered only in books and collected numerous

www.kci.go.kr

plant and animal specimens. Darwin endured various hardships during his exploratory journey. Despite feeling lonely and exhausted, he completed the expeditions. He meticulously observed and passionately collected various species of organisms on the Islands and, upon returning to England, studied the biological specimens he brought back, thus laying the groundwork for evolutionary theory.

In the story, the vocabularies, such as "specimens," "origin," "search," "discover," "earth" (*Complete* 104-05), that appear in the process of John collecting broken objects bring to mind Darwin's explorations. Just as John explores, observes, and collects various objects, Darwin directly observed and collected various species during the Beagle expedition. Darwin's discoveries were significant events that challenged anthropocentrism and changed perceptions of nonhuman species. Similarly, John's process of discovering various objects can be interpreted as a journey toward overcoming anthropocentrism. Ironically, his friend, Charles, who holds the conservative and indifferent attitude toward nonhuman vitality, has the same first name as Charles Darwin.

In *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Woolf shows reverence for Darwin as a great figure, directly mentioning his name: Mr Bankes says "[w]e can't all be Titians and we can't all be Darwins" (79). Gillian Beer states that describing the South American forest in *The Voyage Out* (1915), Woolf draws directly on Darwin's *The Voyage of the Beagle* (1839) and echoes Dawin's theories throughout *Between the Acts* (1941), pointing out that she records Darwin's writings in her diaries, including

www.kci.go.kr

The Voyage of the Beagle (14, 20). Woolf was one of the artists who sought to incorporate changing scientific paradigms, such as the Darwinian evolutionary theory and paleontology, which were at the forefront of biology in the early 20th century, into her literary worldview.

Although Darwin collected living organisms and John collects inanimate objects, John's method of meticulously exploring the Earth's surface and collecting specimens is reminiscent of Darwin's actions in studying living non-humans. It is written that "[i]n a few months he had collected four or five specimens that took their place upon the mantelpiece" after beginning to search for objects similar to the lump of glass, and among the variety of broken china "[t]he finest specimens he would bring home and place upon his mantelpiece" (*Complete* 104-05).

Comparing "the broken china" to "a creature from another world" (*Complete* 105), Woolf deconstructs the boundary between inanimate and animate or inorganic and organic, implying John's search is akin to Darwin's biological discoveries. Describing the china as "freakish and fantastic as a harlequin" (105) symbolizes the diversity of biological species and the emergent nature of creation, particularly the specificity of biological forms. Woolf suggests that taxonomy could no longer properly address the characteristics of specific organisms, and biologists came to observe organisms through morphology, a branch of biology dealing with the study of the form and structure of organisms.

The phrases "the china so vivid and alert" and "the glass

www.kci.go.kr

so mute and contemplative" (*Complete* 105) also anthropomorphize inanimate objects into sentient nonhuman beings. John asking himself "how the two came to exist in the same world, let alone to stand upon the same narrow strip of marble in the same room" resembles a scientist astounded with the distinctiveness of each creature through external morphology, dealing with outward appearances such as shape, structure, color, pattern, and size. Furthermore, the distinctive creatures on the mantelpiece symbolize the singularity of each woman over 30 who gained suffrage and eventually obtained recognition for their political agency after World War I.

John is surprised "by the immense variety of shapes to be found in London alone," and there is "still more cause for wonder and speculation in the differences of qualities and designs" (*Complete* 105), which makes him delve into the question more deeply. This is related to both the diversity of female voters and the various species of living beings. This means that among the women who had been disenfranchised until then, there were truly diverse individuals, and, not only in London but also throughout the UK, various women began to participate in voting. John's bewilderment stems from the fact that the diversity exceeds his expectations. Woolf exposes the limitations of male politicians by emphasizing the infinite diversity of individuals, pointing out that suffrage should have been granted to all adult women, not just to those over 30 years old. This also evokes Darwin's astonishment and wonder at the diversity of the species he discovered during his exploration.

www.kci.go.kr

"Barnes Common," where John finds "a very remarkable piece of iron" (*Complete* 106) under a furze bush, is also associated with biodiversity. Barnes Common is a Local Nature Reserve on the largest common land in London. John's act of discovering inanimate objects in a nature reserve where various species of living beings can be encountered, gives the impression that these broken objects are treated as nonhumans with vitality resembling that of living organisms.

John devotes "himself more and more resolutely to the search," and does not give up the pursuit, despite "the disappointments" and "fatigue and derision" he has suffered, since he is convinced that "one day some newly-discovered rubbish heap would reward him" (*Complete* 106). This evokes the hardships Darwin experienced during his exploratory journey, as documented in his Beagle diary. The way John ransacks all deposits of the earth, rakes beneath matted tangles of scrub, and searches all alleys and spaces between walls to find discarded objects resembles Darwin's efforts to collect specimens of various organisms species on the islands. From this perspective, it can be interpreted that John's inanimate objects are placed on an equal footing with Darwin's living organisms in terms of vitality and aesthetic subjectivity. Moreover, this interpretation leads to the conclusion that the inanimate objects collected by John ultimately symbolize women who eventually gained the right to vote.

It is written that the remarkable piece of iron was "alien to the earth and had its origin in one of the dead stars or was itself the cinder of a moon," and yet "the meteorite stood

www.kci.go.kr

upon the same ledge with the lump of glass and the star-shaped china" (*Complete* 106). This description may symbolize the more democratic and egalitarian society that emerged after World War I, where women gained the right to vote and the rights of workers were elevated. The community of objects on the mantelpiece constructed by John anticipates the collapse of the hierarchical order between diverse objects, between living and inanimate, and between human and nonhuman, envisioning an egalitarian ontology.

Ⅳ. Aesthetic Subjectivity as Ongoing Resistance

Considering that Bennett argued that women were intellectually inferior to men, and Woolf vehemently rebutted this claim, her criticism of Bennett's method of creating characters based solely on external and superficial facts implies Woolf's challenge to androcentrism. In "The Lady," as if celebrating the full realization of women's suffrage in 1928, Woolf proposed aesthetic subjectivity based on concrete aesthetic experiences as a new concept of subjectivity, and by elevating the aesthetic subjectivity of non-human beings and inanimate objects to the same level as that of humans, resisted both anthropocentrism and androcentrism.

Bennett and MacCarthy asserted that "the mind of woman is not sensibly affected by education and liberty; that it is incapable of the highest achievements; and that it remain for ever in the condition in which it now is" (*Congenial* 126). In

www.kci.go.kr

response to this, Woolf had to argue that women need education and should have liberty of experience, pointing out that "the fact that women have improved [···] shows that they may still improve" (126). Therefore, in "The Lady," Woolf's attempt to propose an aesthetic subjectivity that is formed and transformed through aesthetic experiences can be seen not only as a new methodology for creating fiction but also as a form of resistance against male writers who sought to limit women's abilities and fix their subjectivity. Thus, the equal distribution of aesthetic subjectivity between humans and nonhumans and the universality of aesthetic experience in the story resonate with the full acquisition of adult women's suffrage, which was only achieved in 1928.

In "Solid Objects," both John and Charles experience problems in innovating society. Woolf points out that both male politicians face limitations with respect to social reform. Charles is a politician who focuses solely on his logic and language and is indifferent to changes in his close friend or the presence of nonhuman beings in his surroundings. Even when touching the stones on the mantelpiece, Charles never notices their existence. He represents those who, even in the presence of non-humans, remain completely indifferent to their existence and consider politics an exclusively human affair. He is highly anthropocentric and lacks the ability to change vertical hierarchical structures.

John, on the other hand, fails to reapply what he has learned through the diverse objects of democracy to society and to extend the aesthetic relationships between objects and

www.kci.go.kr

himself to the community by sharing them with others. In a sense, John's isolation stems from his arrogance, which prevents him from realizing that objects can be subjects and that he can be the object in an aesthetic relationship. While indulging in his own power to confer meaning to objects, he cannot see the alluring influence that nonhumans exert on himself. Because John does not abandon the anthropocentric and arrogant thinking that he can 'possess' objects, the relationships he forms with the objects are flawed. He cannot let go of his dictatorial attitude toward objects owing to his possessiveness, and he ends up being drawn by the desire for domination without seeing the powerful force of change and movement in objects. Neither John nor Charles can fully understand the aesthetic subjectivity of nonhumans, resulting in their failure to establish a complete relationship with them.

Whether John knows it or not, the china, glass, iron, mantelpiece, and John mutually influence and bring about changes in each other aesthetically through invisible attraction and untouchable contact. Woolf writes that the piece of iron "weighed his pocket down; it weighed the mantelpiece down" (*Complete* 106), suggesting that inanimate objects are capable of inducing tangible physical and material changes in both John and his environment. More significantly, the objects on John's mantelpiece themselves affect one another without touching. Things affect other things indirectly. For inanimate objects, causality means the process of mysterious influences, and aesthetic transformation. Morton emphasizes that aesthetic events are not limited to interactions between humans or

www.kci.go.kr

between humans and artworks, yet they always happen in nonhuman world, including inanimate matters (19-20). Exploring the aesthetic causality between nonhumans as an aesthetic phenomenon in Woolf's works is an intriguing endeavor closely linked to her sociopolitical ideas.

www.kci.go.kr

Works Cited

Allen, Judith. "The Aesthetics/Politics of the Mantelpiece." *Virginia Woolf Miscellany,* no. 85, 2014, pp. 28-31.

Alt, Christina. *Virginia Woolf and the Study of Nature.* Cambridge UP, 2010.

Beer, Gillian. *Virginia Woolf: the Common Ground.* U of Michigan P, 1996.

Brown, Bill. "The Secret Life of Things: Virginia Woolf and the Matter of Modernism." *Aesthetic Subjects,* edited by Pamela R. Matthews and David McWhirter, U of Minnesota P, 2003, pp. 397-430.

Briggs, Julia. "'Cut Deep and Scored Thick with Meaning': Frame and Focus in Woolf's Later Short Stories." *Trespassing Boundaries: Virginia Woolf 's Short Fiction,* edited by Kathryn, N. Benzel and Ruth Hoberman, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 175-91.

Garrington, Abbie. "Reflections on a Cinematic Story." *Journal of the Short Story in English*, no. 50, 2008, pp. 217-26.

Harman, Graham. *Art and Objects.* Polity, 2019.

_____. *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects.* Open Court, 2002.

_____. "On Vicarious Causation." *Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development,* vol. 2, 2007, pp. 171-205.

Hoberman, Ruth. "Collecting, Shopping, and Reading: Virginia Woolf's Stories About Objects." *Trespassing Boundaries : Virginia Woolf 's Short Fiction,* edited by Kathryn, N. Benzel and Ruth Hoberman, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 81-98.

Mao, Douglas. *Solid Objects: Modernism and the Test of Production.* Princeton UP, 1998.

Morton, Timothy. *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality.* Open Humanities Press, 2013.

Shaviro, Steven. *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism.* U of

www.kci.go.kr

Minnesota P, 2014.

Whitehead, Alfred North. *Process and Reality.* 1929. Free Press, 1978.

Woolf, Virginia. *Congenial Spirits: The Selected Letters of Virginia Woolf,* edited by Joan Trautmann Banks, Harvest Books, 1991.

_____."Craftmanship." *Collected Essays,* edited by Leonard Woolf, vol. 2, Hogarth Press, 1966, pp. 245-51.

_____. "The Lady in the Looking Glass: A Reflection . " *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, edited by Susan Dick, 2nd ed., Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989, pp. 221-25.

_____. *To the Lighthouse.* Penguin, 2000.

_____."Modern Fiction." *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Vol.4, 1925-1928,* edited by Andrew McNeillie, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 2008. pp. 157-65.

_____. "Montaigne." *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 4, 1925- 1928,* edited by Andrew McNeillie, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 2008, pp. 71-81.

_____. *Moments of Being: A Collection of Autobiographical Writing,* edited by Jeanne Schulkind, 2nd ed., Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985.

_____. "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown." *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Vol.3: 1919 -1924,* edited by Andrew McNeillie. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991, pp. 384-89.

_____. *Orlando: a Biography.* Penguin, 2000.

_____. "Solid Objects." *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf,* edited by Susan Dick, 2nd ed., Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989, pp. 102-07.

www.kci.go.kr

국문초록

여성과 비인간의 미적 주체성과 정치적 행위성: 버지니아 울프의 「거울 속의 여인」과 「단단한 사물들」

박신현 (건국대학교, 연구교수)

전통 미학에서 미적 경험의 주체는 인간에게 제한되었으며 비인간은 단지 감상의 객체로만 여겨졌다. 하지만 최근 사변적 실재론자들 사이에 비인간 역시 미적 경험을 할 수 있고 미적 감정의 주체가 될 수 있다는 주장이 활발하다. 스티븐 샤비로, 그레이엄 하먼, 티머시 모턴의 포스트휴먼 미학은 칸트의 인간중심적 미학을 극복하려 한다. 이러한 사상가들과 버지니아 울프에게 미적 경험은 인식론적 차원을 넘어 존재론적 차원에서 작동한다. 본고는 울프의 두 단편, 「거울 속의 여인」(1929)과 「단단한 사물들」(1920) 안에서 모든 존재가 서로 미적으로 상호작용하며 미적 경험으로 형성되고 변화하는 양상을 탐색한다. 또한 미적 주체들로서 인간과 비인간, 생물과 무생물 사이의 경계들이 흐려지고 이러한 다양한 종의 미적 주체성이 여성의 참정권을 상징함으로써 남성중심주의와 인간중심주의를 전복시키는 양상을 고찰한다.

주제어: 버지니아 울프, 미학, 사변적 실재론, 포스트휴먼, 스티븐 샤비로, 그레이엄 하먼, 여성 참정권, 「거울 속의 여인」, 「단단한 사물들」

Received : Mar. 15. 2024
Reviewed : Apr. 17. 2024
Accepted : Apr. 23. 2024

www.kci.go.kr