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"THE SUBMERGED BUT UNDERLYING CONNECTION".

THE FUNCTION OF SYMBOLS IN THE NOVELS OF

VIRGINIA WOOLF

by

Jennifer A. Fremlin, B.A. (Hons.)

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English

Carleton University

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The undersigned recommend to the Faculty of
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The Function of Symbols in the Novels of
Virginia Woolf

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the function of symbols in the novels of Virginia Woolf, and finds that they generate themes.

Chapter One looks at different definitions of the term "symbol," and defines it for this context as "symbol-work," the implicit relationship between two otherwise unconnected elements, best understood by the reader intuitively. Given that symbols generate themes in the works of Woolf, Chapter Two examines the theme of androgyny and male/female relationships in her novels; Chapter Three discusses the theme of history; and in Chapter Four the theme of art and literature is dealt with. Chapter Five shows that these themes are all part of a larger issue - that of connection and isolation, which are interrelated in Woolf's fiction. Simultaneous integration and fragmentation are also shown to be the products of symbol-work, so that, for Woolf, the question of form and content is a false one, assuming as it does a dichotomy which does not exist.

Woolf's novels are thus in every way symbolic manifestations of her concern with connection and isolation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PREFACE

To undertake a study of the novels of Virginia Woolf is to necessarily get involved with many aspects of her fiction. The world of Woolf's novels is complex, created out of her concerns with language and art, her ideology and cultural beliefs, and of course the belief that the novel is an appropriate form with which to tackle perceived problems.

Some of the problems which Woolf approached include feminism and androgyny, and the relationship between male and female, the relative position of the individual to the universe, and to his inner self, the tension between generations and eras, the importance of language and "phrase-making", the power of art, and the tension between simultaneous feelings of connection and isolation. All of her novels deal with these themes to varying degrees, and a common thread may certainly be traced throughout.

However, her novels also share a style; Woolf's novels are highly symbolic. They employ images, metaphors and symbols to different effects. In fact, the form of her novels becomes inseparable from their content, as the structures produce meanings not otherwise apparent. In turn, the themes of her novels also produce a more complicated theory of symbols for her works.

In order to deal both with the themes and Woolf's use of symbols, and more importantly the relationship between the two, it is necessary to define terms and, in the beginning, treat form and content as separate. Chapter One is

designed to set out a terminology with which to discuss the symbol. By beginning with a quote from Woolf herself on the nature of language, it is immediately apparent that such an approach is in fact faithful to a reading of her work. After discussing symbols historically and generally, an attempt is made to place Woolf in this definition.

Then, in Chapters Two to Four, thematic concerns are isolated from her texts, and treated separately. For convenience, these chapters are organized according to a statement of Woolf's regarding some of her concerns. Thus the theme of androgyny is discussed in the second chapter, history is the proposed topic of the third, and Chapter Four examines the ways in which language, writing, and art are thematically dealt with. Each of these chapters is prefaced with a quote which serves to focus the discussion on a particular moment in a particular text. In explicating the given passage, the discussion then moves out towards the treatment of similar themes in the other texts.

However, given that these intermediary chapters are arbitrarily set up, the fifth chapter undermines this structure by setting out the thesis that each of these subjects is in fact related under the single heading of "Connection and Isolation," and demonstrates the relationship of the first chapter to the following three. Thus the paper first isolates different aspects of Virginia Woolf's fiction, and then connects them back together, restoring a more integrated look at her novels than any one method alone could achieve.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
PREFACE.....	v
CHAPTER ONE: "A Different Outline of Form": Theories of the Symbol.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: "A Plan of the Soul": The Theme of Androgyny.....	23
CHAPTER THREE: "A Different Ordering of the Scene": Past and Present in Virginia Woolf.....	33
CHAPTER FOUR: "A String of Six Little Fishes": The Function of Language and Literature in the Novels of Virginia Woolf.....	79
CHAPTER FIVE: "The Shaping Power": Connection and Isolation.....	99
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	116

CHAPTER ONE: "A Different Ordering of Form" Theories of the Symbol

One sees a fin passing far out. What image can I reach to convey what I mean? Really there is none, I think. But by writing I don't reach anything.¹

So writes Virginia Woolf in her diary in 1926, after the completion of *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), and before publication of *To the Lighthouse* (1927), indicating her concern with images. And symbols, metaphors, and stream of consciousness, these characteristics help to define her within the tradition of modernism.

Virginia Woolf, by the time she completed *The Voyage Out* in 1915, was working in a philosophical and literary milieu quite aware of symbols – of their existence, their implications, and their possible uses. The Symbolists of France in the late nineteenth century, the works of Freud,² William James, G. E. Moore and of Henri Bergson indicated a renewed, and new, interest in symbols, and thus Virginia Woolf, who was also reviewing widely and discussing theories with Roger Fry and the rest of Bloomsbury, worked quite consciously within this tradition.

As Woolf herself states, what worked for the "materialists" such as Mr. Wells, Mr. Bennett, and Mr. Galsworthy, who "write of unimportant things," with "labour misplaced to the extent of obscuring and blotting out the light of the conception."³

¹ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary* (London, 1953, rpt. St. Albans, Herts. Triad/Panther, 1979), p. 104. All further references to this work appear in the text.

² As Quentin Bell notes, Leonard Woolf was reading Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* in May 1914, and the English translations of these were to be published by the Woolfs' Hogarth Press. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf 1912-1941* (London, 1971, rpt. St. Albans Triad/Granada, 1982), p. 19.

³ Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction," in *The Common Reader 1* (London, 1925, rpt. London, Hogarth Press, 1984), pp. 148 and 149. All further references to this work appear in the text.

would no longer do for the British writer. But thanks to the Russian writers the British novelist is afforded a view of the infinite possibilities of the art and they remind us that there is no limit to the horizon and that nothing - no method no experiment even of the wildest - is forbidden but only falsity and pretence (Modern Fiction p 134) Samuel Hynes in a chapter entitled Human Character Changes discusses the implications of Woolf's assertion in her essay Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown that in or about December 1910 human character changed.⁴ He suggests that her

choice of this date was not arbitrary the first exhibition of Post-Impressionist paintings in London opened on November 8 1910 and ran until January 13 1911 and she chose that occasion as an appropriate symbol of the way European ideas forced themselves upon the insular English consciousness during the Edwardian years and so joined England to the continent.⁵

As well 1910 marked the year of King Edward's death and it was only after Edward's death in 1910 that contemporary movements in European culture began to penetrate English insularity.⁶ As Woolf herself so acutely noted after Roger Fry's Post-Impressionist exhibit which included paintings by Russian artists the Russians were instrumental in pushing English culture into the twentieth century Hynes says on this matter

Russia in particular was discovered and extravagantly admired during those years Russian literature Russian modes of dress Russian drama Russian opera and Russian

⁴ Virginia Woolf 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' (1924) in *Collected Essays* (London Hogarth Press 1966) p 320

⁵ Samuel Hynes, 'Human Character Changes' in *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (Princeton Princeton University Press 1968) p 326

⁶ Ibid p 313

ballet all had sudden vogues between 1910 and 1914

The great Russian novelists were not, of course, unknown to English readers in 1910. The generation of writers that included James and Conrad had taken Turgenev in particular as their example.

However, in a review written in 1920 of J. D. Beresford's novel, *An Imperfect Mother*, Woolf expressed the fear that psychologically-influenced novels may unduly depend on this new approach. "Our complaint is rather that in 'An Imperfect Mother' the new key is a patent key that opens every door. It simplifies rather than complicates, detracts rather than enriches."⁸ Such a use of psychology would be falsity and pretence.

"By writing I don't reach anything," Woolf contradicts herself in her diary, as she follows what is clearly an image – the fin – by the negation of that image, this image does reach something – communication. So what exactly is she saying? That the idea which she is trying to grasp is, like the fin, passing far out, out of reach, out of expression? And that even by writing, transmogrifying thoughts into words, she will not reach that elusive meaning? Yet the given image is strong, suggestive, provoking an approximation of the thought, which itself is a thought on the elusiveness, the fin-like quality of darting among the waves, of expressing ideas.

Woolf deals with her concern for alternate methods of expression in her letters, diaries and essays. The problem before the novelist at present is to contrive means of being free to set down what he chooses. He has to have the courage to say that what interests him is no longer this but that – for the moderns that – the point of interest.

Hynes, p. 336

⁸ Virginia Woolf, "Freudian Fiction," *Times Literary Supplement* (March 25, 1920), p. 199. Edward Hungerford, in "Mrs. Woolf, Freud, and J. D. Beresford," *Literature and Psychology* 5 (August 1955), attributes this unsigned review to Woolf.

lies very likely in the dark places of psychology at once a different outline of form becomes necessary" ("Modern Fiction," p. 152). "I daresay one ought to invent a completely new form"⁹ However, this concern permeates her fiction as well, and in fact becomes its major distinguishing feature

"Who is to say what meaning there is in anything? Who is to foretell the flight of a word? It is a balloon that sails over tree-tops"¹⁰ Bernard, in *The Waves* muses on this same issue. He suggests that, even when one tries to establish meaning, in language, the meaning cannot be controlled, it can slip away, out of reach, like the fin passing by out in the water. Significantly, Bernard follows his own questions with an image, a concrete representation of his sense of the unanswerability of those questions. The image of the balloon, like that of the fin, serves to suggest the notion that ideas move spatially, just above one's head or beyond one's grasp. Paradoxically, it is the image, although Woolf declared there's no sufficient one, that conveys the essential meaning.

But how do we know that these images are meant to convey "essential meanings"? In the case of the fin, Woolf calls it explicitly an image, and thus it is approached as such. The fin also reappears several times in her fiction, most notably in *The Waves*. "Through all the flowers the same wave of light passed in a sudden flaunt and flash as if a fin cut the green glass of a lake" (p. 123). "Nothing, nothing, nothing broke with its fin that leaden waste of waters. Nothing would happen to lift

⁹ Virginia Woolf, (1917), in *The Question of Things Happening - The Letters of Virginia Woolf 1912-1922*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London, 1976; rpt. London, Chatto & Windus, 1980), p. 167. All further references to this work appear in the text.

¹⁰ Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London, 1931, rpt. St. Albans: Granada Publishing Ltd., 1982), p. 79. All further references to this work appear in the text.

that weight of intolerable boredom" (p. 166). "So we compared each other's versions, and then sank into one of those silences which are now and again broken by a few words, as if a fin rose in the wastes of silence, and then the fin the thought sinks back into the depths, spreading round it a little ripple of satisfaction, content (p. 184), and finally, "Nothing came, nothing. I cried then with a sudden conviction of complete desertion. Now there is nothing. No fin breaks the waste of this immeasurable sea. Life has destroyed me" (p. 192). The meaning of the image is not fixed. Bernard variously uses it to suggest interruption, thought, and, as in the earlier passage, suggestion itself. In the case of Bernard's balloon, he unequivocally uses the word "meaning" in conjunction with the image.

Such an approach thus explicitly called upon reveals a fundamental belief in such abstracts as meaning. The philosophical milieu of early twentieth-century Britain, especially Woolf's Britain, that of Bloomsbury, provided a basis for these fundamental beliefs. The theories of G. E. Moore and Sigmund Freud, especially, were accessible to Virginia Woolf, or Virginia Stephen as she would have been then. G. E. Moore's aesthetic theories that the primacy of experience of art is art's chief value find their echo in Bernard's attempt to translate his experience, or experience-his experience, as it were. In his major influential work, *Principia Ethica*, G. E. Moore says

By far the most valuable things, which we can know or can imagine, are certain states of consciousness, which may be roughly described as the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects: such mere existence of what is beautiful has value, so small as to be negligible, in comparison with that which attaches to the *consciousness* of beauty.¹¹

¹¹ G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (1903, rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), pp. 188-189.

Bernard's attempt to capture the flight of his experience with an image his attempt to know his state of consciousness is more important in G. E. Moore's terms than the actual experience of the beauty of the image itself. In this way symbolic writing for Woolf both forces the reader to notice the beauty of the flight of the word and to enjoy the aesthetic experience of the consciousness of that beauty. As J. K. Johnstone describes it in *The Bloomsbury Group*

Moore thus appeals to intuition to reason and to knowledge or as he says to reflective judgment to assist in the recognition of what is intrinsically good. Reason devises the method and approves its soundness intuition since good is an ultimate term of reference is expected to recognize goodness when that which is good in itself is held in isolation and knowledge helps intuition in the classification of various goods.¹²

Intuition is the key faculty for the recognition of good. The idea that intuition is the primary response to good and therefore beauty seems further validated by Woolf's use of symbols. In fact G. E. Moore himself takes on a symbolic function in *The Voyage Out*. Richard Dalloway chats with Helen Ambrose

May I ask how you've spent your time? Reading - philosophy? (He saw the black book.) He began turning the pages.

Good then is indefinable he read out.¹³

Helen Ambrose is reading *Principia Ethica* and Richard quoting from page seventeen reminisces treating philosophy as a rather jolly activity enjoyed as a boy

It's the philosophers it's the scholars he continued they're the people who pass the torch who keep the light burning by which we live. Mrs. Ambrose responds

¹² J. K. Johnstone *The Bloomsbury Group* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1954) p. 23.

¹³ Virginia Woolf *The Voyage Out* (London, 1915 rpt. St. Albans: Granada Publishing Limited, 1982) p. 71. All further references to this work appear in the text.

But can you remember if your wife takes sugar? Ironically although G E Moore's theories of intuition and the expression of experience are in accordance with Woolf's practices all theories and theorizing are manifestations of an outlook which is divorced from the everyday reality of details of whether one's wife takes sugar or not. In a memoir written about 1921-22 she contrasts Old Bloomsbury to the world to which she had been accustomed

In the world of the Booths and Maxses Vanessa and I were not asked to use our brains much. Here we used nothing else. And part of the charm of those Thursday evenings was that they were astonishingly abstract. It was not only that Moore's book had set us all discussing philosophy art religion it was that the atmosphere was abstract in the extreme.¹⁴

However she later finds that theorizing and abstraction alone are restrictive. She writes in her biography of Roger Fry: For if we allow sensations to accumulate unchecked they lose their sharpness to test them by reason strengthens and enriches. But fascinating as theories are they too must be controlled or they will form a crust which blocks the way for further experience.¹⁵

The implications of this philosophy of art and literature in Bloomsbury's Britain included a greater emphasis on experience and the act of experiencing and a movement away from the realism of Mr Wells Mr Bennett and Mr Galsworthy these three writers are materialists. It is because they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body that they have disappointed us. (Modern Fiction p

¹⁴ Virginia Woolf Old Bloomsbury in *Moments of Being* ed Jeanne Schulkind (Sussex 1976 rpt Triad/Granada 1982) p 194 All further references to this work appear in the text

¹⁵ Virginia Woolf *Roger Fry* (London 1940 rpt Middlesex Penguin Books Ltd 1970) p 198 All further references to this work appear in the text

147) Woolf, in her essay, "Modern Fiction," despairs over this materialist fiction, and, in the spirit of G E Moore, complains that Mr Bennett et al write fiction in which "life escapes. Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide" (p 149)

In response to materialist writing, which expends "so much of the enormous labour of proving the solidity, the likeness to life" ("Modern Fiction," p 149), Woolf proposes a new wardrobe, a new way to dress "life or spirit, truth or reality." Not only are the concerns or vision of the materialists misguided, as "they write of unimportant things" (p 148), but the design of their fiction, "constrained to find a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability" (p 149), is unsuited to the important task of writing about the identity of the individual. In "The Narrow Bridge of Art" (1927), Virginia Woolf writes that the novel of the future

will resemble poetry in this that it will give not only or mainly people's relations to each other and their activities together, as the novel has hitherto done, but it will give the relation of the mind to general ideas and its soliloquy in solitude. The psychological novelist has been too prone to limit psychology to the psychology of personal intercourse. We long for more impersonal relationship. We long for ideas, for dreams, for imaginations, for poetry.¹⁶

Woolf is calling for the novel to borrow from poetry, and she considers one of the fundamentals of poetry to be the use of symbols.

While symbols were obviously an aspect of literature long before the twentieth century, the conception of the symbol has a different significance for post-Freudians than it would have had for Shakespeare or Emily Bronte, for example. As Jean Stafford

¹⁶ Virginia Woolf, "The Narrow Bridge of Art," in *Collected Essays Volume Two* (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), p 225

explains it in her essay "The Psychological Novel," all novels are psychological, in that they are "concerned with emotional motivations and their intellectual resolutions, with instincts and impulses and conflicts and behavior, with the convolutions and complexities of human relationships, with the crucifixions and the solaces of being alive."¹⁷ However, Freud himself "has made our moral attitudes more humane and he has modified our habits of observation, making us more alert to our conduct and to the patterns and symbols of experience, enriching our insights, sharpening our sense of meaning."¹⁸ After Freud, the symbol suggests an unacknowledged or at least unstated relationship between things, the subconscious production of meanings subconsciously perceived. And he sets the precondition for novelists to observe and see patterns and symbols in experience, although of course he did not invent these emotions.

According to Aristotle, "Metaphor consists in applying to a thing a word that belongs to something else."¹⁹ In this sense of "metaphor," its properties of application are similar to those of "symbol." A symbol, like a metaphor, consists of the indirect or suggested connection of two ideas, things or situations. In modern definitions the emphasis is not so much on the application between things as on the act of perceiving the connection and the significance of the symbol for the thing symbolized, or left unarticulated. Ernest Jones, a psychologist and student of Freud's, defines the symbol thus:

A symbol is a representative or substitute of some

¹⁷ Jean Stafford, "The Psychological Novel," *Kenyon Review* X, #2 (Spring 1948), p. 214.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 216.

¹⁹ As paraphrased by Winifred Nowotny in *The Language Poets Use* (London: The Athlone Press, 1962), p. 49.

other idea from which in the context it derives a secondary significance not inherent in itself. It is important to note that the flow of significance is from the primary idea to the secondary to the symbol so that typically a more essential idea is symbolised by a less essential. The association may be an internal or an external one. An association however which is superficial to the reason may often be of significance in feeling especially in the unconscious. A symbol is characteristically sensorial and concrete whereas the idea represented may be a relatively abstract and complex one. The symbol thus tends to be shorter and more condensed than the idea represented ²⁰

There are various methods available to effect a relationship between these two elements. Analogy juxtaposition comparison conjunction combination montage patterns condensation projection displacement allusion all of these constructions in some way present a connection between two apparently unrelated constituents. The two components need not be placed side by side indeed one of them may only be implied. In the case of an image the connection is generally limited to within the specific context that it occurs. An image as Philip Wheelwright explains emphasizes the most concrete element in a typical poetic situation. ²¹ A metaphor is a fuller or larger combination of two elements; it includes more of the associations between two juxtaposed or implied elements. ²² Lastly the symbol then suggests meanings of a more permanent kind than those transient wisps of image and metaphor of suggestiveness that are never entirely lacking in a poem. ²³ The difference is one of

²⁰ Ernest Jones, *The Theory of Symbolism* in *Papers on Psychoanalysis* 5th ed. (London: Baillière Tindall and Cox 1950) pp. 89-90.

²¹ Philip Wheelwright, *Metaphor and Reality* (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press 1962) p. 66.

²² Wheelwright p. 69.

²³ Wheelwright p. 66.

degree not content or intention. Thus image and symbol will be hereafter treated as one entity given the collective term symbol."

What exactly, then, is the intention of a symbol? A symbol contains the indirect association of different terms but why is it used? Classically as Terence Hawkes outlines the symbol was ornamental, extra detachable from language a device that may be imported into language in order to achieve specific pre-judged effects.²⁴ However this view has undergone radical changes, so that the symbol is no longer simply a rhetorical device of emphasis. The intention of the modern symbol is directly connected to why it remains an element of modern literature. The consequences of a symbol as has already been pointed out are connective associative. Two elements are shown to be related and the result of this display is that each element is enlarged as it acquires fuller being from the association. According to William York Tindall, "One half of this peculiar analogy embodies the other and the symbol is what it symbolizes."²⁵

The results of this indirect association are complex ambiguous implied. Because the method of suggested connection is indirect insinuated the actual intended relation is vague and ambivalent. It is only intimated, not fully and explicitly revealed. However the aim of the symbol may be clarity unity revelation. Thus the paradox of the symbol through indirectness and suggestion a clearer relationship between two elements may be apprehended.

This apprehension is the work of the reader. It is his to discover the implications of the association between two apparently arbitrary and disparate things or ideas. For

²⁴ Terence Hawkes *Metaphor* (London Methuen 1972) p 90

²⁵ William York Tindall *The Literary Symbol* (Bloomington Indiana University Press 1955) p 12

the moderns, the work of the reader is analogous to that of the psychoanalyst who decodes the unconscious symbolic messages and makes the connective leaps between apparently unrelated things. Freud's discussion of speech-mistakes is valuable for pointing out that the mind works associatively and collectively. A speech-mistake occurs when repressed thoughts emerge in speech instead of in the speaker's intended conscious thought. "The formation of substitutions and contaminations in speech-mistakes is therefore the beginning of that work of condensation which we find taking a most active part in the construction of the dream."²⁶ Because Freud sees the dream as primarily symbolic, the medium of messages between the conscious and the unconscious, this statement applies also to the construction of the symbol. The dream, like a symbol, reproduces thoughts in visual or acoustic form. Graham Hough recognizes this concrete element in his definition of "symbols being verbal or visual presentations, regarded as realizing complexes of experience otherwise inapprehensible."²⁷ Thus literary symbols become a psychological manifestation, products of a mind whose essential act is symbol-making. In the words of Robert Humphrey

the primary mental process is that of forming symbols [T]his symbol-forming process is prior to association or ideation

The chief impetus for reliance on symbols is rooted in the psychological experience which indicates that symbolization is a primary mental process [S]tream-of-consciousness literature has used symbols realistically

²⁶ Sigmund Freud, "Mistakes in Speech," from *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* 1914, in *The Structuralists* ed. G. de George (New York: Doubleday, 1972), p. 35.

²⁷ Graham Hough, "Symbolism," in *Literary Modernism* ed. Irving Howe (Greenwich: Fawcett, 1967), p. 183.

and methodically in its attempt to present mental
functioning as primarily symbol-making²⁸

For the moderns, the expression of the mind expressing, or the appearance of symbols in literature, indicates "the phenomenon of twentieth century art in terms of its significance as a *symbol itself* - a symbolic expression of the psychological condition of the modern world"²⁹

The symbol is an inherent characteristic of the system of language and language is itself a characteristic of the systemizing, symbol-making mind as it seeks to apprehend and thereby create the world. In essence, the symbol has as its concern the "why" of its own existence. A symbol symbolizes the act of symbolization itself, ~~so that~~ its ultimate subject matter is not the content of the relationship or connection between two elements or ideas, but the fact of the relationship. Symbols reveal the generality of symbolizing, they contain and reflect the inexplicable, associative nature of ideas in language, of which they too are a part. "As symbols can serve structure, so structure can serve as symbol,"³⁰ writes Tindall, the structure of a novel - the relationship between form and content - serves as a model of the symbol. The way in which a symbol works - ambiguously connecting two indirectly related factors - is analogous to the way in which a novel's form and content are connected, so that to alter one would fundamentally change the other. The definition of a symbol is not limited to what it is, or what it does, but is to be found in the answer to why it is used. Natural to the system of language, the psychological content of the unconscious, and essential to effective

²⁸ Robert Humphrey, *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* (1954, rpt Berkeley & Los Angeles University of California Press, 1968), pp 81-82

²⁹ Amelia Jaffe, "Symbolism in the Visual Arts", in *Man and His Symbols*, ed and intro C G Jung (1964, rpt New York Dell, 1973), p 257

³⁰ Tindall (1967), p 229

communication the symbol is not used by choice but is organically connected to the art of expression

Symbolic writing makes use of symbols, imagery and metaphor in addition to a chronological narrative to suggest larger themes and, metaphorically and hierarchically speaking, deeper meanings. In the tradition of reading the novel symbols seem to serve to support the narrative and to emphasize underlying concerns and even to add a degree of literariness to a text. But such a reading implies that symbols and the other tropes are an instrument of technique, something imposed by the author on the story, on clear, more precise language, a given from without and a device considered to be more commonly employed in poetry.

However, critical theory, especially that of the twentieth century, understands the use of symbols to be less that of extraneous ornamentation, and more a function of meaning.

I want to find out what the function of content is, and am developing a theory which you will hate very much, viz. that it is merely directive of form and that all the essential aesthetic quality has to do with pure form. I think that in proportion as poetry becomes more intense the content is entirely remade by the form and has no separate value at all, (as quoted by Virginia Woolf, in *Roger Fry* p. 139)

writes Roger Fry to G. L. Dickinson, in 1913. The implications of this statement for a theory of rhetoric include a shifting of emphasis from the content of the narrative to the form of the narrative. Nearly sixty years after the date of Fry's letter, Jurij Lotman, in *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, reasserts this premise:

A writer's thought is realized in a particular artistic structure and is inseparable from it. An idea in art is always a model, for it reconstructs an image of reality. The dualism of form and content must be replaced by the concept of "idea" as something realized in a corresponding structure and non-existent outside that

structure

The artistic text is an intricately constructed thought
All its elements are meaningful elements³¹

Form becomes a way of generating meaning, instead of simply a technique
superfluous to content

In order to understand the function of symbols in fictional works, it is
necessary to understand the ways in which symbols work. In short, what are the
effects produced by the use of symbols? The term metaphor can refer to the specific
trope which results in the Wordsworthian

observation of affinities
In objects where no brotherhood exists
To passive minds³²

In this sense of metaphor, its properties are similar to those of "symbol." In fact, the
term "symbol" will be employed as a derivative of the more exact "symbol-work." The
kind of work the symbol does, the effects of, and the process towards, this
achievement, are the significant considerations of the term. Thus the exact term or
name for "a fin passing far out" or "a balloon that sails over tree-tops," (which are,
specifically images), is not useful for the discussion. Rather, a recognition that these
images work in certain ways is vital, and these ways will be termed, for our purposes
as symbolic.

But what exactly are the implications of symbol-work? A symbol consists of the
indirect connection of two ideas, things and/or situations. There are many ways of
effecting such a relationship among them, as mentioned above, are analogy,
juxtaposition, comparison, conjunction, combination, montage, condensation, proj-

³¹ Jurij Lotman *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, transl. Ronald Vroon (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1977) pp. 10-11

³² William Wordsworth "The Prelude" (1850) II 384-86

ection and repetition. The sentence "One sees a fin passing far out" remains an image, a concrete picture of a physical event. However, when juxtaposed with "What image can I reach to convey what I mean?" although the logic behind the placement of this question is unstated, a connection between two apparently unrelated constituents is created. It is in this place where the two are situated that the relationship is established. The second sentence reveals explicitly that the first is primarily an image, not a description of an actual event. But there is more to it than that. The image of the fin passing far out in fact is similar to the image of Woolf as diarist reaching out into language for a precise phrase, some words which would exactly correspond to what she is trying to describe. And this is how the image of the far-away fin works. Without directly saying it, by implication rather than explication, the concrete image symbolizes the desired emotion. The active mind of the reader is required to observe these affinities.

In Virginia Woolf's biography of Roger Fry, she quotes from his own notes an account of one of "two great emotional experiences, my first passion." "I conceived that nothing in the world could be more exciting than to see the flower suddenly burst its green case and unfold its immense cup of red: all passions even for red poppies leave one open to ridicule" (*Roger Fry*, p. 13). The incident is significant as a signpost to Roger Fry's early love of beauty, and for the harsh lessons learned that became associated with the flower. But later on, as Woolf discusses Fry's development as an artist, the reader's mind is triggered by a faint echo: "A red poppy, a mother's reproof: they too have their part in moments of vision" (p. 140). And still later, the incident is again recalled.

There are certain phrases that recur, that seem to stress the pattern of the whole. They bring to mind the little boy who sat in his own private and particular garden at Highgate, watching for the bud to burst into flower. What

was true of the child in the garden was true of the man all through his life. There was always some bud about to burst into flower, there was always some flower that gave him pure delight. But the critic who attempts to analyse the composition of his own work of art will have to note that his flower did not burst suddenly and completely into its immense cup of red. (p. 236.)

As Woolf herself says the repetition of certain phrases or images makes those segments relatively insignificant on their own into symbols the active mind connects the several mentions of the red poppy and the flower becomes symbolic of more than a moment of vision. The colour of the flower suggests the passion which Fry brought to all his experiences the budding flower suggests Fry's budding talent the single incident becomes representative of the whole so that the image will thus suggest the life the pattern of the whole and will no longer exist simply as a flower. The poppy becomes a complex of associations and meanings and as J. Hillis Miller suggests therefore becomes symbolic.

A long work like a novel is interpreted in part through the identification of recurrences and of meanings generated through recurrences. On a small scale there is repetition of verbal elements words figures of speech shapes or gestures or more subtly covert repetitions that act like metaphors. On a larger scale events or scenes may be duplicated within the text. A novel is interpreted in part through the noticing of such recurrences. Any novel is a complex tissue of repetitions and of repetitions within repetitions or of repetitions linked in chain fashion to other repetitions.³³

Thus the repetitions of the image of the poppy inhibit the too easy determination of a meaning based on the linear sequence of the story.³⁴

The use of symbols suggests an implicit ontological position. While the creation

³³ J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press 1962) pp. 1-2.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 2.

of symbols appears similar throughout literary history, as Terence Hawkes points out. an examination of the *idea* of metaphor (and thus symbol) as a *social* and *historical* phenomenon deriving from attitudes towards language" (*Metaphor*, p. 5), reveals different approaches toward the concept. While "metaphor in Elizabethan poetry represents an act of ordering imposed on Nature, aimed at 'decorum, consistency and coherence' (p. 20) the Puritan idea of Plain *Style* treated metaphor as an extravagance (p. 28) and Dr. Johnson saw it as "almost an abuse of language," whose sole aim should be clarity. In such a process, ambiguity becomes a vice. 18th century metaphors tend to deal in what is generally and universally acceptable" (pp. 32-33).

But for the Romantics symbols signified the Platonic view of organicism, so that symbols according to this principle of organic unity, cannot be separated from language: the parts are inseparable from the whole. Metaphor is less a technique than a way of *experiencing* the facts" (Hawkes, p. 39), and is a product of the Imagination. "The function of this faculty [Imagination] is to connect, to fuse, to blend and to reconcile in a process of unification for which Coleridge coined the term *esemplastic* 'to shape into one'" (p. 43), and thus symbol-making is not an act of choice but rather is dictated by the ways of language itself in its attempt to express the Imagination. Coleridge's "main notion," according to Hawkes, is that "the ultimate realization of Imagination will take linguistic form, and that form is most obviously manifested in the sort of association of ideas which generates metaphor" (p. 43).

Coleridge in "Dejection: An Ode," writes

I see them all so excellently fair,
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!
I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within
Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the Earth—
And from the soul itself must there be sent

A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element! (ll 37-38, 45-46, 53-58)

Like G E Moore, Coleridge believed the beautiful (in this case Nature) was only so in its perception of being so, and it is the soul which transforms "that inanimate cold world" (l 51) into a thing of beauty Vita Sackville-West comments,

Did the analogy between Virginia and Coleridge ever strike you? Did it ever occur to you that Virginia translated into another century, might have written *Kubla Khan*, the *Ancient Mariner*, and the *Biographia Literaria*? She and Coleridge both seem to me to combine the unusually mixed ingredients of genius and intellect: the wild, fantastic, intuitive genius on the one hand, and the cold, reasoning intellect on the other.³⁵

Woolf's vision, and indeed her design, owes much to the Romantic conception of the world, which, as Hawkes says,

sees metaphor as inseparable from a language which is "vitality metaphorical", and a "reality" which is ultimately the end-product of an essentially "metaphorical" interaction between words and the "hurrying of material" that they encounter daily. Metaphor, deliberately invoked, intensifies language's characteristic activity, and involves, quite literally, the creation of "new" reality" (*Metaphor*, p 90)

Like Coleridge, and then G E Moore, she believes the experience of the world or the act of perception, and not the worldly object itself, to be of the utmost importance, and thus that the act of expressing, and not just the content of the expression is what matters, as an inextricable part of reality. However, earlier implications of the method are still applicable, as the use of symbols in a sense still suggests a desire to master experience and control nature, as Fredric Jameson mentions, in his discussion of

³⁵ Vita Sackville-West, from a letter written to a friend at the time of Virginia Woolf's death, 1941, collected in *Recollections of Virginia Woolf*, ed Joan Russell Noble (London, 1972, rpt Middlesex Penguin, 1973), pp 164-65

Jacques Lacan

The relationship of the literary text to its image content is thus - in spite of the historic preponderance of the sensory in modern literature since Romanticism - not that of the production of imagery but rather of its mastery and control in ways which range from outright repression (and the transformation of the sensory image into some more comfortable conceptual symbol) to the more complex modes of assimilation of surrealism and more recently of schizophrenic literature³⁶

Thus while both positions may be argued the implications contained in both attitudes are useful. Because while the use of symbols does in some sense belie the text's desire to master and control itself, symbols are also by definition ambiguous, uncertain, and the meanings shimmer, they do not stand still. Therefore they pull the text's control of itself out from under it, and it is the tension between control of production and the uncontrollability of meanings produced, between reason and intuition as methods of dealing with experience, which are at the heart of the symbolic novel.

The definition of symbol draws from psychology, linguistics and literature, the use of symbols indicates certain philosophical preconceptions often historically placed, but what are the actual effects of the symbol on the literary text?

Symbols give the text a spatial dimension, by placing things side by side, taking up space but not chronological time (except the actual time it takes for the reader to read) the text is simultaneously 'thickened' as it is lengthened. As the meanings and suggestions incurred by the symbol pile up vertically, as it were, the text also progresses linearly. For example, in this passage from *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa is simultaneously in the vertical world of thought and the chronologically-bound world

³⁶ Fredric Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject," *Yale French Studies* 55/56, 1977, p. 376

of time and space

For having lived in Westminster one feels even in the midst of the traffic Clarissa was positive a particular hush or solemnity an indescribable pause a suspense before Big Ben strikes There Out it boomed First a warning musical then the hour irrevocable The leaden circles dissolved in the air Such fools we are she thought crossing Victoria Street³⁷

As Big Ben time irrevocable and real - intrudes on her thoughts bringing in the outside arbitrary world of Acts of Parliament (p 6) and London Clarissa feels and by implication is thinking and she is also crossing the street Symbol and action (and of course some actions can be symbolic) combine organically to make up the text

The leaden circles dissolved in the air Symbols also serve to give a sense of weighted meaning Meanings are not fixed or solid but are various and the result is the effect of suggested importance While the leaden circles could represent the heavy and thus burdensome permeation of civilized time into the society or the workings of Clarissa's mind as her thoughts dissolve or the collective aura of love which she feels for London and life or the act of making it up building it round one tumbling it creating it afresh (p 6) etc they also symbolize that very impermanence of symbols which do not exist as actions but disappear off the page

This ambiguity creates a text which is not closed meanings both fly off the page and can be poured into the page by the reader

Up they bubble - images "Like a camel" "a vulture" The camel is a vulture, the vulture a camel, for Bernard is a dangling wire Yes, for when he talks, when he makes his foolish comparisons, a lightness comes over one One floats, too, as if one were that bubble one is freed, I have

³⁷ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London, 1925, rpt St Albans Triad/Panther 1976), p 6 Further references to this work appear in the text

escaped one feels (*The Waves* p 26)

As Neville in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* states images and therefore symbols have an effect of freeing the reader (or listener) from the constraints of the physical concrete world. The text itself can free the reader.

Thus he directed me to that which is beyond and outside our own predicament, to that which is symbolic and thus permanent if there is any permanence in our sleeping eating breathing so animal so spiritual and tumultuous lives' (*The Waves* p 168). Bernard the prime storyteller and symbol-maker in *The Waves* remembers the effect of symbols which can lend an air of greater significance outside the moment of their occurrence and suggest a permanence beyond daily life. While the control over everyday life may be tenuous there is the suggestion that by symbol-making and even story-telling one may gain a firmer grasp of experience. In fact as Hawkes says language and experience interact and prove fundamentally implicated with each other to an extent that makes it difficult to consider them as separate entities (*Metaphor* p 59). In general then symbols in a literary text are as much a rendering of action as for example a description of a lady shopping in London.

These then are the general functions of symbols in a text but what are the specific particular significances of them in the works of Virginia Woolf?

The violent explosion which made Mrs Dalloway jump came from a motor car. Passers-by stopped and stared.

Yet rumours were at once in circulation from the middle of Bond Street to Oxford Street on one side to Atkinson's scent shop on the other passing invisibly inaudibly like a cloud swift veil-like upon hills falling indeed with something of a cloud's sudden sobriety and stillness upon faces which a second before had been utterly disorderly.

Septimus Warren Smith found himself unable to pass.

Everything had come to a standstill. Every one looked

at the motor car. Septimus looked. Boys on bicycles sprang off. And there the motor car stood, with drawn blinds, and upon them a curious pattern like a tree. Septimus thought.

The motor car with its blinds drawn and an air of inscrutable reserve proceeded towards Picadilly still gazed at, still ruffling the faces on both sides of the street. There could be no doubt that greatness was seated within. Greatness was passing removed only by a hand's-breadth from ordinary people who might now be within speaking distance of the majesty of England, of the enduring symbol of the state.

It is probably the Queen, thought Mrs Dalloway.

The car had gone, but it had left a slight ripple which flowed through glove shops and hat shops and tailors' shops on both sides of Bond Street. For thirty seconds all heads were inclined the same way - to the window (*Mrs Dalloway*, pp 14-17).

The grey car winds its way through the city, and everyone sees it, thinks about it, shares in this symbol of power and mystery. The car functions as a lateral shift from the mind of one character to another, a device by which Woolf can seamlessly move from one scene or character's interior consciousness, to the next. But more than a neat device by which to manipulate the text, the car's significance like that of Big Ben's, or the aeroplane above the heads of the people, or the streets and shops of London etc. seems to be suggestive of larger concerns. And this is not an isolated case for throughout her novels, symbols work in this way. As Woolf herself states, in *A Room of One's Own*, "books continue each other, in spite of our habit of judging them separately."³⁸ Thus the question of the function of symbols in the works of Virginia Woolf is more properly the question of the function of symbols in the work of Virginia Woolf as all the books may be considered as part of a larger continuum.

And more than ways of perception, the use of symbols functions to generate

³⁸ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London 1929, rpt St Albans Granada Publishing Ltd 1982) p 77. Further references to this work appear in the text.

24

theme in the novels of Virginia Woolf. For Woolf, novels should have form or perhaps we should say internal order.³⁹ This form is produced by an experience of life but it also directs content. As Woolf says in the planning stages of what was eventually to become *The Waves*: "there are to be millions of ideas but no preaching - history, politics, feminism, art, literature - in short a summing up of all I know, feel, laugh at, despise, like, admire, hate and so on." (*A Writer's Diary*, p. 192). This collection of themes which Woolf deals with symbolically rather than didactically proves to sum up a specific view of life.

39 J. K. Johnstone, p. 86.

CHAPTER TWO "A Plan of the Soul" The Theme of Androgyny

[Eleanor] was standing with her back to them. She was watching a taxi that was gliding slowly round the square. It stopped in front of a house two doors down.

"Aren't they lovely?" said Delia, holding out the flowers.

Eleanor started.

"The roses? Yes," she said. But she was watching the cab. A young man had got out, he paid the driver. Then a girl in a tweed travelling suit followed him. He fitted his latch-key to the door. "There," Eleanor murmured, as he opened the door and they stood for a moment on the threshold. "There!" she repeated, as the door shut with a little thud behind them.¹

The time is the present day, and Eleanor, in Virginia Woolf's *The Years*, experiences a moment of vision, signified by her affirmation of "There!" The couple getting into the taxicab is firstly just a part of the London scene, an observable event occurring early one morning. But Eleanor's reaction suggests that the action is also an image which imprints itself on her mind pictorially, so that the rhythm of the cab and its occupants evokes an importance not inherent in the scene itself. Eleanor, the watchful eye, brings to the tableau her imagination, which imbues it with drama and symbolic significance. The reader is cued to a further emphasis on the scene by Eleanor's response. However, one of the meanings may have remained obscured, felt by the reader but left unarticulated by Eleanor, had Virginia Woolf not already written eight years earlier, in *A Room of One's Own*.

The fascination of the London street is that no two people are ever alike, each seems bound on some private affair of their own. They all seemed so separate, self-absorbed, on business of their own.

At this moment, as so often happens in London, there was a complete lull and suspension of traffic. A single leaf detached itself from the plane tree at the end of the street, and in that pause and suspension fell. Now it was bringing from one side of the street to the other diagonally a girl in patent leather boots, and then a young man in a maroon overcoat, it was also bringing a taxi-cab.

¹ Virginia Woolf, *The Years* (1937, rpt. St Albans: Granada Publishing Ltd., 1979), pp. 330-31. All further references to this work appear in the text.

and it brought all three together at a point directly beneath my window where the taxi stopped, and the girl and the young man stopped and they got into the taxi and then the cab glided off as if it were swept on by the current elsewhere

The sight was ordinary enough what was strange was the rhythmical order with which my imagination had invested it and the fact that the ordinary sight of two people getting into a cab had the power to communicate something of their own seeming satisfaction. The sight of two people coming down the street and meeting at the corner seems to ease the mind of some strain. Perhaps to think as I had been thinking these two days of one's sex as distinct from the other is an effort. It interferes with the unity of the mind. For certainly when I saw the couple get into the taxi-cab the mind felt as if after being divided it had come together again in a natural fusion. The obvious reason would be that it is natural for the sexes to co-operate. But the sight of the two people getting into the taxi and the satisfaction it gave me made me also ask whether there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body and whether they also require to be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness? And I went on amateurishly to sketch a plan of the soul so that in each of us two powers preside one male one female and in the man's brain the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together spiritually co-operating (pp 91-94)

The passage deserves to be quoted so fully as paraphrasing would capture neither the complete sense nor the logic of the idea. While Eleanor may not have so clearly put into thoughts the implications of her observations she intuitively realizes the larger permanence of the moment. By investing the sight with rhythmical order Eleanor like Woolf herself generates associative meanings. In and of itself the image of the couple and the taxi has no meaning it is the work of the mind which creates the sense of a symbolic interaction. And Eleanor unlike Woolf does not explain either to herself or to the reader the image's importance thus making the scene in terms of the definition symbolic whereby the more abstract half of the symbolic relationship is left unstated.

Some of the meanings encouraged by this incident as explained by Woolf herself include a sense of order and rightness, and the theme of androgyny. The taxi becomes a symbol of the outer shell of the mind, within which are hidden two powers: one male and the other female. Thus the two are always together under one roof as it were, although separate, sitting side by side. It is significant that in the fictional text Woolf chose not to enter into further reflections on the scene but instead to let it stand alone. As this work appears nearly a decade later, it could be interpreted as a sign that Woolf decided that it would be more effective if the reader were to do the work.

For Woolf, androgyny as a concept is more than the representation of the two genders present in each person. In *To the Lighthouse*, male and female represent two halves of the whole, each performing a different and opposite yet equally necessary function.

Mrs Ramsay braced herself and half turning, seemed to raise herself with an effort, and at once to pour erect into the air a rain of energy, a column of spray looking at the same time animated and alive as if all her energies were being fused into force, burning and illuminating (quietly though she sat) and into this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself like a beak of brass, barren and bare. He wanted sympathy; his barrenness made fertile, and all the rooms of the house made full of life.

James, as he stood stiff between her knees, felt her rise in a rosy-flowered fruit tree laid with leaves and dancing boughs into which the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of his father, the egotistical man plunged and smote demanding sympathy.²

Mrs Ramsay herself becomes a symbol. She is energy, is the life-giving force which makes the dinner party pass pleasantly, which gave birth to eight children.

² Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927 rpt. St Albans: Granada Publishing Ltd. 1982) pp. 38-39. All further references to this work appear in the text.

28

and which keeps her husband happy. She is a symbol of Woman as Fecund and the image of a laden bough of fruit is entirely appropriate to this aspect of her function. Similarly Mr Ramsay is the receiver of life the necessary complement to his wife. Hers is the capacity to surround and protect (p. 39). His is to be protected - from himself and his rational mind which urges him on through logical thinking to the end of thought, truth.

It was a splendid mind. For if thought is like the key-board of a piano divided into so many notes or like the alphabet is ranged in twenty-six letters all in order then his splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters until it had reached say the letter Q. He reached Q. Very few people in the whole of England ever reach Q. (p. 35)

His energy is turned inward on himself and he needs his wife to turn her energy out towards him in order to give balance. For if he is male, rational, self-centred and demanding, she is female, intuitive, a sponge sopped full of human emotions (p. 34) the one to whom the others come. The first section of *To the Lighthouse*, 'The Window', is aptly named. The reader looks in on the action. Mrs Ramsay looks out. It is daylight, the view is unobstructed. Mrs Ramsay is at the centre of this household. She has gathered the guests, she has ordered the meals.

Mrs Ramsay's reactions to her position are ambivalent. At once she needs to help to represent the archetype of female fertility yet she resents being cast in this restrictive role. She arranges walks for Paul and Minta, she betrothes Lily and William Bankes in her mind, she imagines her daughter Prue married. Two rooks outside her window occupy her imagination so much that she names them, Joseph and Mary. She watches them daily. Look, she said, laughing. They were actually fighting. Joseph and Mary were fighting. Anyhow they all went up again and the air was shoved aside by their black wings and cut into exquisite scimitar shapes. The movement of the

wings beating out, out, out - she could never describe it accurately enough to please herself - was one of the loveliest of all to her" (p 76) The birds represent to her the beauty in nature, the satisfaction of relationships, even when those in the relationships are fighting

She revels in her own powers, yet they are restrictive, and her role is defined by them. However, this ambivalence is evidence of the tension, like that between the two birds, between the two parts within her own self. She is both male and female, and while the female force dominates, she too feels the need for privacy and selfishness. But, being predominantly female, she can attain these private moments in the midst of the group.

Here, she felt, putting the spoon down, was the still space that lies about the heart of things, where one could move or rest, could wait now (they were all helped) listening, could then, like a hawk which lapses suddenly from its high station, flout and sink on laughter easily, resting her whole weight upon what at the other end of the table her husband was saying about the square root of one thousand two hundred and fifty-three, which happened to be the number on his railway ticket (pp 97-98)

But even when alone, her husband is never further away than the other end of the table. Throughout the meal, Mrs Ramsay is watching her husband, waiting to hear him speak. "Then, realizing that it was because she admired him so much that she was waiting for him to speak, she felt as if somebody had been praising her husband to her and their marriage and she glowed all over without realizing that it was she herself who had praised him" (p 89). Their relationship exists through just such unspoken moments. At the end of the book, Cam echoes her mother's admiration for this man: "And watching her father as he wrote in his study, she thought (now sitting in the boat) he was most lovable, he was most wise, he was not vain nor a tyrant" (p 173).

It is Lily who acts as the eye on the Ramsays' relationship, and it is upon her

that their marriage has a profound effect.

So that is marriage, Lily thought, a man and a woman looking at a girl throwing a ball. That is what Mrs Ramsay tried to tell me the other night, she thought. For she was wearing a green shawl, and they were standing close together watching Prue and Jasper throwing catches. And suddenly the meaning which, for no reason at all, as perhaps they are stepping out of the Tube or ringing a door-bell, descends on people, making them symbolical, making them representative, came upon them, and made them in the dusk standing, looking, the symbols of marriage, husband and wife. Then, after an instant, the symbolical outline which transcended the real figures sank down again, and they became, as they met them, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay watching the children throwing catches (p. 69)

Sara Ruddick, in "Learning to live with the angel in the house," describes Lily's experiences as a recognition of the meaning of marriage:

Surprisingly, Lily now understands Mrs Ramsay's message which she had previously resisted. She is able to see her as a wife, one of two...for the parents and their family, with all its jealousies and constraints, offers far more life space than the sanctuary of the eternal mother. Despite the tension and sexuality of the Ramsay marriage, the man and woman are momentarily brought together in a stable beneficent union foreshadowing the larger community of the dinner party where Lily again experiences a sense of freedom, space and possibility.³

While the novels of Virginia Woolf could be described as marriage tales, the function of the marriage relationship is symbolic, representing the transcendent union of men and women, the male and the female. Like the taxi cab, marriage is the roof under which are joined two individual powers. Mrs. Ramsay's role as mother is secondary to, and indeed only possible because of, her primary role as wife. Marriage is a symbolic representation of the ideal of androgyny, and the Ramsays' relationship

³ Sara Ruddick, "Learning to live with the angel in the house," *Women's Studies* 4 (1977), p. 193

surrounds them like the taxi-cab, transcending their individual identities. Their marriage indicates a balance, the harmony they have made out of life. Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's relationship is not unnatural, or, as popular, vulgar feminism would have it, a one-way effort on the part of the woman. As S. P. Rosenbaum expresses it, in his article, "The Philosophical Realism of Virginia Woolf,"

Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay can be viewed as embodying not only the masculine and feminine principles but also reason and intuition, analysis and synthesis, farsightedness and nearsightedness, thought and action, truth and beauty, perhaps even realism and idealism in some sense or other. These poles are not simply positive and negative values. Mr. Ramsay's logic is a counterweight to his wife's instinct, she must yield to his truth and he pay homage to her beauty. Beneath the dichotomies is love. The Ramsays are individuals as well as a couple, and each has the capacity to lose his personality in something outside himself. The lighthouse symbolizes and is a symbol for both.⁴

There is an organic relationship, both parts of a whole, alone each would "perish," as Mr. Ramsay states after his wife's death. Remember the couple in the taxi-cab, both halves, male and female, reason and intuition, are necessary in the yin-yang world of unity and balance. What Woolf said of Roger Fry with respect to his art is appropriate to a discussion of the Ramsays' marriage: "a unity seemed to have been arrived at — a balance between the emotions and the intellect, between Vision and Design" (*Roger Fry*, p. 213). Each half is defined by its relation to the other. When Mrs. Ramsay died, "a downpouring of immense darkness began. Nothing, it seemed, could survive the flood, the profusion of darkness: there was scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one could say 'This is he' or 'This is she'" (p. 117). Without the concomitant force of

⁴ S. P. Rosenbaum, "The Philosophical Realism of Virginia Woolf," in *English Literature and British Philosophy*, ed. S. P. Rosenbaum (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 340.

light and energy darkness pervades unrelieved, and life is lost⁵ The house, analogous to the taxi-cab the outer shell housing the powers, succumbs to the eternal night and those stray airs advance guards of great armies [which] blustered in, brushed bare boards nibbled and fanned " (p 120)

Both marriage and androgyny signify unity, a concept which Herbert Marder, like S. P. Rosenbaum sees manifested in the symbol of the lighthouse "Masculine tower feminine sea a radiance somehow joining the two - the image of the lighthouse became for Virginia Woolf a symbol of the marriage of opposites, and, by implication, of the androgynous mind"⁶ The lighthouse functions to balance the powers of the sea and of man uniting the sexes In the final section, appropriately enough called "To

⁵ In a passage describing the death of Julia Stephen, written to Vanessa's as yet unborn child in 1908, Virginia Woolf describes her mother in a way which foreshadows her portrait of Mrs Ramsay

Living voices in many parts of the world still speak of her as of someone who is actually a fact in life Whether she came merry, wrathful or in impulsive sympathy, it does not matter, they speak of her as of a thing that happened, recalling, as though all round her grew significant, how she stood and turned and how the bird sang loudly, or a great cloud passed across the sky Where has she gone? What she said has never ceased If what I have said of her has any meaning you will believe that her death was the greatest disaster that could happen, it was as though on some brilliant day of spring the racing clouds of a sudden stood still, grew dark and massed themselves, the wind flagged, and all creatures moaned or wandered seeking aimlessly ("Reminiscences," in *Moments of Being*, op. cit., p 46)

The idea that Julia Stephen was the prototype is well-documented, but the language itself of this recorded memory is significantly similar to the passages of *To the Lighthouse*

⁶ Herbert Marder, *Feminism and Art* (1968, rpt Chicago and London The University of Chicago Press, 1974), p 139

the Lighthouse James, Sam and their father finally reach their destination unity is achieved. As they approach it James remembers that earlier day when they had planned to go to the lighthouse.

The Lighthouse was then a silvery misty looking tower with a yellow eye that opened suddenly and softly in the evening. Now-

James looked at the Lighthouse. He could see the white-washed rocks the tower stark and straight he could see that it was barred with black and white he could see windows in it he could even see washing spread on the rocks to dry. So that was the Lighthouse was it?

No the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing. The other was the Lighthouse too. It was sometimes hardly to be seen across the bay. In the evening one looked up and saw the eye opening and shutting and the light seemed to reach them in that airy sunny garden where they sat. (p. 172)

Of this passage Marder says: "The two lighthouses complement each other. The lighthouse of the present is associated with Mr. Ramsay and the masculine principle; the lighthouse of the past leads us back to the now dead Mrs. Ramsay and the feminine principle. Looking across the bay James begins to discover that these lighthouses of fact and of memory are reconcilable for nothing is simply one thing. The lighthouse symbolizes a union of past and present of the children with their father and of the sexes - for Lily on the shore finishes her painting as Mr. Ramsay reaches the tower."

J. K. Johnstone sees this treatment of the sexes as a direct link to the philosophy of Bloomsbury. "The great strength of Bloomsbury's aesthetics is that it asserts that sensibility and intellect are equally necessary to the artist that as Virginia Woolf puts it the artist must be androgynous, with the sensibility of a woman and the intellect of

a man and with the prejudices of neither.⁵ Bloomsbury was a group of intellectuals artists novelists biographers and historians who lived as they wished to live with as Woolf describes it in *Old Bloomsbury*:

the result that the old sentimental views of marriage in which we were brought up were revolutionized.

Thus many customs and beliefs were revised. Indeed the future of Bloomsbury was to prove that many variations can be played on the theme of sex and with such happy results that my father himself might have hesitated before he thundered out the word which he thought fit to apply to a buggler or an adulterer which was Blackguard. (p. 20)

Thus Woolf's writings reflect concerns of the time and are produced out of them. Marriage no longer was considered the only goal for the generation of women younger than Mrs Ramsay nor the only way to achieve unity. In a short story written by Woolf called *Lappin and Lapinova* in fact marriage is the game which kills. The story is a portrait of the marriage of Ernest and Rosamund who affectionately pretend that they are a pair of rabbits and who possessed a private world inhabited save for the one white hare entirely by rabbits. It made them feel more even than most young married couples in league together against the rest of the world.⁶ However 10 years later on Ernest's parents' golden wedding anniversary Ernest has forgotten their game. When he remembers he says "caught in a trap killed and skinned and read the newspaper" (p. 74). The story ends with the words "So that was the end of that."

⁵ Johnstone pp. 44-47

⁶ Virginia Woolf, *Lappin and Lapinova*, in *A Haunted House* ed. Leonard Woolf, 1944 rpt. St. Albans: Granada Publishing Ltd. 1962, p. 7

34

marriage (p 79) and indeed Woolf seems to be suggesting that it is the end of the pattern of traditional marriage in general

While she wrote tracts specifically on feminism - *Three Guineas* as well as *A Room of One's Own*, many of her novels include portraits of Gissingesque 'odd women' - Mary Datchet, Doris Kilman, Lily Briscoe, Peggy Pargiter, Miss La Trobe. These women are 'odd' in Gissing's terminology because they are unmarried, they are unattached, the odd ones out, as well they are 'odd' because of their beliefs in the freedom from the social constraint to marry, and because they have goals other than marriage and financial security. Their condition is as much an historical fact as a matter of choice, as Marcia R. Fox states in her introduction to Gissing's *The Odd Women*. In the 1850's when their plight first came to be noticed by pioneering feminists, there were an estimated 50,000 surplus or odd women in England. By 1890 their number had swelled to nearly one million in London alone.¹⁰ The products of this phenomenon, if they do not wish to live with a married relative and his/her family, often become teachers like Miss Kilman, Doris Kilman, Elizabeth Dalloway's tutor in *Mrs Dalloway*, is an unsympathetic example of female fecundity displaced. Miss Kilman, denied love and luxury, turned to the church, and Clarissa resents this woman's relationship with Elizabeth.

Miss Kilman was not going to make herself agreeable. She had always earned her living. Her knowledge of modern history was thorough in the extreme.

Love and religion, thought Clarissa, going back into the drawing room, tugging all over. How detestable, how detestable they are. For now that the body of Miss Kilman was not before her, it overwhelmed her - the idea. The cruellest things in the world, she thought, seeing them clumpy, hot, cruel and unscrupulous dressed in a mackin.

Marcia R. Fox, Introduction, *The Odd Women* by George Gissing, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1977, p. viii.

wash coal on the landing love and religion love and religion would destroy that whatever it was the privacy of the soul The odious Kilman would destroy it (pp 112 113)

The tension between Clarissa and Miss Kilman is produced out of the difference in their roles as women in society Miss Kilman whose very name emphasizes her spinsterhood and suggests a hatred of men is unfulfilled intellect divorced from a life completed by marriage and motherhood Clarissa too is incomplete living as she does in her nun-like tower and her drawing-room severed from a life of ideas and even from being a mother by the odious Kilman Ironically then Clarissa's antagonism towards Miss Kilman arises both out of a distrust and even to some extent envy her natural bent is to merge with this other woman but she ambivalently also wishes to maintain her privacy to which Miss Kilman represents a threat And they even have something in common neither is that perfect blend of male and female of intellect and intuition life-giving and life-receiving necessary in order to be fully actualized

Mary Datchet in *Night and Day* in contrast to Clarissa, and to Katharine Hilberry, is an independent self-sufficient young woman who seems to have taken Virginia Woolf's advice "So that when I ask you to earn money and have a room of your own, I am asking you to live in the presence of reality an invigorating life it would appear, whether one can impart it or not" (*A Room of One's Own* p 105) Not long after their meeting, Katharine says to Mary, "I want to assert myself and it's difficult, if one hasn't a profession"¹¹ Mary works in an office, the very epitome of Woolf's invigorating reality, Katharine is helping her mother prepare a biography of her famous grandfather, and she lives with her parents However, Katharine "had no aptitude for literature She did not like phrases" (p 39) Instead, she harbours a secret

¹¹ Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day* (1919, rpt Middlesex Penguin Books Ltd 1975) p 52 All other references to this work appear in the text

love for science. Perhaps the unwomanly nature of the science made her instinctively wish to conceal her love of it. But the more profound reason was that in her mind mathematics were directly opposed to literature. She would not have cared to confess how infinitely she preferred the exactitude, the star-like impersonality of figures to the confusion, agitation, and vagueness of the finest prose (p. 41). In her parents' world, science and mathematics belong to the domain of men; women are better left to the vagueness of literature. Reason and exactitude are male attributes; female intuition is better adapted to words and phrase-making.

That Katharine has to conceal her interest indicates the social restrictions placed on young women of her class. She envies Mary for her freedom, the freedom to take a job, to live alone in the city in a room of her own. Yet Mary also envies Katharine for her poise and confidence. They are like night and day, two reflections of one concept, woman. But the distinction, and the implications of the title, are not so simply dealt with. For as much as they are different, they are also similar. Both young women, like Rachel Vinrace in *The Voyage Out* and Elizabeth Dalloway, are trying to come to terms with becoming an adult in a world which they did not create. Katharine becomes engaged to William Rodney; he is suitable and safe, her parents approve, it is in accordance with the social norm. Yet at night, while sleeping, Katharine dreams of

an image of love, and the marriage that was the outcome of love, and the man who inspired love, which naturally dwarfed any examples that came her way. Splendid as the waters that drop with resounding thunder from high ledges of rock and plunge downwards into the blue depths of night, was the presence of love she dreamt, the man too was some magnanimous hero, riding a great horse by the shore of the sea. But waking, she was able to contemplate a perfectly loveless marriage, as the thing one did actually in real life, for possibly the people who dream thus are those who do the most prosaic things (p. 98).

Thus night and day represent two worlds, the world of nightmare fantasy and

romance, and the everyday world of reality, of giving parties and marrying for practical reasons instead of for love. On the surface, *Night and Day* seems to be a rather conventional novel of manners – Katharine is engaged to Sir William Rodney, Mary Datchet loves Ralph Denham, Ralph falls in love with Katharine, William becomes engaged to Katharine's cousin Cassandra, etc. However, the tension out of which the book arises is much more ambiguous than that of whom to marry. Katharine oscillates between the world of reality and the world of her dreams, where she would be free to pursue mathematics and fall in love with a man with whom she could be an equal. Her cousin Cyril has scandalized the family with his relationship with a woman by whom he has had two children, although they are not married. Katharine, listening to the aunts' and her mother's ensuing discussion, thinks, "How they talked and moralized and made up stories to suit their own version of the becoming. No, they had their dwelling in a mist, she decided, hundreds of miles away – 'Perhaps it would be better if I married William,' she thought suddenly, and the thought appeared to loom through the mist like solid ground. She stood there, thinking of her own destiny." (p. 114) Marriage to William thus becomes "real life" in her mind, it is real and natural to marry, and she works at "confirming herself in the belief that to be engaged to marry some one with whom you are not in love is an inevitable step in a world where the existence of passion is only a traveller's story brought from the heart of deep forests and told so rarely that wise people doubt whether the story can be true" (p. 200), whereas her cousin Cyril lives a misty existence unsanctioned by society.

When Katharine meets Mary and Ralph, she begins to get an intimation of the possibility of another way, and the novel traces her internal struggle between her daily duties and nightly desires. Ralph falls in love with her, and thus begins an at

times almost mystical relationship between Katharine and himself. She provokes in him a joyful recognition of the truth that human nature surpasses in its beauty all that our wildest dreams bring us hints of (p. 135). But this very vision is unrealistic and Ralph too must live between reality and fantasy. No good had ever come to him from Katharine; his whole relationship with her had been made up of dreams and as he thought of the little substance there had been in his dreams he began to lay the blame of the present catastrophe upon his dreams (p. 232).

Night and day thus signify the disparity between reality and illusion; however the distinctions are not clear-cut. For even the real world of the drawing-room in daylight is described as the great make-believe game of English social life; this game needed a great deal of skill and the keeping up of appearances (p. 193). So the night world where Katharine and Ralph communicate becomes a reality and he says to her, 'I've dreamt about you. I've thought of nothing but you; you represent to me the only reality in the world' (p. 273). Reality and dreamworld thus become intertwined and reality becomes that place where the dream of union between the sexes is possible. And in the night Katharine experiences the merging of her fantasy and reality.

She was feeling happier than she had felt in her life. If Denham could have seen how visibly books of algebraic symbols, pages all speckled with dots and dashes and twisted bars, came before her eyes, his secret joy in her attention might have been dispersed. All the time she was in fancy looking up through a telescope at white shadow-cleft disks which were other worlds, until she felt herself possessed of two bodies, one walking by the river with Denham, the other concentrated to a silver globe aloft in the fine blue space above the scum of vapours that was covering the visible world. There was no reason for this feeling of happiness; she was not free, she was not alone, she was still bound to earth by a million fibres (pp. 278-79).

Significantly, Katharine translates her experience into "algebraic symbols" and a

vision of a silver globe the reality of her fantasy is thus dealt with symbolically. And indeed this passage is echoed on two later occasions when Katharine and Ralph finally if inarticulately declare their love for each other. Katharine glances at a paper on which he has been doodling

I like your little dot with the flames round it she said meditatively

Ralph nearly tore the page from her hand when he saw her actually contemplating the idiotic symbol of his most confused and emotional moments

somehow to him it conveyed not only Katharine herself but all those states of mind which had clustered round her. It represented by its circumference of smudges surrounding a central blot all that encircling glow which for him surrounded inexplicably so many of the objects of life softening their sharp outline so that he could see certain streets books and situations wearing a halo almost perceptible to the physical eye. She said simply and in the same tone of reflection

Yes the world looks something like that to me too.
(pp 45-48)

The only articulation of a vision is a symbolic one. As N. C. Thakur puts it in *The Symbolism of Virginia Woolf*. Whenever characters in *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* have to express an idea which they cannot convey adequately in a direct statement they try to evoke it by making use of symbols.¹² But the symbol also serves to connect Katharine and Ralph they have in common an expression of the world as dots and dashes and twisted bars. Secondly the image of the globe is likewise repeated in Katharine's happiness at finding so fantastical a love in reality it seemed to her that the immense riddle was answered the problem had been solved she held in her hands for one brief moment the globe which we spend our lives in trying to shape round whole and entire from the confusion of chaos (pp 466-67)

The globe also signifies unity which can be achieved through marriage and the

¹² N. C. Thakur *The Symbolism of Virginia Woolf* (London New York and Toronto Oxford University Press 1965) p 13

realization of androgyny The symbol of the globe appears in others of Woolf's novels In *To the Lighthouse*, Lily Briscoe recalls the effect of Mrs Ramsay's presence and Lily's love for the Ramsays

Into them had spilled so many lives The Ramsays', the children's, and all sorts of waifs and strays of things besides A washerwoman with her basket, a rook, a red-hot poker, the purples and grey-greens of flowers some common feeling which held the whole together

It was some such feeling of completeness perhaps which, ten years ago...had made her say that she must be in love with the place Love had a thousand shapes. There might be lovers whose gift it was to choose out the elements of things and place them together and so, giving them a wholeness not theirs in life, make of some scene, or meeting of people (all now gone and separate), one of those globed compacted things over which thought lingers, and love plays (pp 177-178)

Bernard in *The Waves* seems to be one of those who Lily says can make of life "one of those globed compacted things" In summing up, he says, "Let us again pretend that life is a solid substance, shaped like a globe, which we turn about in our fingers. Let us pretend that we can make out a plain and logical story, so that when one matter is despatched - love for instance - we go on, in an orderly manner, to the next" (p 170) And later on he refers to "the crystal, the globe of life as one calls it" (p 173) The globe throughout symbolizes, like the taxi-cab, and the androgynous mind, the attempt to create a unified life

While Woolf's novels thus obviously deal, to varying extents, with the relationship between men and women, between the male and the female, reason and intuition, appearance and reality, what is the significance of dealing with this theme through symbols?

When Ralph had first created the drawing, it was "because he could do nothing further with words, he began to draw little figures .blots fringed with flames meant to represent - perhaps the entire universe" (p 453) Thus, as with Bernard's balloon,

symbols are used where direct words cannot be. As Edmund Wilson points out in his essay on the French Symbolists in *Axel's Castle*: 'To intimate things rather than state them plainly was thus one of the primary aims of the Symbolists. Every feeling or sensation we have every moment of consciousness is different from every other and it is in consequence impossible to render our sensations as we actually experience them through the conventional and universal language of ordinary literature'.¹³ Ordinary language is therefore inadequate to translate extraordinary perceptions.

However, it is impossible to state them plainly as an attempt to explain the experiences because as Henri Bergson points out the further one abstracts from an experience in order to explain it the further away from that experience language and thought take him: for each and every one of these states, moods, we think we can substitute the words which designate them and which ever after will cover them up; we then attribute to them the fixity, the discontinuity, the generality of the words themselves.¹⁴ While Woolf may never have actually read Bergson, her sister-in-law wrote a book on his theories in 1922 (three years after publication of *Night and Day*) for which Bergson himself wrote the preface. In it Karin Stephen notes that 'Bergson's philosophy is popular because it gives expression to a feeling which is widespread at the present time: a distrust of systems, theories, logical contradictions'.¹⁵ William Troy echoes this interpretation in his article 'Virginia Woolf: The Novel of Sensibility'.

¹³ Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle* (1931 rpt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959) p. 21.

¹⁴ Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: The Wisdom Library, 1946) p. 27.

¹⁵ Karin Stephen, *The Misuse of Mind: A Study of Bergson's Attack on Intellectualism* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1922) p. 10.

The evidence is clear in Virginia Woolf's work that the fundamental view of reality on which it is based derives from what was the most popular ideology of her generation. What is so often regarded as unique in her fiction is actually less the result of an individual attitude than of the dominant metaphysical bias of a whole generation: the philosophy of flux and intuition offered a relief from the cumbersome technique and mechanical pattern of naturalism.¹⁶

For Troy, the subjective novel is a combination of Bergsonian assumptions and Freudian methods. Thus it is useful to refer to Bergson's articulation of theories and feelings which apply to Woolf's writing as well. As Shiv K. Kumar explains it in his study of Bergson and the stream of consciousness novel, the true explanation of the Bergsonian character of her novels lies in her being a manifestation of the *Zeitgeist*.¹⁷

Bergson strongly argues against a direct knowledge based on facts for the attitude of the mind required for explaining the facts conflicts with that which is required for knowing them.¹⁸ Language restricts experience like Woolf. Bergson believes that intuition is the necessary work of the mind towards knowledge and yet its perceptions cannot be communicated directly: words stand for abstractions and carry their logical implications.¹⁹ Language imposes form on experience and Bergson says that this imposition must be recognized as a limitation. However

¹⁶ William Troy, *Virginia Woolf: The Novel of Sensibility* (1932) rpt in *Literary Opinions in America* ed. Morton Darwin Zabel (New York: Harper & Bros. 1937 and 1951) p. 324.

¹⁷ Shiv K. Kumar, *Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel* (1963) rpt New York: New York University Press 1970) p. 68.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 22.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 57.

symbolic writing to some extent is best equipped for communicating since it follows the form of the non-logical and ever-shifting meanings of direct knowledge itself

Thus the image of Ralph's ink blot symbolizes both the impossibility of words to convey exact meaning and the medium through which he and Katharine can intuitively communicate. Rather than talk about the doodle, Katharine simply recognized it for what it might be instead of attempting through common language to share the experience; she recognizes implicitly his intuition. The symbol is inexplicable; it seems to represent Ralph's frustration with language, as well as the effect of Katharine's presence on him. For her it represents a world of joy which cannot be confined to phrases. And even Eleanor in *The Years* while sitting at her writing desk to do the accounts thinks about the past. She drew on her blotting-paper a dot with strokes raying out round it" (p. 71). The dot seems to symbolize the present with all its ties to the past, including her mother and Martin's walrus paper-weight.

Symbols in the novels of Virginia Woolf reappear from work to work as well as within one work, creating even further resonances not felt within one text. The repetition of the ink blot and the various meanings of its significance illustrates the common bond between people: not only do they try to understand their experience through symbols, but often they share an image. It is interesting that it is Eleanor who shares this image with Katharine and Ralph; the time is 1891. Eleanor is in her mid-thirties, unmarried, keeping house for her father. The ink blot becomes an expression of her frustration with the past - her mother died, she is the eldest child, her widowed father is a typical Victorian patriarch which has entrapped her into the present from which she cannot escape. Like Katharine and Ralph, she senses that life has more to offer, but again the tension between realism and idealism battles

within her and she accepts her role

Besides the younger women of Woolf's novels - the Rachels Katharines Elizabeths Lilys and Miss La Trobes the daughters of the present - there are the mothers the women who like Eleanor were young in a different era Mrs Hilberry lives according to a code under which the cohabitating and begetting of children between unmarried people is deplorable Mrs Dalloway worries that her daughter will be adversely influenced by the creature in the mackintosh who will talk of religion and history These women the mothers are the ones who maintain the social order who care for the men when they are unhappy The very title of *Mrs Dalloway* emphasizes her position as defined by her relationship to her husband (one earlier working title was *The Hours*)²⁰ These women of Virginia Woolf also experience moments of being and are sometimes dissatisfied with the way reality has turned out In *Mrs Dalloway* Clarissa's ambivalence is symbolized by her room

Like a nun withdrawing or a child exploring a tower she went upstairs There was an emptiness about the heart of life an attic room Women must put off their rich apparel The sheets [of the bed] were clean tight stretched in a broad white band from side to side Narrower and narrower would her bed be So the room was an attic the bed narrow and lying there reading for she slept badly she could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet (p 29)

It was all over for her The sheet was stretched and the bed narrow (p 42)

For Woolf rooms are often symbols of isolation and solitude As well they indicate character as Jacob's rooms are a clue to the man who dwells within them In *The Waves* Bernard says There are many rooms - many Bernards (p 176) thus reinforcing the concept of room as indicator of identity

²⁰ See for example her diary entry of June 19 1923 wherein Virginia Woolf mentions mentions working on *The Hours* (*A Writer's Diary* p 63)

Clarissa is compared to a nun and to a child. The repetition of the image of the stretched sheet, suggesting her preserved virginity, reinforces her unawakened sexuality and thus undermines her role as wife and mother. It is as if these events, marriage and childbirth, "the only profession open to her," as Woolf puts it in *Three Guineas*²¹ have not occurred, do not form a part of her reality. Irène Simon, in her essay "Some Aspects of Virginia Woolf's Imagery," says that images "are capable of suggesting the significance of life as felt by a character."²² In this regard, she discusses the image of Clarissa as nun "the main quality of the image is its ambivalence, as such it can convey Clarissa's attitude to life, her love and fear of it, her longing for privacy and her wish to merge, it can also express the twofold movement of withdrawal and gift, and imply the relation of self to other selves."²³ Clarissa epitomizes the "Angel in the House," as Woolf describes her in "Professions for Women," named after the heroine of a poem by Coventry Patmore. "She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty."²⁴ The angelic quality to her character, coupled with the nun imagery, emphasizes the unsexual nature of Clarissa Dalloway.

If each person houses both male and female powers, and, if Septimus Warren

²¹ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (1938, rpt. Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1982) p. 45. All further references to this work appear in the text.

²² Irène Simon, "Some Aspects of Virginia Woolf's Imagery," *English Studies* 41, No. 3 (June 1960), p. 184.

²³ *Ibid.* p. 184.

²⁴ Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women," in *Collected Essays 2* (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), p. 285.

Smith is considered to be Clarissa's doppelgänger, as undoubtedly he is²⁵ then Septimus may be said fairly to represent the male side of Clarissa. While she remains cloistered emerging to give parties and go shopping Septimus experiences the breakdown of reason. Severely affected by the war in which his friend Evans was killed Septimus loses all powers of rationality and succumbs to a vision entirely symbolic where

at every moment Nature signified by some laughing hint like that gold spot which went round the wall her determination to show by brandishing her plumes shaking her tresses, flinging her mantle this way and that, beautifully, always beautifully, and standing close up to breathe through her hollowed hands Shakespeare's words ["Fear no more the heat of the sun"], her meaning (p 124)

Septimus' madness results from an effect occasioned by surviving the War. He could not feel (p 78). He is mad because his thoughts are pure symbol unattached to any concomitant meaning or reality. As well as being an example of a casualty of war against which Woolf rails in *Three Guineas*, he is symbolic of reason divorced from feeling or intuition, and vice versa. Thinking of Evans, "he could not feel" (p 78) later on, "There was a screen in front of him, with black bulrushes and blue swallows. Where he had once seen mountains, where he had seen faces, where he had seen beauty, there was a screen" (p 129). Ralph Freedman, in *The Lyrical Novel*, describes this latter scene: "The insight gone, only things remain."²⁶ Septimus lacks the

²⁵ See, for example, Virginia Woolf's diary entry for October 14, 1922: "Mrs Dalloway has branched into a book, and I adumbrate here a study of insanity and suicide, the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side - something like that Septimus Smith? is that a good name?" (*A Writer's Diary*, p 58). The character of Septimus was added to her original short story, "Mrs Dalloway," first published in *The Dial*.

²⁶ Ralph Freedman, *The Lyrical Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1963) p 233.

necessary counterpart to effect the balance. The news of his death arrived.

Clarissa's party by Sir William and his suicide results in catharsis for her.

A young man had killed himself. And they talked of it at her party: he had killed himself, but how. Always her body went through it, her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window, it had flashed the ground through him, blundering, bruising, went the spikes. So she saw it.

She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung it away. They went on living. A thing there was that mattered, a thing wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which mystically evaded them. There was an embrace in death. (p. 163)

Septimus throws his life away. Clarissa lives through the experience of death but emerges to go on living. Septimus dies because he looks only within himself. Conversely, Clarissa reaches out, attaches herself to the external world, lives in and of the temporal while perpetuating the past. She gives existence, she creates.

For how could they know each other? It was unsatisfactory, how little one knew people. But she said she felt herself everywhere, not here, here, here, and she tapped the back of the seat, but everywhere. She was all that. It ended in a transcendental theory which, with her horror of death, allowed her to believe, or say that she believed (for all her scepticism) that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow, attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places, after death. Perhaps - perhaps (pp. 135-36).

Thus Peter Walsh explains Clarissa's philosophy under this belief. Septimus will survive his death as a memory of Clarissa's, attached to her through her party, the uninvited, and yet most important, guest. Her power is to live, and to maintain life.

Peter Walsh is another figure who represents only one half of the androgynous

self as dominant, and in control, as well as being a recurring motif. Peter's identifying tie Just as Clarissa's room symbolizes the essential femaleness of her character, Peter's knife indicates the fundamental maleness of his; the futile opening and closing of his knife represents his incompleteness and frustration as he desires the unattainable. he is engaged to marry a woman who is married to another man, he desires yet another man's wife and he follows an anonymous young woman through the streets of London

To sum up Virginia Woolf's theories on feminism is a difficult, if not fruitless, task. The women in her fiction are not consistently one thing or another, they are not monolithic but are rather a combination of characteristics and involved in a complex of relationships. She does not judge, but presents her characters, internally and externally as multi-faceted. However, one character in particular serves to illustrate the intricacy of the concept Orlando.

David Daiches called *Orlando* "a book to be read with the surface of the mind and enjoyed for its surface brilliance. It would be unfair to its author and to its readers to treat it as a great novel."³⁰ Shiv K. Kumar says that "*Orlando* is, in many respects, Virginia Woolf's tour de force."³¹ Kumar is referring to Woolf's treatment of time and the Bergsonian concept of "la durée." Daiches seems to be taking at face value Woolf's own statement upon completion of *Orlando* that her book, "begun on 8th October as a joke is now rather too long for a joke, and too frivolous for a serious book." (*A Writer's Diary* p. 125). Yet *Orlando* may indeed be in many ways the most complex of all of Woolf's books dealing as it does with a boy who survives four

³⁰ David Daiches, *The Novel and the Modern World* (1960 rpt Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1973) p. 215.

³¹ Kumar p. 79.

hundred years and a sexual transformation encountering major literary figures gypsies, royalty and literary critics during the process which process ages him/her a mere ten or fifteen years. Of course Orlando's surface appearance changes throughout as the styles of dress do yet her essential character like the battered manuscript of "The Oak Tree" survives.

Orlando is a perfect manifestation of Woolf's thesis that "there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body" (*A Room of One's Own* p 94) in reverse there are two sexes of his/her body corresponding to the two facets of his mind. He ("but in future we must, for convention's sake say her for his and she for 'he,'"³² for Orlando is a woman for most of her long life) is androgyny incarnate. On the surface, the book does indeed seem frivolous and fanciful: the Sisters of Purity Chastity and Modesty pay a call to the sixteenth-century nobleman and invoking Truth, turn him into a woman, then, the biographer turns away from the obvious discussion of "sex and sexuality" with the words, "we quit such odious subjects as soon as we can" (p 87). The mocking tone of the narrator suggests that such a discussion would be tasteless, however, his reticence to explicate the transformation is also congruent with Woolf's methods of letting the text speak for itself.

Orlando's metamorphosis from man to woman, from a sixteenth-century young Nobleman on his vast estate to nineteenth-century Victorian London serve the purpose of Woolf's intent for *The Years* very well - of this she said in her diary "there are to be millions of ideas but no preaching" (*A Writer's Diary* p 192).

Orlando is born in the sixteenth century, yet she also belongs in the twentieth the present moment. Her sensibilities shudder at the role of woman in the Victorian

³² Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (1928, rpt St Albans: Granada Publishing Ltd, 1980), p 87. All further references to this work appear in the text.

age permitted only to think of love and social coquetry. Yet she enjoys being female employing modesty and subtlety and enjoying a private life and at the same time retaining characteristics usually described as masculine.

The difference between the sexes is happily one of great profundity. Clothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath perhaps in this she was only expressing rather more openly than usual openness indeed was the soul of her nature something which happens to most people without being thus plainly expressed. Different though the sexes are they intermix in every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what it is above (pp. 117-118).

Disparate though the elements of Orlando's personality are in sex sensibilities and ambitions they are assembled by and thus congruent because of the one mind under which they are united. What a phantasmagoria the mind is and meeting place of dissemblables (p. 110) thinks Orlando. And her fundamental essence does not deviate from its base of memory even though Orlando's external position of sex time and society does. Identity is constant and external factors do not alter its enduring consistency. In the nineteenth century Orlando thinks back to that day in her father's court in 1550 when the book opened and realizes how very little she had changed all these years. Yet through all these changes she had remained she reflected fundamentally the same (p. 148). However something has changed in the nineteenth century under the reign of Victoria. Wedding rings abounded. Wedding rings were everywhere (p. 151). At first Orlando resists this spirit of the nineteenth century antipathetic to her in the extreme (p. 152) she buys herself a wedding ring but does not marry. Gradually though she submits to the new discovery that each man and each woman has another allotted to it for life whom it supports by whom it is supported till death do them part (p. 153). The book ends with the return of

Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine Orlando's husband to an awaiting Orlando by the oak tree Orlando has married in order to complete herself in Shelmerdine she has found her necessary complement When they first met and became engaged they recognized their similar androgyny

an awful suspicion rushed into both their minds
simultaneously
You're a woman, Shel she cried
You're a man Orlando he cried (p 157)

The fundamental consistency of character and relationships is true of the novel about Orlando as a whole Imprecise capricious and incomplete the biographer's account nonetheless delivers the fundamentals of the life of Orlando and her character its subject However this concern with essences and character only matters if the reader and the writer are concerned with truth And so the fundamental issue of Orlando becomes that of truth

To give a truthful account is beyond the powers of the biographer or the historian Only those who have little need of the truth, and no respect for it - the poets and the novelists - can be trusted to do it, for this is one of the cases where the truth does exist Nothing exists The whole thing is a miasma - a mirage (p 120)

As Bernard expresses it in *The Waves* the biographic style 'does to tack together torn bits of stuff stuff with raw edges' (p 175) However ironically the biographer is a fictionalizer and thus in a sense a novelist And so she is not concerned with facts but with getting at the heart of the subject explaining by exploring and revealing the life By offering the details language can intimate the reality which is concealed by the external The shifting constant identity cannot be defined only surmised from the offered hints

Thus reading in general must be approached as reading a symbol is approached with one part reasoning and the other intuition If symbols generate themes then the

theme of androgyny in the fiction of Virginia Woolf is produced out of this concern with a viable approach to reality and thus to its expression. As S. P. Rosenbaum argues, Woolf is thus a realist philosophically because of this attempt to capture the reality of experience. Like G. E. Moore, Virginia Woolf concluded that we must distinguish between consciousness and the objects of consciousness that exist independently of the position of modern philosophical realism.³³ And this philosophy is best revealed by the form of her fiction. Woolf describes the objects—a grey car, a lighthouse, an oak tree—and various characters' consciousnesses of these objects. Thus the object is itself, but it is not one thing—like the character of Jacob in *Jacob's Room*, the reality of the object is a complex of associations and significances important for its place as a perception of consciousness. In and of itself, the skull that Jacob finds on the beach is not symbolic, but because he brings it home and installs it in his room, other people see it and it becomes associated with Jacob and hence definitive of his essential character.

Nobody sees anyone as he is, let alone an elderly lady sitting opposite a strange young man in a railway carriage. They see a whole—they see all sorts of things they see themselves.

It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done.³⁴

Thus the androgynous mind is best equipped to see, to follow the hints to capture reality. For Woolf, the androgynous vision is the most complete, the truest to the ways of linguistic sensibility wherein symbolic language nearest approaches that elusive goal of truth.

³³ S. P. Rosenbaum, p. 321.

³⁴ Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room* (1922 rpt. St. Albans: Triad Panther Books, 1981), p. 28.

CHAPTER THREE A Different Ordering of the Scene Past and Present in
Virginia Woolf

The Guide Book still told the truth 1833 was true in 1939 No house had been built no town had sprung up Hogben's Folly was still eminent the very flat field-parcelled land had changed only in this the tractor had to some extent superseded the plough The horse had gone but the cow remained If Figgis were here now Figgis would have said the same So they always said when in summer they sat there to drink coffee if they had guests When they were alone they said nothing They looked at the view they looked at what they knew to see if what they knew might perhaps be different today Most days it was the same

That's what makes a view so sad said Mrs Swithin lowering herself into the deck chair which Giles had brought her And so beautiful It'll be there she nodded at the strip of gauze laid upon the distant fields when we're not¹

So muses Lucy Swithin aunt of Giles Oliver and one generation older than he is For only something over a hundred and twenty years the Olivers had been at Pointz Hall (p 9) the setting for *Between the Acts* and the place where three generations of Olivers now make their home The estate has remained virtually the same over those hundreds of years

There had always been lilies there self-sown from wind dropped seed floating red and white on the green plates of their leaves Water for hundreds of years had silted down into the hollow and lay there four or five feet deep over a black cushion of mud Under the thick plate of green water glazed in their self-centred world, fish swam gold splashed with white streaked with black or silver Silently they manoeuvred in their water world, poised in the blue patch made by the sky or shot silently to the edge where the grass trembling made a fringe of nodding shadow On the water-pavement spiders printed their delicate feet A grain fell and spiralled down, a petal fell filled and sank At that the fleet of boat-shaped bodies paused poised equipped, mailed, then with a waver of undulation off they flashed (pp 35-36)

While Bartholomew Oliver ages his grandson George catches butterflies beyond the

¹Virginia Woolf *Between the Acts* (1941 rpt St Albans Granada Publishing Ltd 1982) pp 42-43 Further references to this work appear in the text

pond, for "butterfly catching, for generation after generation, began there, for Bartholomew and Lucy, for Giles, for George" (pp. 45-46), the lily-pond symbolizes a world unaffected by human history. The fish and spiders, bushes, brambles and butterflies, relics of ancient history, creatures at the end of their evolution, exist impervious to the war or to a pageant being enacted nearby. Nature continues, a "self-centred world" of continuity and rhythm.

Meanwhile, Miss La Trobe appropriates the area of the lily-pond for the actors' dressing-room. Miss La Trobe "had a passion for getting things up" (p. 46); she works fervently to make the villagers' annual pageant an extraordinary affair. The audience gathers on the lawn to watch the performance, which will be held in and among the trees; the natural world is to serve as setting for the history of England.

Virginia Woolf began *Poyntz Hall* (later *Between the Acts*) in 1937, on 19th July, 1939, she wrote:

The past only comes back when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of a deep river. Then one sees through the surface to the depths...it is then that I am living most fully in the present. For the present when backed by the past is a thousand times deeper than the present when it presses so close that you can feel nothing else, when the film on the camera reaches only the eye. But to feel the present sliding over the depths of the past, peace is necessary. The present must be smooth, habitual. For this reason - that it destroys the fullness of life - any break - ...causes me extreme distress; it breaks; it shallows; it turns the depth into hard thin splinters...I write this partly in order to recover my sense of the present by getting the past to shadow this broken surface. Let me then, like a child advancing with bare feet into a cold river, descend again into that stream. ("A Sketch of the Past," pp. 114-15)

The attempt to capture the past in the present, the depths revealed through the smooth surface, as if through a lily-pond, the "present when backed by the past," informs

Woolf's novels insistently. For Woolf the present day is always a culmination of the past, a balance of history and the individual moment.

In *Between the Acts* the events of history - battles, pilgrimages, monarchies - are chronicled, however the observations and conversations of the guests are also recorded. The audience taking its cue from the play and the conventions of drama laugh and clap, but sometimes their reactions are confused as the play denies an easy understanding. "Could they talk? Could they move? No for the play was going on. Yet the stage was empty, only the cows moved in the meadows, only the tick of the gramophone needle was heard. The tick, tick, tick seemed to hold them together, tranced. Nothing whatsoever appeared on the stage." (p. 63) The tick, tick, tick of the machine serves as an insistent background beat to the events of the day, chuffing incessantly, like the sound of a clock.

Between the acts of the play, tea is served, the crowd is dispersed, human interaction is resumed. During these intervals, individuals reconvene and enact little dramas of their own. Lucy Swithin befriends the homosexual William Dodge, as does Isa. Isa engages Dodge in a walk to the greenhouse, and they play out a touching minor scene, wherein Isa's motherhood is contrasted with William's homosexuality; his child is not his own. She hands him a flower, he takes it (p. 85). Giles kills a snake, Mrs. Manresa pursues Giles, Isa daydreams of a man in grey who once handed her a tennis racquet. However, the repercussions of these personal acts are not isolated, for example, on Giles' walk,

He kicked - a flinty yellow stone, a sharp stone, edged as if cut by a savage for an arrow. A barbaric stone, a pre-historic. The first kick was Manresa (lust). The second, Dodge (perversion). The third himself (coward). ...There, couched in the grass, curled in an olive green ring, was a snake. Dead? No, choked with a toad in its mouth. The snake was unable to swallow, the toad was unable to die...it was birth the wrong way round - a

monstrous inversion. So, raising his foot, he stamped on them. The mass crushed and slithered. The white canvas on his tennis shoes was bloodstained and sticky. But it was action. Action relieved him. He strode to the Barn, with blood on his shoes (p 75)

Giles, inactive while watching the play, reasserts his activeness and power by killing the snake and its prey, he takes history into his own hands. Then, when he reaches the Barn, where the others are gathering for tea, the blood on his shoes asserts his own life between the acts of the play. Mrs. Manresa notes the blood

she turned, saw Giles, caught his eye, and swept him in, beckoning. He came. And what - she looked down - had he done with his shoes? They were bloodstained. Vaguely some sense that he had proved his valour for her admiration flattered her. If vague it was sweet. Taking him in tow, she felt I am the Queen, he my hero, my sulky hero (p 81)

Thus Giles' act, performed privately, now takes on a larger significance, and becomes one incident in a longer chain of events. Actions are not isolated, and the novel, blocked off in scenes, emphasizes the episodic nature of real life.

Then music is heard again in the distance, and the crowd reconvenes

Feet crunched the gravel. Voices chattered. The inner voice, the other voice was saying. How can we deny that this brave music, wafted from the bushes, is expressive of some inner harmony?

For I hear music, they were saying. Music wakes us. Music makes us see the hidden, join the broken. Look and listen. And the trees with their many-tongued much syllabing, their green and yellow leaves hustle us and shuffle us, and bid us, like the starlings, and the rooks, come together, crowd together, to chatter and make merry while the red cow moves forward and the black cow stands still.

The audience had reached their seats. The audience turned to one another and began to talk. Scraps and fragments reached Miss La Trobe where she stood, script in hand, behind the tree (pp 89-90)

The history of England is interspersed with scenes of "this very moment, half-past three on a June day in 1939" (p 58), the present day is juxtaposed with a

representation of the events which led up to this day. In her diary, Woolf wrote that her new novel was to be

a centre all literature discussed in connection with real little incongruous living humour but "I" rejected "We" substituted "We" the composed of many different things we all life, all art, all waifs and strays - a rambling capricious but somehow unified whole - the present state of mind? And English country, and a scenic old house - and a terrace where nursemaids walk - and people passing - and a perpetual variety and change from intensity to prose, and facts - and notes (*A Writer's Diary*, p 276)

"This very moment" is similar to "the present state of mind" both are "present" in the sense of chronological time, the moment at hand, and because they deal with the concept of the present in relation to the past

Thus the lives of the Olivers, the villagers, of Englanders in general, are relativized, put into historical context, so that the last act of the play, following a drama of Victorian manners, involves the actors bringing the play up to the present moment. Mirrors and bright objects are turned towards the audience, so that the final scene is of themselves. "And the audience saw themselves, not whole by any means, but at any rate sitting still. The hands of the clock had stopped at the present moment. It was now Ourselves" (p 135). A voice from the bushes comments on the significance of the scene, in a long speech

O we're all the same. Take myself now. Do I escape my own reprobation, simulating indignation, in the bush, among the leaves? There's a rhyme, to suggest, in spite of protestation and the desire for immolation, I too have had some, what's called, education. Look at ourselves, ladies and gentlemen! Then at the wall, and ask how's this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilization, to be built by (here the mirrors flicked and flashed) orx scraps and fragments like ourselves? (p 136)

The scenes of various queens and citizens, the scraps of quotation from literature - Shakespeare, R. L. Stevenson, Tennyson, Blake, Dante (p. 134) - the

fragments of human existence, add up to civilization, as Lionel Trilling expresses it, coincidentally just one year after publication of *Between the Acts* "We are creatures of time, we are creatures of the historical sense...we must have it [the sense of the past] and we must live with it. And we must read our literature by it."² History in the making is just a collection of chaotically arranged incidents. It is only the present moment which gives them order, form, and Miss La Trobe, aware of the historical sense which Trilling says "is often so deeply ingrained that [the artist] is not conscious of it,"³ exposes the present to be just one more part in history, the audience to be a part of that as yet unresolved, unexamined process. The date of the play - June 1939 - is significantly on the eve of World War Two; Woolf seems to be suggesting that the larger world history is produced out of commonplace, everyday lives, and so the Olivers and the villagers are contributors to, and thus responsible for, the turn of events. By turning the mirrors on the audience, they become actors, participants in the drama of life.

The play within the novel functions as an interlude in daily relationships, it stops the action of real life. Yet the play centres on "real life" as it dramatizes events of English history. The audience exchanges the reality of experience and the present moment for a replication of past moments. But the exchange does not erase the present; rather, the play reinforces the distance between the audience and its subject:

Tick, tick, tick the machine continued.
 "Making time," said old Oliver beneath his breath.
 "Which doesn't exist for us," Lucy murmured. "We've
 only the present." (p. 64)

² Lionel Trilling, "A Sense of the Past," *Partisan Review* IX, No. 3 (May-June, 1942), p. 233

³ *Ibid.*, p. 234

As the play provides the temporary escape from the present, it also stands out in relief from the daily routine. Yet, by continually referring to other periods in English history, leading chronologically to the present, the play reinforces the play-like progression of the ordinary routines of daily life, and suggests the inherent drama in the everyday. "Words raised themselves and became symbolical" (p. 36). The play affects the members of the audience, forcing them to see the symbolism of the palpable world, as it will some day be to those of the future.

While the title refers to the space between the acts of the play, time between historical acts of war or war as interruption in lives of meal-taking and novel-writing and -reading, and the play as interludes between the audience's conversations, the entire day functions as a fragment between the acts of Isa and Giles' marriage, as the ending emphasizes. The day is closing, as reflected in the lily pond: "Scared by shadows passing, the fish had withdrawn...the lilies were shutting; the red lily, the white lily, each on its plate of leaf. Above, the air rushed; beneath was water" (p. 148). The final scene of the novel takes place at Pointz Hall; "the play hung in the sky of the mind - moving, diminishing, but still there" (p. 154). Giles offers his wife a banana, which Isa refuses. The action speaks of ancient and mythical ritual; Giles becomes the snake he had earlier tried to kill, but Isa rejects the symbolic acceptance of Eve. It is not until they retreat even further from civilized symbol that reconciliation can be effected.

"Prehistoric man," [Lucy] read, "half-human, half-ape, roused himself from his semi-crouching position and raised great stones."

She rose, smiled, and tiptoed silently out of the room.

Left alone together for the first time that day, they were silent. Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be

born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night.

The window was all sky without colour. The house had lost its shelter. It was the night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks.

Then the curtain rose. They spoke. (pp 158-59)

John Lehmann says that the basic underlying themes of this novel include "the struggle of civilization against savagery" and the theme "of love against lust, against what is destructive and selfish in sexual appetite"⁴. While the above passage does seem to suggest that the veneer of civilization is thin indeed, and that at the slightest provocation, the animalistic tendencies of man are revealed, Mitchell A. Leaska, in his afterword to *Pointz Hall: Transcripts of Between the Acts* posits that this scene is not just

an upper middle-class husband and wife settling their upper middle-class differences. More fundamentally, [Woolf] was depicting the brute urge of the male and female animal during a time of stress to join together in the instinctive act of procreation, a primitive coming together in the service of biological species preservation; a part of the natural cycle of birth, death, and regeneration - natural history repeating itself⁵.

Thus, when Miss La Trobe turned the play on the audience, she suggested not only that they were part of human history, but that, along with the cows and the butterflies, a part of the natural world as well. And as such, man is thus also subjected to cyclical patterns of behaviour; history is merely the recording of these shared natural patterns.

In her diary entry for September 29th, 1940, Woolf describes an air raid. "It's

⁴ John Lehmann, *Virginia Woolf and her world* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), p. 108.

⁵ Mitchell Leaska, "Afterword" to *Virginia Woolf's Pointz Hall Transcripts of Between the Acts* ed. Mitchell A. Leaska (New York: New York University Press, 1983), p. 450.

like a sheep dog, chasing a fox out of the fold. You see them yapping and biting and then the marauder, cropping a bone, a bomb towards Newhaven flies. All now become familiar" (*A Writer's Diary*, p. 334). It is not an accident that animal imagery best serves to express her meaning. The instinctual behaviour of animals is metaphorically equivalent to the speechless quality of symbols. As Leaska puts it,

If the universal (archetypal) symbol is, by itself beyond the lexical inventory of words we are often left therefore after a freighted passage is finished, trying vainly to kindle it into some kind of meaning. These passages, their author certainly knew, must be felt and understood in the most primitive recesses of our being; they are not open to analysis or description. And the harder we try to tap them into speech, the more reticent they become.⁶

This statement of the function of universal symbol as indicative of primitive intuitive powers certainly holds true for all of Woolf's novels, in keeping with, as William York Tindall says, her Bergsonian "hostility to concept, logic, character, and external time, and his fidelity to flux."⁷ While a few examples would soon dispel any imagined hostility of Woolf's to characterization - Clarissa Dalloway, Mr Ramsay, Eleanor Pargiter, to name only a few notable creations - the bulk of the statement is accurate. Even in *Between the Acts* a minor character serves to reinforce Woolf's disparagement of empty intellectualism: after the performance seems ended, the Reverend Streatfield, M. A., rises to analyse the play, until "His command over words seemed gone. It was plain to all that the natural desire of the natural man was overcoming him. He had no further use for words" (p. 141).

⁶ Mitchell A. Leaska, "Preface" to Virginia Woolf's *Pointz Hall. Typescripts of Between the Acts* op. cit., p. 14.

⁷ William York Tindall, *Forces in Modern British Literature: 1885 - 1956* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), p. 202.

Woolf describes her last novel as more quintessential than the others. More milk skimmed off. A richer pot. (*A Writer's Diary* p. 340) it is quintessentially Woolf in that it deals with the theme of time and history and man's place in the universe and that the form of symbols and repetition best recreates these tensions. Indeed most of her books could be called *Between the Acts* as they deal with man in relation to nature and the chronicling of individual lives as temporary interludes in a larger external existence. In the chronological context of her novels *Between the Acts* holds the place of the Present Moment, that moment which exists only as a culmination of all previous moments, the goal of the past and at the same time a moment in flux preparing for the next future.

The section entitled "Present Day" in *The Waves* reveals this same concept of time. "Eleanor's feeling of happiness returned to her her unreasonable exaltation. It seemed to her that they were all young with the future before them. Nothing was fixed nothing was known. Life was open and free before them." (p. 292) Eleanor in her seventies is one of the oldest guests at her sister's party of the "Present Day" in the 1930's. She is surrounded by her siblings' children who in their thirties appear to live in the heart of the present day. As Eleanor notes the future is theirs and her own once-imagined future is now the dead past to the younger generation. Eleanor's niece Peggy personifies this generation who hold rights to the future. She is educated she is a doctor she supports herself. But as the reader sees Peggy's thoughts it is apparent that she is a product of the past and hasn't entirely escaped its effects. When she is praised within her father's earshot she thinks "There that's pleasure. The nerve down her spine seemed to tingle as the praise reached her father." (p. 277) Her present life is owed to her past and to being her father's daughter as she is motivated

by wanting him to be proud of her

While the chapter headings of dates clearly fix the events of those chapters in real and historical time, "Present Day" is not specified by its year as the other sections are. It is not over a closed and summed up past, but is the sum of all those past years and by implication represents the present day of the reader. Those years have been leading up to the present, which, of course, is only a step to some future present; each present does not entirely rid itself of the previous one. Rather, it is as if a ball of yarn is wrapped round and round. In *The Years* the arbitrary centre end of the string is marked as 1880 (although Eleanor is already twenty-two, her mother has lived out her entire short life, and her father is middle-aged). The ball is formed as the years pass and accumulate. Present Day marks the point to which the years have rolled thus far. Therefore, by unravelling the yarn, the past can be revealed in reverse chronological order. In this sense *The Years* is a novel which can be unwritten, or un-read; it can be read backwards, so that not only does the past lead to the present, but the present informs the past. Peggy and North do not just push forward; they contain and reflect and point back to the past. Peggy is ambivalent about her sexuality - like William Dodge she seems homosexual although he married and she will not. She, a modern woman, in "living differently" (p. 298) as she vaguely terms it, will likely remain childless. Yet she can't entirely escape the past. She sees her brother North at the party and thinks: "He'll tie himself up with a red-lipped girl and become a drudge. He must and I can't," she thought. "No! I've a sense of guilt always. I shall pay for it. I shall pay for it. She would have no children and he would produce little Gibbons" (p. 302). The ambiguity of this thought - does she feel too guilty towards her sex to accept traditional marriage, or too guilty to her elders to tie herself up with another girl? and what will she pay for - not getting married, the price of which is no children, or for

following lesbian instincts, the price of which is the same? - does not deny that, in her supposedly free world she is fettered both by old and new ideas and moralities. Though the particular conventions have changed since Eleanor's day, the general effects upon the individual have not.

In Virginia Woolf's novels, memory is the faculty which both defines the form and creates the content. As Joanne Schulkind explains in her introduction to *Moments of Being*, "memory itself the test of the enduring quality of the moment of being, is invaluable in extending the dimensions of the moment; memory is the means by which the individual builds up patterns of personal significance to which to anchor his or her life and secure it against the 'lash of the random unheeding flail'."⁸ Memory functions to retain and revive the past in the present, so that Mrs. Dalloway while walking about the street is both a receptacle of her memories of her youth and a product of the events of her memory. Similarly Rose Pargiter in *The Years* symbolizes the concurrent existence of different times - those of memory and that of the present.

Her past seemed to be rising above her present.
[Maggie and Sara] talked as if they were speaking of people who were real, but not real in the way in which she felt herself to be real. It puzzled her, it made her feel that she was two different people at the same time, that she was living different times at the same moment. She was a little girl wearing a pink frock, and here she was in this room, now. But there was a great rattle under the windows. A dog went roaring past. The glasses jingled on the table. She started slightly, roused from her thoughts about her childhood, and separated the glasses. (p. 129)

In *The Years* Eleanor, the eldest, holds the longest memory. She has lived through the

⁸ Joanne Schulkind, "Introduction" to Virginia Woolf's *Moments of Being* op cit, p. 25.

changing of times from Victorian to Edwardian to the present. And, as Woolf describes it in 'A Sketch of the Past,' the transitions between eras are not seamless, often they continue to exist simultaneously

Two different ages confronted each other in the drawing room at Hyde Park Gate: the Victorian age, and the Edwardian age. We were not [Sir Leslie Stephen's] children, but his grandchildren. The cruel thing was that while we could see the future, we were completely in the power of the past. That bred a violent struggle. By nature, both Vanessa and I were explorers, revolutionists, reformers. But our surroundings were at least fifty years behind the times. So that while we fought against them [their father and step-brothers] as individuals we also fought against them in their public capacity. We were living say in 1910, they were living in 1860.

The pressure of society was now very strong. It created that "manner" which we both still use. It is the manner which when the front door bell rang we used to receive whoever it might be, and the whole was enclosed in, the Victorian manner. It was not natural for Vanessa or myself. We learned it. We learned it partly from memory and mother had that manner. Nobody ever broke the convention. If you listened, as I did, it was like watching a game. One had to know the rules. (pp. 147-50)

Thus Eleanor, like the Stephen girls, is forced to live with her father and his Victorianisms while also living in the present moment. However, her memory later functions to resolve the struggle between past and present. "And suddenly it seemed to Eleanor that it had all happened before. Does everything then come over again a little differently? she thought. If so, is there a pattern, a theme recurring, like music half remembered, half foreseen? a gigantic pattern momentarily perceptible?" (p. 282). She has lived through the end of one century and the turning of the next, through the deaths of her parents, her uncle Parnell, the King, and through a World War. Her past stretches far enough back that she can begin to see recurring patterns of events of life and death. She has outlived the need to make change, yet is not hindered by an obsession to perpetuate the past. Change is a natural progression from past to present.

retaining part of the past, discarding the obsolete. It is time constantly in flux, the eternal present.

However, imposed on this fluctuation is clock time. For Woolf, the clock symbolizes the attempt to structure memory time. *Mrs Dalloway* was originally entitled *The Hours*. Big Ben is the force around which London life is constructed. "For having lived in Westminster one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, a particular hush, or solemnity, an indescribable pause, a suspense before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical, then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolve in the air" (p. 6). Throughout the course of the novel, the clock chimes intermittently, structuring human experience into parcels of time, and leadenly, heavily tolls the hours away, a reminder that Big Ben will survive even while it emphasizes the passing of time for Londoners. As David Daiches says, "Time is the unifying factor, making, without the knowledge of anyone except the omniscient author, significant patterns out of chance."⁹ Clarissa Dalloway

feared time itself, the dwindling of life, how year by year her share was sliced, how little the margin that remained was capable any longer of stretching, of absorbing, as in the youthful years, the colours, salts, tones of existence, so that she filled the room she entered, and felt often, as she stood hesitating one moment on the threshold of her drawing-room, an exquisite suspense, such as might stay a diver before plunging while the sea darkens and brightens beneath him, and the waves which threaten to break, but only gently split their surface, roll and conceal and encrust as they just turn over the weeds with pearl (pp. 28-29)

The rhythm of the latter part of the sentence contradicts the sense of it, as it stretches lyrically to the image of the gentle waves. It is as if Clarissa, in order to counterbal-

⁹ David Daiches, *The Novel and the Modern World* rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 25.

ance the effects of external time, creates her own inner time, a smooth, uninterrupted moment which combats Big Ben's irrevocable message

Ironically time, harnessed by man into manageable parcels, brought under his control becomes man's master. 'Remember my party remember my party' said Peter Walsh as he stepped down the street, speaking to himself rhythmically in time with the flow of the sound, the direct downright sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour (The leaden circles dissolved in the air)' (p. 44) The leaden circles permeate even Peter's thoughts imposing their order on them the concomitant effects of flow and fragmentation. Striking every quarter hour clocks reinforce the passing of every minute. And it is not just Big Ben clocks tick mercilessly everywhere. St. Margaret's echoes Big Ben's eleven-thirty chime and

the sound of St. Margaret's glides into the recesses of the heart and buries itself in ring after ring of sound, like something alive which wants to confide itself to disperse itself like Clarissa herself. Then as the sound of St. Margaret's languished, he thought, she has been ill and the sound expressed languor and suffering. It was her heart he remembered, and the sudden loudness of the final stroke tolled for death that surprised in the midst of life. (p. 46)

The clock is reminiscent of the ticking of the heart. It symbolizes the natural rhythm like that of the waves inherent in experience. It is not just an arbiter of human life but grows out of inner time.

For Septimus the madman time has no such tangible distinctions. It is all flow. The word time split its husk, poured its riches over him, and from his lips fell like shells like shavings from a plane without his making them hard white imperishable words and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time an immortal ode to Time. He sang' (p. 63) The rhythm of time is expressible in the rhythm of language and words arise naturally to capture and celebrate the flux of

memory. But without memory, there is no life, or, as Schulkind describes it, "when [Septimus Warren Smith] lost his power to recall the past, he lost his will to survive the present."¹⁰

The clocks of London, like the grey car, the aeroplane, the park, connect individuals into a shared experience. As Jean Sudrann notes, in her dissertation, "The Sea, the City and the Clock: A Study of Symbolic Form in the Novels of Virginia Woolf," "ultimately [Woolf's] interest in time is a concern with the nature of reality and it is at this point that her kinship with Proust and with Bergson is most marked."¹¹ Sudrann categorizes three different aspects of time in Woolf's novels. Firstly, "Clock" or "outer" time...provides a norm against which other aspects can be seen;¹² the striking clock in all the novels indicates the present moment, and "making the moment, the clocks of all the novels annihilate space and anneal the fragmented self."¹³ Secondly, there is "inner time, which is the equivalent of Bergson's duration, [and] is definable only in terms of the intensity of lived experience. Framed by clock time, it nevertheless negates the chronological series of hours by its totality of past and present which in itself also constitutes the future."¹⁴ And, thirdly, Sudrann lists historical time, "the hoarded hours of the past in where every moment finds its setting, each individual his place."¹⁵

¹⁰ Schulkind, p. 25

¹¹ Jean Sudrann, "The Sea, The City and The Clock: A Study of Symbolic Form in the Novels of Virginia Woolf," Diss. Columbia University 1959, p. 238

¹² Ibid., p. 242

¹³ Ibid., p. 243

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 244

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 244

These various aspects of time occur simultaneously in Clarissa's, Peter's and Septimus' consciousnesses, as they move through historical time, according to clock time, and recording inner time. According to John Hawley Roberts, in all of the novels the elements of time and space "combine not only to make the "frame" for the novel, within which, as in a picture, the material exists, but also in their conjunction, to become a part of the form and therefore of the meaning. Thus Mrs Woolf gains a wholeness or unity, impossible to disassociate from each part"¹⁶ Similarly, *Between the Acts* and *The Years* chronicle the tensions between the different modes of time. But in *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* the same theme or "meaning" is produced by a different symbolic ordering, or "form."

The first section of *To the Lighthouse*, and the longest, details a day in the life of the Ramsay family. Mr Ramsay and his wife and their eight children are spending the summer at their summer home, with guests. The youngest son James wants to make a trip to a nearby lighthouse, but his father says that it will rain, and the trip should be postponed. As in *Mrs Dalloway*, the inner as well as the outer life of the characters is recorded, and in many ways Mrs Ramsay resembles Clarissa: wife, mother, hostess. The action of *Mrs Dalloway* takes place on a single day that seems to be representational of Clarissa's whole life – she gives a party, sees old friends, mends a dress, encounters her daughter's tutor. Even Septimus' suicide is relatively unexceptional – she did not even know the man, and the brief identification which she feels with him is similar to the connection she makes whenever she hears of a death.

However, *To the Lighthouse* extends beyond the boundaries of *Mrs Dalloway*.

¹⁶ John Hawley Roberts, "Vision and Design in Virginia Woolf," *PMLA* LXI (1946), p. 840.

72

A second section of the novel *Time Passes* frames the narrative and changes the implications of the individual's relationship to the external world. In this section seasons change, night succeeds to night (p. 119). The waves roll in. Loveliness and stillness clasped hands in the bedroom scarcely disturbed the peace, the indifference, the air of pure integrity, as if the question they asked scarcely needed that they should answer, we remain (p. 121). (Mrs. Ramsay dies. Prue marries, gives birth, dies. Andrew is killed in the War.) The empty house remains inhabited by shadows, by airs, by shifting light and nesting birds. (As Mr. Ramsay's recitation notes, they perished each alone (p. 134). Nature abides fertile.

The effect of the second section is to erase the novelistic convention of the importance of the Ramsay's lives. As Mrs. Ramsay and Prue die parenthetically, the insignificance of their lives is punctuated. What is significant is the whole. Nature she alone continues, and in the face of this endurance, individual lives are meaningless. Lulled by the details of Mrs. Ramsay's ordinary day into the rhythm and convention of the novel, the reader is suddenly denied that conceit. The heroine - definitionally, traditionally important by virtue of being the subject of a book - is trivialized, her relative position exposed. As humanity disappears in the chaos of War, obliterating itself, all deaths become mundane, their impact dulled, added to the lists of casualties. Only Nature has meaning and order, eternally.

However, man can attempt a permanence, a transcendence of temporal existence. Roberts says, *To the Lighthouse* discusses both human relationship and formal relationship and moreover testifies to the truth that permanent values lie not in the one but in the other, not in life but in art.¹⁷ Art or human creation inserts,

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 344.

itself into nature as a more permanent expression of existence

When darkness fell, the stroke of the Lighthouse, which had laid itself with such authority upon the carpet in the darkness, tracing its pattern, came now in the softer light of spring mixed with moonlight gliding gently as if it laid its caress and lingered stealthily and looked and came lovingly again. But in the very lull of this loving caress, as the long stroke leant upon the bed, the rock was rent asunder, another fold of the shawl loosened; there it hung, and swayed. (pp. 124-25)

Like the London clocks and art, the Lighthouse symbolizes an ordering of Nature, man's attempt to control and enforce a pattern on the world. However, these human creations eventually take on an air of being of the natural world, as they outlive the ones who built them. Surviving time, they, like the waves and the seasons and cycles of night and day, enter into the permanent realm, imperturbable to the lonely individual lives carrying on about them: "Did Nature supplement what man advanced? Did she complete what he began? With equal complacency she saw his misery, condoned his meanness, and acquiesced in his torture" (p. 125). Whether or not Mr. Ramsay and his children reached the Lighthouse, it would go on beaconing into the night.

Time passes, the war ends, peace returns. And, after ten years, the house is cleaned by Mrs. Bast and Mrs. McNab: "At last, after days of labour within, of cutting and digging without, dusters were flicked from the windows, the windows were shut to, keys were turned all over the house; the front door was banged; it was finished" (p. 131). The interval ends, and the novel of the journey to the Lighthouse resumes. As with *Between the Acts*, each scene functions as a respite for the others, so that "Time Passes" may be seen as the main act, flanked by minor scenes of individual domestic activity, or the first and last sections may be interpreted to be the intended drama, and the middle section to be indicative of time between the acts. Both structures are

validated by the text's form, as with the other novels, *To the Lighthouse* reveals the interdependence of man and Nature. While Nature is immutable, impassive, it gains its significance from man's consciousness of it. More importantly, human lives attempt to reflect the conditions of Nature. Orderly, dramatic and cyclical, Nature engulfs and expropriates humanity. And so human lives, brief and insignificant on their own, gain meaning when they symbolize the condition and patterns of Nature.

In *The Waves* this structure is intensified

The sun had not yet risen... The sun rose higher... The sun rose... The sun, risen... bared its face and looked straight over the waves. The sun had risen to its full height. The sun no longer stood in the middle of the sky... The sun had now sunk lower in the sky... Now the sun had sunk... The waves broke on the shore.

Thus begin the nine "interchapters" of the novella contained within the novel of *The Waves*. These introductory sentences frame the individual interludes, the episode sections, and, ultimately and collectively, form a superstructure about the whole work. The structural effect of these nature passages is to provoke specific thematic readings of the text.

As a sustained metaphor, these passages anticipate the incidents and development of the succeeding prose sections. "The sun had not yet risen," six young children, as yet relatively unconscious of their articulateness, note briefly the natural world about them. But they do not see themselves, seeing. The "sun," or self-consciousness of awareness, is still hidden, the day's beginning is only hinted at. However, the sun begins to rise, and, in parallel structure, so are the consciousnesses of the six friends raised.

And as the sun shifts in the sky, it touches the birds in the garden, singly and as a whole flock. As the sun strengthens, the birds "that had sung erratically and spasmodically in the dawn... now sung together in chorus... now together, as if conscious

of companionship, now alone" (p. 49) As the sun angles over the tree, the birds are revealed individually and collectively. The six friends become aware of their individual identities, simultaneously, each realizes the organic relationship created by their individual selves. They are joined by fear and joy, united by their common experience. As they mature, emphasized by the increasing intensity of the sun, they probe deeper into themselves and into the nature of their group. Awareness rushes in in energetic waves; life is exposed and examined as it surges through the six, a common pulse of experience. Love, and jealousy, and death ripple the scenes. The waters are periodically disturbed by these changes in the steady rhythm of Monday-Tuesday; but the disturbance subsides, the waves resume their methodical course. A faint impression is left on the shore; Bernard pauses on the steps as he mourns Percival's death. "Such is the incomprehensible combination," said Bernard, "such is the complexity of things, that as I descend the staircase I do not know which is sorrow, which joy. My son is born; Percival is dead" (p. 103). But another wave erases the remaining trace of its predecessor; Bernard, although he maintains that he "still resent(s) the usual order" and "will not let [himself] be made yet to accept the sequence of things" (p. 104), soon resumes the usual pattern of things. The sun proceeds towards its inevitable destination; the birds quieten in the late afternoon.

Thus these interchapters accomplish the usual effects of symbol-work: the actual story is anticipated, paralleled, emphasized and clarified. The symbol's job is fulfilled and the story is enhanced by the subtle implications of the analogy.

However, this neat, pleasant explanation of some disturbing, complex passages is necessarily reductive: the rising sun representing consciousness — as the sun recedes, consciousness fades; the birds in the tree suggesting the six individual friends, each alone, yet together in chorus and innocence; the waves equalling the tides of life.

itself. But there are slight inconsistencies and incongruities to this definition of meaning. For example

As they neared the shore each bar rose, heaped itself, broke and swept a thin veil of white water across the sand (p. 5). Gradually the fibres of the burning bonfire were fused into one haze, one incandescence. The surface of the sea slowly became transparent (p. 5), the dew dancing on the tips of the flowers and leaves made the garden like a mosaic or single sparks not yet formed into one whole (p. 19)

Already the explanation of the metaphoric elements is obviously insufficient. Not only are the children analogous to the birds in a tree, but they are also comparable to waves and flames, elements of the explanation above of "life" and "consciousness," and, to further complicate the matter, dew and flowers are added to the pile of images. Later, repeated phrases and images such as turbaned warriors, muscular engines, thonged whills and maned woods, greasy kitchen odours of mutton and garbage mountain streams and cupboards, and moths assert their presence as significant, if not categorical.

"All for a moment wavered and bent in uncertainty and ambiguity, as if a great moth sailing through the room had shadowed the immense solidity of chairs and tables and floating wings" (p. 122); the symbolic images likewise waver and resist attribution of meaning. Not merely a device for emphasis, these passages command a purpose of their own, a meaning interrelated with that of the narrative line.

These passages, like the section "Time Passes" in *To the Lighthouse*, force the story of the individual lives of Bernard, Jinny, Neville, Louis, Susan and Rhoda into a perspective. "Poetry, it would seem, requires a different ordering of the scene; human beings are needed, but needed in their relation to love, or death, or nature rather than

to each other,"¹⁸ writes Woolf in her essay "Phases of Fiction." And the novel, if representational of "reality," both materialistic* and subjective, must then acknowledge the larger whole, the fuller moment. The events of the novel – Neville's love for Percival, Louis' and Rhoda's affair, Susan's husband and children, Bernard's writing, etc – like the activities of the Ramsays, are only part of reality, existing in time and space. As Bernard says, "Time has given the arrangement another shake. Out we creep from the arch of the currant leaves, out into a wider world. The true order of things – this is our perpetual illusion – is not apparent. Thus in a moment, in a drawing-room, our life adjusts itself to the majestic march of day across the sky" (p. 184). The interlude sections contextualize experience, nature, the daily rising and setting of the sun, the flow of the waves, all of these things surround and imbue one's consciousness of daily life, yet they exist independently of, and indeed cause the rhythm of human knowledge, so that, as Bernard said, human life adjusts itself to nature while "the tree alone resisted our eternal flux" (p. 168). To deny or ignore nature's importance for man is to distrust and falsify the real experience. If a writer ignores the sunrise the sun will not be affected, it will continue of course. But if nature should change its pattern, the whole ordering of human consciousness would be altered. The implacable permanence of nature and its cycles, "the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again" (p. 200), leads men to desire that sense of patterning in human life. As Woolf herself said, in 1927,

[The novel of the future] will give, as poetry does, the outline rather than the detail...it will give the relation of the mind to general ideas and its soliloquy in solitude. We have come to forget that a large and important part of life consists in our emotions toward such things as roses and

¹⁸ Virginia Woolf, "Phases of Fiction", in *Collected Essays 2* op. cit., p. 98. Further references to this work appear in the text.

nightingales, the dawn the sunset life death and
fate we are not entirely occupied in personal relations
all our energies are not absorbed in making our livings
("The Narrow Bridge of Art" pp 224-25)

In her novels of the future the poetical passages inform the main narrative line particularly in *The Waves* each of the characters is shown alone in isolation dreaming, reflecting, noting the sunlight or a friend's death. At the end Bernard is left summing up. The course of the sun in the sky follows the descending path of Bernard's life into death. But "*the waves broke on the shore*" (p 200). The book ends on a note of death, of finality, a single blunt sentence of the end of a pattern. Yet the pattern is cyclical, recurrent, the sun is gone, the waves remain to finish out the night, awaiting the new dawn. Individual lives are temporary, nature is repeatable.

Thus the highly suggestive nature passages of *The Waves* and *To the Lighthouse*, and the descriptive introductions to each section of *The Years* as well as the cows wandering into Miss La Trobe's play and Septimus's emotional responses to a June day, symbolize collectively Woolf's attempt to break with the novelistic tradition of "the incessant, the remorseless analysis of falling into love and falling out of love" ("The Narrow Bridge of Art", p 225). These passages symbolize the very difficulty of capturing life in its fullest, and indicate the arbitrariness, and even futility, of biographies: "again how futile life-writing becomes. I see myself as a fish in a stream deflected, held in place, but cannot describe the stream," writes Woolf in "A Sketch of the Past" (in *Moments of Being*, p 93). No real story can be complete without including history and nature, and descriptions of "the stream," and the irony is that the juxtaposition of these powers underscores the tenuousness of mortals.

CHAPTER FOUR A String of Six Little Fishes The Function of Language and Literature in the Novels of Virginia Woolf

With intermittent shocks sudden as the springs of a tiger life emerges heaving its dark crest from the sea. It is to this we are attached it is to this we are bound as bodies to wild horses. And yet we have invented devices for filling up the crevices and disguising these fissures (pp. 43-44)
The Waves

All of Virginia Woolf's novels deal with life emerging; they examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. (Modern Fiction, op cit, p. 149) But as well all of her novels (to say nothing of the essays) deal either overtly or indirectly with the implications of recording the mind recording or writing. Writing and story-telling bridge the gap between the experience and the thought of that experience so that the crevices are hidden and the process appears seamless. In *The Waves* especially this concern with art and literature (p. 192 *A Writer's Diary*) becomes manifest and nearly every page contains self-conscious observations about the writing process.

Of the six characters with speaking parts it is primarily Bernard who is given to spontaneous and interminable phrase-making. Even in the first episode Childhood where the children are at school together Bernard is exhibiting his identity as storyteller. "Let us now crawl said Bernard under the canopy of the currant leaves and tell stories. Let us inhabit the underworld. Let us take possession of our secret territory which is lit by pendant currants like candelabra" (p. 15). The other five serve both as Bernard's audience and his material, as he wrestles with translating experience into words, which "moving darkly, in the depths of your mind will break up this knot of hardness, screwed in your pocket-handkerchief" (pp. 10-11). Bernard's relationship to language is singular, as, unlike Susan who is "tied down with single words...[he] wander[s] off, ...slip[s] away, ...rise[s] up higher, with words and words in phrases" (p. 11), language frees the young Bernard, as he imaginatively translates experience into phrases of metaphors and a universe outside

the world of the classroom and the yard

Bernard is not the only child who speaks imaginatively of course. Indeed the first few pages of the first episode seem to be a catalogue of images which will dominate the rest of the text and each of the children adds to the list in turn for example

Stones are cold to my feet said Neville I feel each
one round or pointed separately
The back of my hand burns said Jinny but the
palm is clammy and damp with dew
Now the cock crows like a spurt of hard red water in
the white tide said Bernard
Birds are singing up and down and in and out all
round us said Susan
The beast stamps the elephant with its foot chained
the great brute on the beach stamps said Louis
Cold water begins to run from the scullery tap said
Rhoda over the mackerel in the bowl (p 7)

The choice of observation of each child signifies a way of seeing which will persist throughout each of their lives. Neville the homosexual is sensitive to pain and cold. Jinny the lively dancer responds to the sun's fire and the intensity of the elements. Susan the earth mother notices the natural world. Louis the foreigner who feels that his roots [which] go down to the depths of the world through earth dry with brick and damp earth (p 8) alienate him from the others, thinks in animalistic images of frustrated power. Rhoda's thought foreshadows her later fascination with petals in basins, which she transforms into fleets of ships (pp 12 and 71). However, it is only Bernard who already phrases his observations metaphorically, so that the crow is "like" something else, he is not content to record impassively the external world, but must shape it into likenesses and patterns.

The children experiment with language, with words and imagery. They seem to be talking, if not to each other, at least at each other, above and about conversation.

that each one is quickly capable of as they graduate to paragraphs of introspection. Their initial characteristics are consistently established, in a speech by Susan she describes the others:

Rhoda dreams, sucking a crust soaked in milk. Louis regards the wall opposite with snail-green eyes. Bernard moulds his bread into pellets and calls them "people". Neville with his clean and decisive ways has finished Jinny spins her fingers on the table-cloth, as if they were dancing in the sunshine, pirouetting" (p. 17 emphasis mine)

Significantly, the verbs, the action-indicators, are appropriate to each character. Thus the individuality of each character is asserted. However, while the content of their speeches differs, the rhythm and structure of the speeches are notably similar, no matter who is talking. In fact, hermeneutically speaking, the concept that these characters are actually talking to one another is doubtful. Virginia Woolf writes in her diary, while she was working on the early drafts of *The Waves*, later to become *The Waves*, that "the method of writing smooth narration can't be right, things don't happen in one's mind like that" (*A Writer's Diary*, p. 106), a week later she writes, "Why not invent a new kind of play. I think it must be something on this line. Anyway from facts, free, yet concentrated, prose yet poetry, a novel and a play" (p. 107). So the book, like a play, has characters speaking parts; but the monologic quality of their speeches and the similarity of the rhythmical sound suggests rather that the characters are not, strictly speaking, talking aloud. However, the idea that Woolf is recording their thoughts as stream-of-consciousness, as unhindered and uninterrupted associative ramblings of the mind, seems to be contradicted by the formal manner of the sentences. Indeed, Woolf's own words, a year later into the writing of the book, may indicate something of the intention behind it: "What I now think (about *The Waves*) is that I can give in a few strokes the essentials of a person's

character. It should be done boldly almost as caricature (*A Writer's Diary* p. 154)

David Daiches posits that the continuous use of the formal interior monologue indicates the high degree of artifice employed in the book.¹ Thus he understands the method to be interior but not stream of consciousness. And his assertion seems to be supported by the text and earlier versions of it. One of the persistent images in *The Waves* is of a lady writing which Bernard repeatedly notes and recalls. "The lady sits between the two long windows writing" (p. 12). "At Elvedon the gardeners swept and swept with their great brooms and the woman sat at a table writing" (p. 84). In summing up the past Bernard recalls her. "The lady sat writing the fixity of that woman writing" (pp. 162-163). On the outskirts of every agony sits some observant fellow who points who whispers. "The gardeners sweep with great brooms and the lady sits writing." Thus he directed me to that which is beyond and outside our own predicament to that which is symbolic and thus perhaps permanent" (p. 168).

And in an earlier holograph version of the novel, Woolf writes, "I am telling myself the story of the world from the beginning. I am not concerned with the single life, but with lives together."² This self has disappeared from the final version, but perhaps it has been displaced, into the lady writing just off centre stage. Thus, in fact, she may be writing the lives of the six children even as they act on, she represents the text's recognition of itself as artifice, as language shaping and moulding experience.

Further support for this interpretation comes from another image in the novel—

¹ Daiches, op. cit., p. 215

² Virginia Woolf, *The Waves: The two holograph drafts* transcribed and edited by J. W. Graham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press in association with The University of Western Ontario, 1976), p. 9.

the flower which figures in the two dinner scenes. In the first, the episode entitled "Farewell Dinner," the six friends are gathered to bid farewell to a friend, Percival. Percival is never directly presented, but is made up of the others' various thoughts about him. Bernard reflects at the table: "There is a red carnation in that vase. A single flower as we sat here waiting, but now a seven-sided flower, many-petalled, red, puce, purple, shaded, stiff with silver-tinted leaves - a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution" (p. 85). The implication is that the flower represents first of all Percival, as each brings their own contribution to his being. As well, the flower, seven-sided, represents the group of seven friends, each a facet of one entity, like the petals of the flower, so that each may be a part of one mind, one lady writing by a window. The petals ripple, the flower sways, and, like Rhoda's childhood petals in the basin, "Some will founder. Some will dash themselves against the cliffs" (p. 13). Percival dies, the six friends meet again in the episode, "Reunion Dinner," and Bernard comments again on the flower: "The flower," said Bernard, "the red carnation that stood in the vase on the table of the restaurant when we dined together with Percival, is become a six-sided flower, made of six lives" (p. 154). One side has dropped off, but the essence, the flower, remains, emphasizing the individual's relationship to the whole. At the end of his life, Bernard remarks, "I am not one person, I am many people, I do not altogether know who I am - Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, or Louis, or how to distinguish my life from theirs" (p. 187). Either his lack of identity justifies the sameness of the style of speech used by each of the characters, or, more fundamentally, Bernard underlines the common bond which they create, and indeed out of which they create themselves. Woolf elaborates on the personal significances that flowers hold for her in "A Sketch of the Past," in which she is describing childhood incidents which are remembered intensely all her life: "I was looking at the

flower bed by the front door. "That is the whole," I said. I was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves, and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was a part of the earth, that a ring enclosed what was the flower, and that was the real flower, part earth, part flower. It was a thought I put away as being likely to be very useful to me later" (p. 82). With this background information, the flower in *The Waves* also suggests the integration of Bernard with Percival into the whole, so that Bernard is a part of Percival, who in turn is a part of the natural world, and Percival's "real" identity is formed in part by himself, and in part through Bernard's and the others' observations of him.

The image of the lady writing which impresses itself so insistently on Bernard's consciousness, together with his oblique reference to an "observant fellow" sitting just over his shoulder, providing commentary, also reflects Bernard's own self-consciousness about his relationship to reality. And this relationship is very much shaped by literature. While at college, "where the stir and pressure of life are so extreme, where the excitement of mere living becomes daily more urgent" (p. 51),

Bernard becomes Byron:

It is the speed, the hot, molten effect, the laval flow of sentence into sentence that I need. Who am I thinking of? Byron of course. I am, in some ways, like Byron... My true self breaks off from my assumed. And if I begin to re-write it [a letter to "the girl with whom he is passionately in love"], she will feel "Bernard is posing as a literary man; Bernard is thinking of his biographer" (which is true) (p. 53).

Bernard also reads Gray's *Elegy* (p. 56); again in retrospect he sums up:

I changed and changed; was Hamlet, was Shelley, was the hero, whose name I now forget, of a novel by Dostoevsky; was for a whole term incredibly, Napoleon; but was Byron chiefly. For many weeks at a time it was my part to stride into rooms and fling gloves and coat on the back of chairs, scowling slightly. I was always going to the bookcase for another sip of the divine specific. Therefore, I let fly my

tremendous battery of phrases upon somebody quite inappropriate - a girl now married, now buried, every book, every window-seat was littered with the sheets of my unfinished letters to the woman who made me Byron (pp 168-169)

Bernard's identity is formed by his reading, understandably because of his college age he identifies with romantic heroes, and does not discriminate between the origins of these models - they come from history literature and some are even authors with whom he is naturally coming to identify. Indeed, all are treated as characters. Neville mocks Bernard's willingness to coalesce his self into those of others

"You have been reading Byron. You have been marking the passages that seem to approve of your own character. I find marks against all those sentences which seem to express a sardonic yet passionate nature, a moth-like impetuosity dashing itself against hard glass. Once you were Tolstoi's young man, now you are Byron's young man, perhaps you will be Meredith's young man, then you will visit Paris in the Easter vacation and come back wearing a black tie, some detestable Frenchman whom nobody has ever heard of" (pp 58-59)

Neville's simile of the moth is neither accidental nor insignificant. Woolf's original title for the novel was "The Moths or the life of anybody,"³ as inspired by an anecdote which her sister, Vanessa, related to her in a letter dated 3 May, 1927, from Cassis

Then having rescued one sheet [of writing paper] I sit with moths flying madly in circles round me & the lamp. You cannot imagine what it's like. One night some creature tapped so loudly on the pane...but it wasn't man or bird, but a huge moth - half a foot, literally, across. We had a terrible time with it. We let it in, kept it, gave it a whole bottle of ether bought from the chemist, all in vain, took it to the chemist who dosed it with chloroform for a day - also in vain. Finally it did die rather the worse for wear, & I set it, & now, here is another! But though incredibly beautiful I suspect they're common - perhaps Emperor

³ Ibid., Draft 1, p. 1.

moths⁴

Virginia replied: "By the way your story of the Moth so fascinates me that I am going to write a story about it. I could think of nothing else but you and the moths for hours after reading your letter."⁵ Thus it is fair to assume that Bernard's identification with above all Napoleon coupled with Neville's comparison of him to a moth is Woolf's private pun. However the moth as symbol signifies other characteristics - the moth is free but, in flying close to light, also approaches death, and hastens the end of its brief life. It swarms in groups, yet retains individuality, signifying freedom. Rhoda describes herself in terms appropriate to a moth: she "flutter[s] unattached, without anchorage anywhere, unconsolidated, incapable of composing any blankness or continuity or wall against which these bodies move" (p. 82). Freedom is conversely a condition of isolation and unconnection to reality. And Louis, in an aside, says of the others: "Look Rhoda they have become nocturnal, rapt. Their eyes are like moths wings moving so quickly that they do not seem to move at all" (p. 94), implying that their lives move so quickly that they seem to be still in the same place. And Josephine O'Brien Schaefer defines Percival's role in terms of the same imagery: "Thus Percival has become the flame, the light around which their thoughts and emotions flicker like moths."⁶ Bernard's ego is moth-like in that it drives him on to butt himself against

⁴ Vanessa Bell, in a letter to Virginia Woolf, as quoted by Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf* 2, op cit, p. 126.

⁵ Virginia Woolf, in a letter to Vanessa Bell, May 8th, 1927, as collected in *A Change of Perspective - The Letters of Virginia Woolf 1923-1928* (1977, rpt. London: Chatto & Windus, 1981), p. 372.

⁶ Josephine O'Brien Schaefer, "Percival's Role," in *Critics on Virginia Woolf*, ed. Jacqueline E. M. Latham (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1970), p. 96.

phrases and books but strong and stubborn as it is it is also common characteristic of his kind. And no matter how hard he fights he will like the great moth die at the end. By the early twentieth century enough time has passed for Romanticism to be studied as a phenomenon theorized and codified thus Bernard's identification with its heroes is necessarily an ironic act if not during his youth then certainly in retrospect.

The literary allusions and quotations function in *The Waves* to indicate the self-consciousness of the characters Bernard watching himself watching, distanced from experience by the act of recording it and indicative of the shaping powers of literature for the individual life. Bernard's maturation path echoes that of English literature. However, these references also expose the text's awareness of itself as a text, a modern sensibility of self-consciousness which, as articulated by T. S. Eliot, in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" he writes:

Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor. It involves, in the first place the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to any one who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence, the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.

⁷ T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* 2, 4th ed., Gen. ed. M. H. Abrams (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1979), p. 2294.

Literature appropriates literature into itself, as texts recognize literary models and patterns of themes and plot. All is in the process, like Bernard's identity, of becoming.

We have proved, sitting eating, sitting talking, that we can add to the treasury of moments. We are not slaves bound to suffer incessantly recorded petty blows on our bent backs. We are creators. We too have made something that will join the innumerable congregations of past time. We too stride not into chaos, but into a world that our own force can subjugate and make part of the illumined and everlasting road (p. 98)

By recording the "petty blows," literature preserves the moments and asserts a permanence for otherwise temporary lives. Yet literature writes more of literature than of life, as Norman Friedman says, "To argue that the function of literature is to transmit unaltered a slice of life is to misconceive the fundamental nature of language itself: the very act of writing is a process of abstraction, selection, omission, and arrangement."⁸ Through literary creation, reality is subjugated and made a "part of the illumined and everlasting road" of tradition. Each individual is, in Bernard's words, both the "inheritor...[and] the continuer...the person miraculously appointed to carry ["the whole of life"] on" (p. 171)

As well as dealing with an awareness of literature and history, *The Waves* acknowledges its concern with the fundamental tools of literature — language, and even more specifically, the units of language: sentences, phrases, and words. Bernard's relationship to words is the most artificial, in that he recognizes the significance of language, and, unlike Susan, who "do[es] not understand phrases" (p. 89), lives only in and of them.

I feel at once, as I sit down at a table, the delicious jostle of confusion, of uncertainty, of possibility, of speculation.

⁸ Norman Friedman, "Point of View in Fiction: The Development of a Critical Concept," *PMLA* 70 (Dec. 1955), p. 1179.

construction, and not the inevitability of process, which is significant. The goal is not eventual, but immediate as *The Waves* is a work of art integrating language and experience, it is "about" individuals who integrate their lives with their languages.

Of course, these languages vary in their manifestations. Most of Woolf's novels are in some sense "portraits of the artist." Many are writers — Terence Hewet in *The Voyage Out*, Ralph Denham in *Night and Day*, the somewhat intangible narrator of *Jacob's Room*, Orlando, etc. Lily Briscoe is a painter, Miss La Trobe is a playwright and producer/director, Rachel Vinrace plays the piano, each responds to life with a different voice. The theme of art in Woolf's novels asserts itself upon the texts quite overtly. As Terence says to Rachel, "What I want to do in writing novels is very much what you want to do when you play the piano, I expect...We want to find out what's behind things, don't we?...Things I feel come to me like lights. I want to combine them...I want to make figures..." (pp. 223-224). Art becomes a way of expressing the essence of experience, so that Lily at last finishes her painting. "With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision" (p. 192). That Lily expresses her vision with a line, representing perhaps a union with Mr. Ramsay, as he reaches the Lighthouse, suggests that her triumph cannot be explicitly stated, but rather is sufficiently captured by a line. The line represents so much, and yet is itself no one thing. In Woolf's novels, the artists grapple with the problem of representing reality, that thing which is behind things, and the implication of Lily's approach is that the only proper or sufficient way to do so is symbolically, through intimation and approximation, rather than exposition, as Mr. Ramsay so valiantly tried to do A through Z. The artist's power lies in his ability to create. However, there is no one way in which to get at reality.

Images breed instantly I am embarrassed by my own fertility I could describe every chair, table, luncheon here copiously, freely My mind hums hither and thither with its veil of words for everything To speak, about wine even to the waiter, is to bring about an explosion Up goes the rocket Its golden grain falls, fertilizing, upon the rich soil of my imagination The entirely unexpected nature of this explosion - that is the joy of intercourse There is no stability in this world Who is to say what meaning there is in anything? Who is to foretell the flight of a word? It is a balloon that sails over tree-tops To speak of knowledge is futile All is experiment and adventure (p. 79).

When I cannot see words curling like rings of smoke round me I am in darkness - I am nothing When I am alone I fall into lethargy I only come into existence when the plumber, or the horse-dealer, or whoever it may be, says something which sets me alight Then how lovely the smoke of my phrase is, rising and falling, flaunting and falling, upon red lobsters and yellow fruit, wreathing them into one beauty But observe how meretricious the phrase is - made up of what evasions and old lies (p. 89)

For the young Bernard, words are signifiers of his existence, and it is only while he is phrase-making that he knows he is Man is a linguistic creature, unlike the moth, for example, beating its wings against the pane, man has a power to control, to create, as words become the light to which he swarms Words as words become symbolic of the process of language, yet, just as they are the only viable way for man to apprehend experience, they also keep him at one remove from that experience A gap exists between the word and its object, so that language in a sense is always metaphorical

"Like" and "like" and "like" - but what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing? There is a square, there is an oblong The players take the square and place it upon the oblong They place it very accurately, they make a perfect dwelling place. Very little is left outside The structure is now visible, what is inchoate is here stated; we are not so various or so mean, we have made oblongs and stood them upon squares This is our triumph, this is our consolation

The sweetness of this content overflowing runs down the walls of my mind, and liberates understanding Wander no more, I say, this is the end The structure is visible We have made a dwelling place" (p. 110, emphasis mine)

The squares are words, arbitrarily placed on objects so that the game may continue. Thus man's "triumph" is this mastery over experience and the creation of a system which symbolizes the structure of the mind, so that the squares are the structure, the outsides, the boxes surrounding the content of the oblongs. As Woolf describes it in *A Room of One's Own*, the novel "is a structure leaving a shape on the mind's eye, built now in squares, now pagoda shaped, now throwing out wings and arcades, now solidly compact and domes like the Cathedral of Saint Sofia at Constantinople" (p. 68). Conversely, this language shapes experience, so that there is no choice: all are players. The world is entirely within grasp, "Very little is left outside." But similarly man cannot put himself outside of the structure, as Neville puts it, "'I cannot feel the flight of the ball and think only of the ball. I shall be a clinger to the outsides of words all my life'" (p. 33). Language is the natural manifestation of self-consciousness, the very structure becomes the "dwelling place."

The failure of words indicates death. The final section of the novel, "Summing Up," is Bernard's entirely; he chronicles what has gone before, he attributes words to action. In a later essay, "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf discusses, in language very similar to Bernard's, the implications of "summing up" in general:

These scenes are not altogether a literary device - a means of summing up and making innumerable details visible in one concrete picture. I find that scene making is my natural way of marking the past. Always a scene arranged itself representative, enduring. This confirms me in my instinctive notion, the sensation that we are sealed vessels afloat on what it is convenient to call reality; and at some moments, the sealing matter cracks, in floods reality; that is, these scenes - for why do they survive undamaged year after year unless they are made of something comparatively permanent? Is this liability to scenes the origin of my writing impulse? (pp. 142-143)

Thus Bernard's liability to scene-making and summing up is also not just a literary device, it functions to convey a permanent, enduring reality which transcends the

relative tenuousness of human existence. Literature preserves and creates reality. However, "*The precise brush stroke was swollen and lop-sided, cupboards and chairs melted their brown masses into one huge obscurity*" (p. 160). Bernard's ability, and desire, to precisely paint his word-pictures is falling into dissolution.

For one day as I leant over a gate that led into a field, the rhythm stopped, the rhymes and the hummings, the nonsense and the poetry. A space was cleared in my mind. I saw through the thick leaves of habit. Leaning over the gate I regretted so much litter, so much unaccomplishment and separation. I said, life had been imperfect, an unfinished phrase. It had been impossible for me, taking snuff as I do from any bagman met in a train, to keep coherency - that sense of the generations, of women carrying red pitchers to the Nile, of the nightingale who sings among conquests and migrations. It had been too vast an undertaking, I said, and how can I go on lifting my foot perpetually to climb the stair? (p. 191)

As language liberates, it tyrannizes. And only at the end of life can Bernard free himself from its demands. Language, which had given him so much pleasure, and indeed been his "snuff," his balm against the reality of the lived moment, has become habitual, and thus deadening. Language thus has two concomitant effects: it frees the imagination, it is a creative force, and at the same time it also annihilates life as it puts squares irresolutely into oblongs, packaging life into neat little word-bundles.

One of the reasons Bernard is "I, I, I, not Byron, Shelley, Dostoevsky, but I, Bernard" (p. 171), is himself, and no longer a writer, is because he has lost his audience. While a young man, Bernard had said,

But soliloquies in back streets soon pall. I need an audience. That is my downfall. That always ruffles the edge of the final statement and prevents it from forming. I make my phrase and run off with it to some furnished room where it will be lit by dozens of candles. I need eyes on me to draw out these frills and furbelows. To be myself (I note) I need the illumination of other people's eyes and therefore cannot be entirely sure what is myself (p. 78)

For a writer, an audience is a necessity, the other half of the writer-reader equation in order to effect the "joy of intercourse" (p. 79). As Mitchell A. Leaska said of Woolf herself, "Privately, war had for her its own elaborate rhetoric. Without the endorsement of a civilized people, her being - as an artist and as a person - was denied ratification. With no 'Thou' there could be no 'I'. If people stopped reading the books of Virginia Woolf, there would soon be no Virginia Woolf."⁹ Similarly, for Bernard the old man, his audience has deserted him. "But now Percival is dead, and Rhoda is dead, we are divided, we are not here" (p. 195). Story-telling is a social act, dependent on a listener for completion. The last scene is unusual, as Bernard seems to be telling his story to someone he met once on a ship to Africa. However, in her notebook, Woolf made a note about the last chapter: "What this needs is some conflict, so that there can be an end. Death I think must come in as the antagonist, must be an argument between them."¹⁰ The stranger thus seems to symbolize death, which Bernard attempts to ward off with words, with the summation of his and the others' lives. And so he is in effect talking to himself, to his imaginary biographer, the side of himself which stands outside and makes the events of his life into words and paragraphs.

The function of this activity of summing up is to impose order on experience, to attach to vision a design. However, as Bernard ages, this patterning begins to fail to keep at bay the inevitability of death, and Bernard achieves the revelation that all of his attempts to capture and record and so make of experience an organized story are

⁹ Leaska, "Afterword" to *Points Hall: Typescripts of Between the Acts* op cit., pp. 458-459.

¹⁰ Virginia Woolf, *The Waves: Two holograph versions* op cit., Notebook 14, p. 761.

inadequate. Until this point, he has operated under "the illusion that something adheres for a moment, has roundness, weight, depth, is completed" (p. 161). For the purposes of telling his story, he says, "Let us again pretend that life is a solid substance, shaped like a globe, which we turn about in our fingers. Let us pretend that we can make out a plain and logical story, so that when one matter is despatched - love for instance - we go on, in an orderly manner, to the next" (p. 170). Thus he admits the arbitrariness of, and perhaps even discordance between, language and experience. Life is seen as orderly and logical in stories; however, this order is an illusion. Even as Bernard recognizes his dependence on a listener for his role as author, he takes away the listener's expectations, exposing the artifice, and thus fallacy, of what he is hearing.

But it is a mistake, this extreme precision, this orderly and military progress; a convenience, a lie. There is always deep below it...a rushing stream of broken dreams, nursery rhymes, street cries, half-finished sentences and sights - elm trees, willow trees, gardeners sweeping, women writing - that rise and sink even as we hand a lady down to dinner...

...Whatever sentence I extract whole and entire from this cauldron is only a string of six little fish that let themselves be caught while a million others leap and sizzle, making the cauldron bubble like boiling silver, and slip through my fingers. (pp. 172-173)

Out of such a philosophy arises the technique of stream of consciousness, which imitates the associative powers of the mind, and adheres to no logic but that of impression. Robert Humphrey, in *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel*, is quick to point out that "stream-of-consciousness" defines a novel's concerns, not its techniques: "The stream-of-consciousness novel is identified most quickly by its subject matter. This, rather than its technique, its purposes, or its themes, distinguishes it...[they] have as their essential subject matter the consciousness of one or more characters, that is, the depicted consciousness serves as a screen on which the

material in these novels is presented¹¹ He extends his definition of stream-of-consciousness fiction to be "a type of fiction in which the basic emphasis is placed on exploration of the prespeech levels of consciousness for the purpose primarily of revealing the psychic being of the characters"¹² However, at least in the case of Bernard, his "psychic being" is completely tied to his phrase-making way of seeing Thus, rather than having as its subject matter consciousness, more specifically the subject matter of *The Waves* is not even "an ordinary mind on an ordinary day" ("Modern Fiction, p 106), but is instead the recording of the mind recording So that, far from being the mind's impressions unfiltered and unmediated, stream-of-consciousness is a symbolic representation of the way that the mind receives its impressions Language still arbitrarily confines its subject in its design, and the illusion that stream of consciousness is freer than ordinary, plotted prose is nevertheless an illusion, this writing is no more "prespeech" nor less self-conscious than the most vigorously formal text Stream of consciousness approximates imaginistically the working of the mind, but it is a linguistic-bound attempt

Ultimately, the concern, of both the characters and language in general, is an attempt to reason an order "Each tense," said Neville, "means differently There is an order in this world, there are distinctions, there are differences upon whose verge I step For this is only a beginning" (p 14) Woolf herself says, in "A Sketch of the Past," that

as one gets older one has a greater power through reason to provide an explanation, and that this explanation blunts the sledge-hammer force of the blow And so I go on to suppose that the shock-receiving capacity is what

¹¹ Robert Humphrey, op cit, p 2

¹² Ibid, p 4

makes me a writer. I hazard the explanation that a shock is at once in my case followed by the desire to explain it—it is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me, it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together. It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what. From this I reach what I might call a philosophy, at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool [of "non-being", (p. 82)] is hidden a pattern, that we — I mean all human beings — are connected with this, that the whole world is a work of art, that we are parts of the work of art. *Hamlet* or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music, we are the thing itself (pp. 83-84)

Throughout *The Waves*, a pattern of patterning develops; individual orderings of the world are approximated, reconciled and discarded. The characters themselves are the "words," the thing itself. Reality and expression are inextricable, so that the writer is the medium through which experience is mediated. The form of *The Waves* mimics, and complements, its own themes.

As Neville and the others attempt to find order in their lives, they naturally begin to examine the external, natural world. Patterns are discernible there: the sun rises, waves surge and recede, birds fly, and the sun lights the trees. The earth operates cyclically, logically, and integrately. Does Bernard's desire to order things, tell their stories, therefore reflect an attempt to capture the natural order, which he desired precisely because the phenomenal world is his environment? Does nature teach him to need patterns? The question is circular, never-ending: life is cyclical; the mind searches for patterns; does the mind thus impose cycles on nature? or does it obtain the idea of pattern from nature? And so on. But finally it is the act of

construction, and not the inevitability of process, which is significant. The goal is not eventual, but immediate as *The Waves* is a work of art integrating language and experience, it is "about" individuals who integrate their lives with their languages.

Of course, these languages vary in their manifestations. Most of Woolf's novels are in some sense "portraits of the artist." Many are writers — Terence Hewet in *The Voyage Out*, Ralph Denham in *Night and Day*, the somewhat intangible narrator of *Jacob's Room*, Orlando, etc. Lily Briscoe is a painter, Miss La Trobe is a playwright and producer/director, Rachel Vinrace plays the piano, each responds to life with a different voice. The theme of art in Woolf's novels asserts itself upon the texts quite overtly. As Terence says to Rachel, "What I want to do in writing novels is very much what you want to do when you play the piano, I expect...We want to find out what's behind things, don't we?...Things I feel come to me like lights. I want to combine them...I want to make figures..." (pp. 223-224). Art becomes a way of expressing the essence of experience, so that Lily at last finishes her painting. "With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision" (p. 192). That Lily expresses her vision with a line, representing perhaps a union with Mr. Ramsay, as he reaches the Lighthouse, suggests that her triumph cannot be explicitly stated, but rather is sufficiently captured by a line. The line represents so much, and yet is itself no one thing. In Woolf's novels, the artists grapple with the problem of representing reality, that thing which is behind things, and the implication of Lily's approach is that the only proper or sufficient way to do so is symbolically, through intimation and approximation, rather than exposition, as Mr. Ramsay so valiantly tried to do A through Z. The artist's power lies in his ability to create. However, there is no one way in which to get at reality.

And this perhaps is the fundamental tension which lies at the heart of Woolf's fiction. "But if there are no stories, what end can there be, or what beginning? Life is not susceptible perhaps to the treatment we give it when we try to tell it" (*The Waves* p. 180). Story-telling gives meaning to life, but life itself remains unaffected by human endeavours. The act of writing both denies, and paradoxically affirms, life's, or "reality's," utter independence from human cognition. Thus Lily's table (p. 26) does exist whether or not she is in the room, and perhaps this is the hardest thing to have to face, that the individual does not matter, cannot win in the argument against Death. Story-telling only temporarily stops the encroaching fate, and while "to let oneself be carried on passively is unthinkable" (p. 162), neither action, nor literature, changes the external world.

As in *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts*, setting in *The Waves* functions to relativize and minimize man's importance in the universe. As Bernard says, "The tree alone resisted our eternal flux" (p. 168). While the tales are told, the lives lived out, and birth, marriage and death and "the populous undifferentiated chaos of life...surged behind the outlines of my friends and the willow tree" (p. 168), the tree, and the sea, and the impersonal natural world repeat their cycles:

I was saying there was a willow tree. Its shower of falling branches, its creased and crooked bark had the effect of what remains outside our illusions yet cannot stay them, is changed by them for the moment, yet shows through stable, still, and with a sternness that our lives lack. Hence the comment it makes; the standard it supplies, and the reason why, as we flow and change, it seems to measure (p. 170)

The tree and by extension the external world serves as a yardstick against which individual lives can be measured.

The structure of *The Waves* emphasizes the background against which human

life is played out. However, the interludes also serve as subject for the episodes, so that literature and its subject matter, "real life," are placed side by side. Because the passages are so clearly isolated from one another, both by type and by style, the effect achieved is one of fragmentation. The story of the six friends is not continuous, but splintered by the intrusion of the wave sections; similarly, the account of a day from pre-dawn to nightfall is prevented from being one of smooth transition and cyclical occurrences by the interrupting passages chronicling individual lives. And even within the episodes, the nature of the characters' speeches - formal monologues more introspective than directed at one another - again symbolizes a fragmentary, distanced set of relationships. The characters seem isolated, which contradicts the communion expected in communication. Woolf's fictional world is just such a modern one, simultaneously one of isolation and connection.

CHAPTER FIVE The Shaping Power Connection and Isolation

Her parties! That was it! Her parties!

What she liked was simply life

That's what I do it for she said speaking aloud to life

But suppose Peter said to her 'Yes yes but your parties - what's the sense of your parties?' all she could say was (and nobody could be expected to understand) They're an offering which sounded horribly vague

But to go deeper beneath what people said (and these judgements how superficial how fragmentary they are!) in her own mind now what did it mean to her 'this thing called life?' Oh it was very queer. Here was So-and-so in South Kensington some one up in Bayswater and somebody else say in Mayfair. And she felt if only they could be brought together so she did it. And it was an offering to combine to create but to whom?

An offering for the sake of offering perhaps. Anyhow it was her gift. Nothing else had she of the slightest importance could not think write even play the piano

All the same that one day should follow another Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday that one should wake up in the morning see the sky walk in the park meet Hugh Whitbread then suddenly in came Peter then these roses it was enough. After that how unbelievable death was! - that it must end and no one in the whole world would know how she had loved it all how every instant (*Mrs Dalloway* pp 108-109)

The culmination of the June day chronicled in *Mrs Dalloway* is Clarissa Dalloway's party. All day she has been preparing for it and even while resting after lunch her mind goes over the details and perhaps occasioned by an old friend's surprise visit she muses on why she gives parties. Mrs Dalloway's gift is to bring people together it is her art form through which she creates an expression of experience of life. Her party connects the past with the present as old friends like Peter Walsh and Sally Seton reappear the eminent with the intellectual - both the Prime Minister and a professor an authority on Milton grace her home the dead with the living as Sir William Bradshaw brings with his presence news of Septimus Warren Smith's suicide. The fundamental symbolic significance of the party is this power of connection

Throughout *Mrs Dalloway*, connections between people are repeatedly made and broken. People visit each other, see one another in the Park, or through a window. The clocks chime, an aeroplane rides overhead, a grey car winds its way through the town, the city of London. All of these elements of the day serve to connect people, join them in common experience. The urban lifestyle necessarily brings people into constant interaction. The world in which they live connects them. It is an intricate, inextricable system. As Woolf said, in an essay called "Abbeys and Cathedrals," "London nevertheless is a city in the full tide and race of human life."¹ As Peter Walsh expresses it, "That was civilisation. It struck him coming back from the East – the efficiency, the organization, the communal spirit of London" (p. 134). The city represents the structure of human society, both born out of, and a creative force acting upon, the lives of the people it subsumes.

And they went further and further from her, being attached to her by a thin thread (since they had lunched with her) which would stretch and stretch, get thinner and thinner as they walked across London, as if one's friends were attached to one's body, after lunching with them, by a thin thread, which became hazy with the sound of bells, striking the hour or ringing to service, as a single spider's thread is blotted with rain-drops, and, burdened, sags down (p. 100).

So although they may not actually be in one another's presence, Lady Bruton, for example, will be connected to Richard Dalloway and Hugh Whitbread because they have shared a meal together. The image of the spider suggests the spider's web, so that all raindrops collected on the web are connected, both to each other and to the spider. In this analogy, Clarissa Dalloway serves as the central "spider" of *Mrs Dalloway*. Through her thoughts Peter Walsh, Richard Dalloway, Elizabeth, the woman in the flower shop, are introduced. Mrs. Dalloway sets out from her home at ten o'clock one

¹ Virginia Woolf, in *The London Scene* (1972, rpt. New York: Random House, 1982), p. 35. Further references to this work appear in the text.

June morning, and as she walks, she reminisces; the threads that she has spun are revealed. Clarissa is composed of these memories, these connections; the spider is not just the vessel which holds the relationships or causes them to be possible, but is herself the culmination of her relationships. Thus Clarissa's identity is many-faceted: she is wife, mother, old flame, and nun-like. But ultimately she is hostess, and her party is indeed her offering, to uphold and perpetuate human connection. This ability of Clarissa's and Lady Bruton's to effect such a state is a social power, "a mystery or grand deception practised by hostesses...when, with a wave of the hand, the traffic ceases, and there rises instead this profound illusion in the first place about the food — how it is not paid for" (p. 93), and it puts the guests at ease, ensuring continued intercourse.

Similarly, Mrs. Ramsey in *To the Lighthouse* functions as hostess, as the force which brings people together, in friendship, and even in marriage, thus continuing the social order. Her dinner party is profoundly significant, as the various members come in from their various activities, they gather around the table waiting for the main course.

Now all the candles were lit, and the faces on both sides of the table were brought nearer by the candle light, and composed, as they had not been in the twilight, into a party round a table, for the night was now shut off by panes of glass, which, far from giving any accurate view of the outside world, rippled it so strangely that here, inside the room, seemed to be order and dry land; there, outside, a reflection in which things wavered and vanished, waterily.

Some change at once went through them all, as if this had really happened, and they were all conscious of making a party together in a hollow, on an island; had their common cause against the fluidity out there. (pp. 90-91)

Parties and gatherings, and the dinner table — which for Lily symbolizes the concepts of "subject and object and the nature of reality" (p. 26), existing solidly even when you're not there — not only connect people together, but also serve to separate them.

from the outside, "the fluidity out there." Thus the gatherings are solid as the table, ordered and comprehensible, giving meaning and substance to human existence, away from the chaos or void of the night, warding off loneliness.

Most of the novels share this symbol of the party. In *The Voyage Out* Helen Ambrose and fellow members of a hiking party discover that they are connected through knowing the same woman back in London:

Mrs Parry's drawing-room, though thousands of miles away, behind a vast curve of water on a tiny piece of earth, came before their eyes. They who had had no solidity or anchorage before seemed to be attached to it somehow, and at once grown more substantial. Perhaps they had been in the drawing-room at the same moment, perhaps they had passed each other on the stairs; at any rate they knew some of the same people. (p. 146)

The drawing-room civilizes, so that its influence pervades even a mountain in South America, as well, it shrinks the world, so that Mrs. Ambrose, Mrs. Thornbury and Mrs. Elliot are all still in a sense in London. Indeed, the novel is framed by the opening scene, wherein Helen and her husband are taking leave of London, walking through the traffic and over the river, then into a cab and through the manufacturing district that makes London "the city of innumerable poor people" (p. 8). However, they soon are on the water itself, and London behind them is reduced, "having shrunk to two lines of buildings on either side of them, square buildings and oblong buildings placed in rows like a child's avenue of bricks" (p. 9). The squares and oblongs, later to be echoed in *The Waves* (p. 110), reinforces the image of the city as a construct, built against the encroaching outer world.

In *The Waves* two dinner scenes reunite the six characters. In the restaurant, where they come together to bid farewell to Percival, Bernard thinks, "This is perhaps happiness. With them I am many-sided. They retrieve me from darkness. We shall meet tonight, thank Heaven. Thank Heaven, I need not be alone. We shall dine together" (p. 78). Bernard voices the fear of being alone, and again solitude is

compared to darkness, to the night, out there. As for the guests at Mrs. Ramsay's table, the moment provokes an insight

We have proved, sitting eating, sitting talking, that we can add to the treasury of moments. We are not slaves bound to suffer incessantly unrecorded petty blows on our bent backs. We are not sheep either, following a master. We are creators. We too have made something that will join the innumerable congregations of past time. We too, as we put on our hats and push open the door, stride not into chaos, but into a world that our own force can subjugate and make a part of the illumined and everlasting road (p. 98)

Parties symbolize the power of man to transcend the darkness and tyranny of the natural world, to connect and thus to join forces in conquering collectively the void by building cities.

The Years, like *Mrs. Dalloway*, begins with a description of a London day, and ends with a party scene, although the chronological time span of *The Years* extends over fifty years, so that the "Present Day" of the last section is prologued by an account of the history of Eleanor Pargiter's London background. Significantly, the party lasts all night, and only ends as the dawn rises. The last sentence of the book indicates the triumph of the party – it has survived the night. "The sun had risen, and the sky above the houses wore an air of extraordinary beauty, simplicity and peace" (p. 331). While the opening description of London is narrated by an omniscient, impersonal narrator, the final sunrise is noted and commented on by all the party-goers; they have integrated day into night and back into day again. And, like the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* who are connected by the aeroplane and the grey car, the sunrise connects the party-goers.

Parties aren't the only symbols of connection in the novels of Virginia Woolf; in fact, upon examination, the theme of connection is effected by a multitude of images and motifs. In *Jacob's Room* a digression of two pages discusses the significance of letters.

Let us consider letters – how they come at breakfast, and at night, with their yellow stamps and their green stamps, immortalized by the postmark – Ah, but when the post knocks and the letter comes always the miracle seems repeated – speech attempted Venerable are letters, infinitely brave, forlorn, and lost.

Life would split asunder without them. "Come to tea, come to dinner, what's the truth of the story? have you heard the news? life in the capital is gay, the Russian dancers." These are our stays and props. These lace our days together and make of life a perfect globe. And the notes accumulate. And the telephones ring. And everywhere we go wires and tubes surround us to carry the voices that try to penetrate before the last card is dealt and the days are over. Yet letters are venerable, and the telephone valiant, for the journey is a lonely one, and if bound together by notes and telephones we went in company, perhaps – who knows? – we might talk by the way.

For centuries the writing-desk has contained sheets fit precisely for the communications of friends. Masters of language, poets of long ages, have turned from the sheet that endures to the sheet that perishes, pushing aside the tea-tray, drawing close to the fire (for letters are written when the dark presses round a bright red cave), and addressed themselves to the task of reaching, touching, penetrating the individual heart. Were it possible! (pp 89-90)

This admittedly lengthy passage stands out as an essay on the art of communication as an attempt to "penetrate," to connect. Letters, and by extension all forms of writing, and speech, are turned to "when the dark presses round," and thus language is the great medium of connection. "the enormous resources of the English language, the power it bestows, after all, of communicating feelings" (*Mrs Dalloway*, p 137) "Only connect." – the epigraph of E. M. Forster's novel, *Howard's End* (first published in 1910), could very well serve the same purpose for the novels of Virginia Woolf.

However, Forster's directive trails off into ellipsis dots, Woolf's passage ends with the words, "Were it possible!" just as the letters connect people, they emphasize the attempt to conceal the essential loneliness beneath. In the passage quoted above on letters, these words were left out

– for to see one's own envelope on another's table is to

realize how soon deeds sever and become alien. Then at last the power of the mind to quit the body is manifest, and perhaps we fear or hate or wish annihilated this phantom of ourselves. Is this all? Can I never know, share, be certain? Am I doomed all my days to write letters, send voices, which fall upon the tea-table, while life dwindles, to come and dine?

As letters invite people to come together, to be known, they also underscore the distance between people, and the fragmentary nature of human identity itself, and the impossibility of knowing, sharing, being certain. Even the title of *Jacob's Room* refers to a place, not a man. Jacob is represented by his rooms, the places where he lives, and others' impressions of him, but his identity is neither solid nor constant. In an essay called "Great Men's Houses," Woolf discusses her impression of Keats' empty house:

And perhaps it is because the rooms are so empty and furnished rather with light and shadow than with chairs and tables that one does not think of people, here where so many people have lived. The imagination does not evoke scenes...All the traffic of life is silenced...The voice of the house is the voice of leaves brushing in the wind, of branches stirring in the garden. Only one presence - that of Keats himself - dwells here. Life goes on outside the window" (in *The London Scene*, pp. 27-29).

Similarly, in *Jacob's Room* the repetition of the almost poem-like segment, "Listless is the air in an empty room, just swelling the curtain, the flowers in the jar shift. One fibre in the wicker arm-chair creaks, though no one sits there" (p. 37 and p. 172), suggests that identity is not fixed, and cannot be represented by one's belongings. The first time this "poem" appears is following a description of Jacob's room in Neville's Court, vacant as he goes for dinner, the second describes Jacob's room after his death in the war. The implication is that, whether its occupant is living or dead, the room both indicates the occupant's personality, and is insufficient to do so. And whatever happens to this occupant, the room remains unchanged and unresponsive.

The title of *Mrs Dalloway* also signifies a distance, as she is called by her social title, and not her Christian name. The invitations to dine, the injunction to connect, however momentarily, do not erase the fundamental condition of isolation, in fact,

they even heighten it. She escapes to her nun-like tower, her day includes both actions of solitude and connection. As Irène Simon says, "the characters are also obsessed by their separateness: it is at once their most precious treasure and the source of their isolation."² Woolf's characters respond to their fundamental isolation ambivalently. Even in the midst of her party, that great party which brings all of London together, either directly or through association, Clarissa pauses several times, struck by the inadequacy of her attempts, "for, though she loved it and felt it tingle and sting, still these semblances, these triumphs had a hollowness, at arm's length they were, not in the heart, and it might be that she was growing old, but they satisfied her no longer as they used" (pp. 154-55). Ironically, she feels a greater communion with Septimus Warren Smith, whom she has never met, because of the utter finality of solitude of his act, than with anyone else, including her family and old friends.

As in *Jacob's Room* the central character of *Mrs. Dalloway* is enigmatic. Clarissa's husband, Richard, does not know her, neither does Elizabeth, or even Sally Seton or Peter Walsh. Sally and Peter discuss Clarissa, and whether or not she and Richard were happy, "for, (Sally) admitted, she knew nothing about them, only jumped to conclusions, as one does, for what can one know even of the people one lives with every day? she asked. Are we not all prisoners? She had read a wonderful play about a man who scratched on the wall of his cell, and she had felt that was true of life -- one scratched on the wall" (p. 170). Sally's feeling that people are imprisoned in an identity by others, and that the inadequacy of human knowledge imprisons them, is in accordance with Clarissa's earlier musings on "the feeling they had of dissatisfaction, not knowing people, not being known. For how could they know each other? You met

² Simon, op. cit., p. 180

every day, then not for six months, or years. It was unsatisfactory how little one knew people" (p. 135). Clarissa theorizes that, "to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who had completed them, even the places" (p. 135), echoing the method of *Jacob's Room*. However, the inability to know one another can also free one, as the largeness of civilization permits one to pass unnoticed. Peter Walsh, early in the day, experiences this freedom:

And just because nobody yet knew he was in London, except Clarissa, and the earth, after the voyage, still seemed an island to him, the strangeness of standing alone, alive, unknown, at half-past eleven in Trafalgar Square overcame him...

He had escaped! was utterly free – as happens in the downfall of habit when the mind, like an unguarded flame, bows and bends and seems about to blow from its holding. I haven't felt so young for years! thought Peter, escaping (only of course for an hour or so) from being precisely what he was (pp. 47-48).

For an hour or so, "Peter Walsh" as conceived of by his friends doesn't exist, as they aren't thinking of him.

The concern with knowing and identity, with connection and isolation, certainly produces the main thrusts of all of Woolf's novels. For example, in *To the Lighthouse*, Lily saves an embarrassing moment for Mrs. Ramsay by asking Charles Tansley to escort her into dinner, thus "apply[ing] some balm to the anguish of this hour and say[ing] something nice to that young man" (p. 86). However, the salve relieves only the symptom, and not the cause. Lily's gesture of interaction strikes her as insincere, and she thinks, "She had done the usual trick – been nice. She would never know him. He would never know her. Human relations were all like that" (p. 86). Despite the powers of Mrs. Ramsay to effect relationships and cause interaction, the essential darkness is not evaded; when Mrs. Ramsay is not there, "directly she went a sort of disintegration set in, they wavered about, went different ways" (p. 103). And when Mrs. Ramsay dies, the section called "Time Passes" reduces the actions therein to

mere occurrences which further time "So with the lamps all put out, the moon sunk, and a thin rain drumming on the roof a downpouring of immense darkness began. Nothing, it seemed, could survive the flood, the profusion of darkness which, creeping in at keyholes and crevices, stole round window blinds...there was scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one could say "This is he" or "this is she" (p 117) Without dinner parties and communion, the darkness invades, comes into the house from the outside, "Night succeeds to night." The natural cycles continue insistently, regardless of human life

In Woolf's novels, therefore, the fundamental essence of her world is this binary nature of the opposition between connection and isolation. Even in *The Waves* where the characters are connected to one another as the petals of a flower, they are simultaneously isolated from one another, although joined in the common effort to subvert chaos, and connected by a similar style of speech, beneath this integration their isolation persists. Bernard articulates this phenomenon

Against the gateway, against some cedar tree I saw blaze bright, Neville, Jinny, Rhoda, Louis, Susan, and myself, our life, our identity. But we - against the brick, against the branches, we six, out of how many million millions, for one moment out of what measureless abundance of past time and time to come, burnt there triumphant. The moment was all, the moment was enough. And then Neville, Jinny, Susan and I, as a wave breaks, burst asunder, surrendered - to the next leaf, to the precise bird, to a child with a hoop, to a prancing dog, to the warmth that is hoarded in woods after a hot day, to the lights twisted like white ribbon on rippled waters. We drew apart, we were consumed in the darkness of the trees. (p 188)

The theme of connection and concomitant fragmentation is thus overtly considered by the characters in Woolf's novels

However, this theme is also reinforced, or even generated out of, the overall structures of the novels. Most obviously, the structures of *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Years* and *Between the Acts* demonstrate simultaneous

connectives and fragments, so that, as Schulkind expresses it, "the meaning of the thing created, whether character or incident, is rigorously subordinated to the design of the novel which, once established, generated its own principles of harmony and coherence"³ Dealing as they do with social relationships and the workings of the mind, these novels shift perspective and setting often, resulting in a text which is made up of pieces and scenes rather than one continuous flowing event. Woolf's comments on her writing method indicate that she was aware of this impression "I am now galloping over *Mrs. Dalloway*, re-typing it entirely from the start, which is more or less what I did with the *V.O.* a good method, I believe, as thus one works with a wet brush over the whole, and joins parts separately composed and gone dry...The reviewers will say that it is disjointed because of the mad scenes not connecting with the *Dalloway* scenes" (*A Writer's Diary*, pp 74-75). Even though the time sequences of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Between the Acts* occur in only one day, they stretch back to the past and forward to an implied future, incorporating "orts and scraps;" while the characters are thus connected to history and tradition, they are simultaneously isolated from the flow. Septimus and Clarissa, while connected in the novel by association and implied similarities, never actually meet; their two narratives exist side by side, contrasting but not converging, until the news of Septimus's death reaches Clarissa at her party. As Jean Sudrann says, "Although [Clarissa's] hours are crowded with contacts with other people and her reveries filled with the insignificance of the personal relationships of the 30-odd years of her life, there is an insistent accompaniment of the awareness of individual isolation"⁴ In *Between the Acts*, the alternating scenes from Miss La Trobe's pageant and the Olivers' lives serve

³ Schulkind, op cit, p 28

⁴ Sudrann, op cit, p 113

to isolate both pageants from one another. "The gramophone was affirming in tones there was no denying, triumphant yet valedictory: *Dispersed are we, who have come together* (p. 142). The gramophone gurgled *Unity - Dispersity*. It gurgled *Un-dis*. And ceased" (p. 146). Miss La Trobe's play is an attempt to integrate the individual with the universal, "the knowledge of the fundamental isolation of the individual combines with that of the individual desire for and sense of participation in the general life."⁵

In *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves* and *The Years* this dichotomy of unity/dispersity is fully manifested by the structure which alternates interludes of descriptions of nature with episodes of human action. While the characters' lives are played out against the background of nature, Woolf also foregrounds nature, so that the positions are reversed and human life becomes merely a backdrop for the natural drama. The balance between the two is tenuous. Lily's thoughts on her painting are appropriate to the function of art as connective in general: "It was a question, she remembered, how to connect this mass on the right hand with that on the left. She might do it by bringing the line of the branch across so; or break the vacancy in the foreground by an object (James perhaps) so. But the danger was that by doing that the unity of the whole might be broken. She stopped" (p. 53). As Jeanne Schulkind describes it, it is as if Lily is searching for "the spiritual continuum which embraces all of life, the vision of reality as a timeless unity which lies beneath the appearance of change, separation and disorder that marks daily life."⁶ John Hawley Roberts suggests that "Lily's ideas about art are identical with those of Roger Fry."⁷ In this

⁵ Ibid., p. 120

⁶ Schulkind, p. 21

⁷ Roberts, op. cit., p. 842

regard, Lily does indeed seem to be manifesting Roger Fry's theory of the "contemplation of form," as articulated in a letter to Robert Bridges

I found that this "constant" [of emotion while contemplating art] had to do always with the contemplation of form. It also seemed to me that the emotions resulting from the contemplation of form were more universal (less particularised and coloured by the individual history), more profound and more significant spiritually than any of the emotions which had to do with life. I therefore assume that the contemplation of form is a peculiarly important spiritual exercise. My analyses of form - lines, sequences, rhythms, & c are merely aids for the uninitiated to attain to the contemplation of form - they do not *explain*. (Roger Fry, p 200.)

And Fry's ideas may even be considered a directive for the proper approach to Woolf's fiction, so that "the reader's response to the whole is very much like that of one who standing before a painting begins to see, as Fry would see, how this mass necessarily balances that, how this line repeats, with a difference, that one, how a high-light here inevitably answers a shadow there, how, in other words, the meaning of the picture lies in our discovery of the fact that the forms agree."⁸ The contemplation of form does not result in explanation, but rather in a vision, often articulated symbolically, of the overall design, which in this case is a pattern of simultaneous patterning and non-patterning, connection and isolation

While art connects objects on the right with those on the left, if pushed too far the unity is dispersed. As Bernard expresses it, "The crystal, the globe of life as one calls it, far from being hard and cold to the touch, has walls of thinnest air. If I press them all will burst" (p 173). Similarly, the structures of the novels themselves unite and disperse, connect and isolate, and if pressed would burst: the narratives are a delicate balance of form and content, and preserve an illusion of unity

While the novels deal directly with this theme, both in content and through

⁸ Ibid. p 839

structure, in fact the issue is the significant force out of which Woolf's fiction is created, and every aspect of her novels contributes to and maintains the tension between connection and isolation. While there are other concerns, as earlier discussed – for example, feminism and androgyny, history and politics, art and literature – all of these specific themes in fact work organically, inseparable from the text except arbitrarily and thus reductively.

Woolf's concern with male and female relationships is just one specific manifestation of the concern with connection and isolation, so that the androgynous mind is a symbol of this very relationship: the androgynous mind both connects the male and the female, and at the same time fragments experience into two accompanying methods, the intuitive and the rational. Just as the clocks and the city, the dinner parties and the letters, connect people, people are connected by sex, and yet even this attribute does not allow women to "know" other women, or men to understand men.

History provides a continuum of experience, so that individual lives take their place in a greater order, and become a part of tradition. Yet this connective force is illusory, as individuals die, alone. As Mr. Ramsay quoted, "We perished, each alone" (p. 154). Death in fact functions as the great connector: it connects people together by virtue of being their inevitable shared conclusion; it reconnects the body to the land, it maintains the cyclical nature of experience. Indeed, death is the code of many of the novels. Rachel Vinrace dies at the end of *The Voyage Out*; Jacob's empty room remains after his death in *Jacob's Room*; Septimus's death marks the end of *Mrs. Dalloway*; *The Waves* concludes as Bernard cries, "Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!" (p. 200), but the last sentence, "The waves broke on the shore," suggests that his fight against the enemy is unsuccessful. Death seems to be the final statement, the ultimate severance from life. Yet, after Rachel dies, another couple of

scenes are played out, in which the guests gather together in the hall during a storm. After the storm, they discuss Rachel's death and play chess, and "Every now and then the moth whizzed over their heads, and hit the lamps with a thud. A young woman put down her needlework and exclaimed, "Poor creature! it would be kinder to kill it." But nobody seemed disposed to rouse himself in order to kill the moth. They watched it dash from lamp to lamp, because they were comfortable, and had nothing to do" (p. 377). So Rachel's death seems bracketed, like Mrs. Ramsay's, by the living, who ignore death, because they are comfortable. This concluding scene serves to connect Rachel's death to the living, similarly, after Mrs. Ramsay's, and Septimus's, and Bernard's, deaths, the novels continue, putting death into a perspective of natural cycles.

The theme of art and literature is also, again like the red flower, one facet of the larger theme of connection and fragmentation. Mrs. and Mr. Dalloway are on the ship with Rachel Vinrace, and later reappear in another novel, Mrs. Hilbery, Katherine's mother in *Night and Day*, comes to Clarissa's party in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Thus even Woolf's own novels are interconnected. The suggestion is that the worlds of her books are linked, and that she has arbitrarily chosen some stories out of this common world when she could have as easily chosen to tell others. Her books are also connected to the larger literary tradition by allusion and quotation, as well as being connected to the tradition of the English novel, by virtue of a shared language and cultural heritage.

However, even more generally, and more importantly, all of these themes are produced or at least supported by Woolf's use of symbols. And, while specific symbols such as the party or the clock or the spider's threads suggest the theme of connection/fragmentation, in fact it may be shown that all of the symbols, and thus of the themes, in the novels of Virginia Woolf do the same. While dealing overtly with social relationships and the relationship of the mind to experience suggests the

importance of this theme for Woolf, the use of symbols in fact symbolizes this tension. For the work of symbols is to connect – to relate things otherwise unrelated, to suggest possibilities of analogy not immediately obvious, to combine disparate elements into a meaningful pattern. In her diary, after completing *The Waves*, she says:

What interests me most in the last stage is the freedom and boldness with which my imagination picked up, used and tossed aside all images, symbols which I had prepared. I am sure that this is the right way of using them – not in set pieces as I had tried first, coherently, simply as images, never making them work out, only suggest. (*A Writer's Diary*, p. 166)

Thus symbols are not to be analysed, the connection is best effected intuitively.

For Woolf, symbols also perform the work of saying the otherwise unsayable, of capturing life more fully than traditional prose. In "Phases of Fiction," she writes,

Life – it is a commonplace – is growing more complex. Our self-consciousness is becoming far more alert and better trained. We are aware of subtleties which have not yet been explored.

But we also desire synthesis. The novel, it is agreed, can follow life, it can amass details. But can it also select? Can it symbolize? Can it give us an epitome as well as an inventory? Prose perhaps is the instrument best fitted to the complexity and difficulty of modern life. (in *The Second Common Reader*, p. 102)

For Woolf, the symbol synthesizes the experience of life, it captures the essence as well as the detail. Such a complex method is a product of modern life, and necessary for dealing with it. The novel, in the history of English literature, is relatively young, and therefore "we scarcely know what powers it may not hold concealed within it" ("Phases of Fiction," p. 102). Its form is open to change and innovation, the content – life itself – is as different from text to text as are the authors, and as life changes, so must its literature. In a letter to Gerald Brenan, dated Christmas Day, 1922, Virginia Woolf states this sense of a change in her time:

This generation must break its neck in order that the next may have smooth going. For I agree with you that nothing is going to be achieved by us. Fragments – paragraphs – s

page perhaps: but no more. The human soul, it seems to me, orients itself afresh every now and then. It is doing so now. No one can see it whole, therefore. The best of us catch a glimpse of a nose, a shoulder, something turning away, always in movement.⁹

Woolf is aware of writing as a linear process, so that one generation succeeds to the next, and each learns from the tradition.

However, the question of form and content, for Virginia Woolf, is a false one, assuming as it does a dichotomy which, in fact, doesn't exist. For Woolf, writing itself is symbolic of the attempt to cohesively integrate experience and knowledge of that experience, at the same time, the use of language reveals the fundamental fragmentation which is its only result. In a discussion of Chaucer's poetry, she says admiringly, "And the whole is held in its place, and its variety and divagations ordered by the power which is among the most impressive of all – the shaping power, the architect's power" ("The Pastons and Chaucer," in *The Common Reader* I, p. 19). In her novels, theme and setting, plot and style all form a congruent pattern, held together by the shaping power of symbols: the pattern of non-~~altern~~ing. Symbolic writing suggests that there are submerged patterns and at the same time undercuts any rational attempt to fix those patterns. Paradoxically, her highly structured novels belie the underlying chaos, the formlessness of language so close at hand. The novels of Virginia Woolf combine the innovative with the traditional, the male with the female, the individual with the whole, isolation and connection, and finally they integrate literature and life.

⁹ Virginia Woolf, *The Question of Things Happening - The Letters of Virginia Woolf, 1912-1922*, ed. Nigel Nicolson (1976; rpt. London: Chatto & Windus, 1980), p. 598.

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