
AN EXAMINATION OF DREAMS AND VISIONS IN THE NOVELS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the importance of the visionary experience in five novels by Virginia Woolf. In her fiction, Woolf portrays the phenomenal world as constantly changing and she uses the cycles of nature and the passing of time as a terrifying backdrop against which the mutability and transience of human life are set. Faced with the inevitability of change and the fact of mortality, the individual seeks moments of permanence. These stand in opposition to flux and lead to the experience of a visionary intensity. Woolf's presentation of time as a qualitative phenomenon and her stress on the importance of memory as a function which allows for the intermingling of past and present make possible the narrative rendering of moments which contradict perpetual change and the rigours of sequential time. Moments of stillness occur in the midst of and in spite of process and allow for individual contact with an experience that defies the relentless progression of time. Necessary for this experience is not only memory but also the imagination, a faculty which has the power to perceive patterns of harmony in the midst of the chaos that characterises the phenomenal realm.

Fundamental to Woolf's writing, however, is the acknowledgement that visions are fleeting, as are the glimpses of meaning that emerge from them. Therefore, while several of her novels describe the artistic effort to create a structured order as a defense against change, Woolf uses the artist's struggle as a metaphor for the difficulties attached to describing the enigma that is life. None of her artist figures is able to formulate a construction that either sums up life or provides a permanence of vision.

This study presents a chronological examination of the novels in order to demonstrate that the changing forms of Woolf's fiction trace the evolution of a style that accurately portrays both the workings of the human mind and the insubstantial and fragmentary nature of life. The chronology also reveals that her novels develop in terms of their presentations of the visionary experience. Woolf's final novel incorporates into its central vision the paradoxical fact of the permanence of time's progression and acknowledges that, beyond the individually mutable life, is a continuum that links pre-history to the future. This notion, which is explored in part in the earlier novels, but developed completely in Between the Acts, suggests that consolation can be found in the greater cycles of existence despite the fact of individual mortality.

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INTRODUCTION

In a diary entry dated 1925, Virginia Woolf describes the qualities in the fiction of Proust that impress her: "He is as tough as catgut and as evanescent as a butterfly's bloom" (A Writer's Diary 99). The language of this claim is notably similar to, and is echoed in, Lily Briscoe's contemplation of the features that her painting requires:

Beautiful and bright it should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent, one colour melting into another like the colours on a butterfly's wing; but beneath the fabric must be clamped together with bolts of iron. It was to be a thing you could ruffle with your breath; and a thing you could not dislodge with a team of horses. (To the Lighthouse 163)

The occurrence of this idea in both Woolf's fictional and non-fictional work suggests the central importance that such a notion has in her conception of the way in which art should be constructed, and, indeed, it constitutes a fusion of features that is common to her novels.

To some degree, Woolf was writing fiction that reacted to the work both of her literary forebears and of certain of her literary contemporaries, particularly the Edwardian novelists, Bennett, Galsworthy, and Wells. In her essay "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" (The Captain's Death Bed 90-111), she provides a critique of the Edwardian novelists' methods, and, implicitly aligning herself with the Georgians, analyses the difference between the aims and techniques of the two groups and the importance of the innovations that the Georgians have instituted. The argument of the essay is directed at examining "what we mean when we talk about 'character' in fiction" (The Captain's Death Bed 91). At the same time, it puts "the question of reality" (The Captain's Death Bed

91) under scrutiny, and suggests the inadequacy of the Edwardian novel as a representation of reality and truth. She begins her essay by asserting that "in or about December, 1910, human character changed" (The Captain's Death Bed 91). This choice of date presumably can be connected to the first Post-Impressionist Exhibition which was organised by Roger Fry, one of Woolf's Bloomsbury companions, in London in November of that year. The exhibition signalled a "radical undermining of accepted aesthetic canons" (Rosenthal 30), a trend which was developing across the range of aesthetic forms, from the visual to the musical and literary. Woolf causally links the developments in art and literature, which go hand-in-hand with shifts in "religion, conduct, politics" (The Captain's Death Bed 92), to the change that she suggests has taken place in human character. To suggest the change, she wittily uses "a homely illustration" (The Captain's Death Bed 92):

The Victorian cook lived like a leviathan in the lower depths, formidable, silent, obscure, inscrutable; the Georgian cook is a creature of sunshine and fresh air; in and out of the drawing room, now to borrow the *Daily Herald*, now to ask advice about a hat. (The Captain's Death Bed 92)

As light and as inconsequential as this may seem, it constitutes a helpful metaphor for the enormous shifts that took place throughout the multiple layers of English life at that time. Many of these changes are evidenced in the numerous letters and essays that Woolf produced, and changes such as those that affected women have a direct bearing on the nature of the non-fictional books that she produced, such as A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas. But, more significant to this research are the literary and aesthetic changes that occurred at the time.

Woolf was a part of the collection of friends that constituted the Bloomsbury Group, a group that was committed to art and literature, and

yet a group that upset, in its focus on form rather than content, the aesthetic expectations and norms of the time. Governed somewhat by the philosophy of G. E. Moore, Bloomsbury maintained that "the most valuable things a human being can experience are the pleasures of human friendship and the enjoyment of beautiful objects" (Rosenthal 22), and, as a group, it was united in its "sense of the debased, philistine nature of the English culture" (Rosenthal 23). It valued art, the intellect, and the power of rationality, all the time feeling the threat that "mediocrity, conventionality, and commercialism" (Rosenthal 24) posed to a country that was simultaneously being threatened by nationalism and the war. The emphasis in Bloomsbury's aesthetic attitudes fell on the necessity of creating an equivalent to life, rather than on imitating it, and a Bloomsbury catch-phrase, one coined by Clive Bell, was "significant form"--the form which conveys and allows for aesthetic emotion--the importance of which lies in its valuing of form over content. The importance and value of form to the members of Bloomsbury signal the change in focus in aesthetic theorising that this group brought about.

Of course, Bloomsbury constitutes a small phenomenon relative to the larger trends that modernism instituted and carried through. As a writer, Woolf can be grouped with the modern novelists and poets, such as Eliot, Joyce, and Proust, who sought, in their writing, to overturn previously accepted literary norms, such as the linear and conventional plot and the frequently moral messages that were evident in Victorian and Edwardian texts. The modernist thrust was centred on changing the conventional focus of literature away from "the world as object to the mind that perceives" (Kemp 13). This was achieved with an experimentation, in terms of both subject and form, with the use of time and space, and it was precisely this shift that allowed a writer like Woolf to

represent the workings of the inner mind, and hence its reflections, fantasies, dreams, and visions.

These developments in the construction of literary texts meant that Woolf was one of a set of writers which not only changed the nature of literary representations of reality, but which also, through necessity, had to discard the tools that had been left for its use. In "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown", Woolf elaborates on the problems attached to the Edwardian method of writing, and, furthermore, on the predicament that such a method posed for the Georgian novelist. She renders this through an examination of the different ways in which the character of Mrs Brown, a woman whom she sees on a train, can be explored and described:

I asked them [the Edwardians] - they are my elders and betters - How shall I begin to describe this woman's character? And they said: "Begin by saying that her father kept a shop in Harrogate. Ascertain the rent. Ascertain the wages of shop assistants in the year 1878. Discover what her mother died of. Describe cancer. Describe calico. Describe -" But I cried: "Stop! Stop!" And I regret to say that I threw that ugly, that clumsy, that incongruous tool out of the window, for I knew that if I began describing the cancer and the calico, my Mrs Brown, that vision to which I cling though I know no way of imparting it to you, would have been dulled and tarnished and vanished for ever.

That is what I mean by saying that the Edwardian tools are the wrong ones for us to use. They have laid an enormous stress upon the fabric of things. They have given us a house in the hope that we may be able to deduce the human beings who live there. To give them their due, they have made that house much better worth living in. But if you hold that novels are in the first place about people, and only in the second about the houses they live in, that

is the wrong way to set about it. Therefore, you see, the Georgian writer had to begin by throwing away the method that was in use at the moment. (The Captain's Death Bed 105-106)

It is this act of throwing away that Woolf identifies as one of the historical changes that occurred in 1910. She emphasises both the importance of it and the risk--"[a]t whatever cost of life, limb, and damage to valuable property Mrs Brown must be rescued, expressed, and set in her high relations to the world before the train stopped and she disappeared for ever" (The Captain's Death Bed 107)--and admits that the discarding of convention necessitates that the Georgian literary era is characterised by "the sound of breaking and falling, crashing and destruction" (The Captain's Death Bed 108). While her essay, therefore, provides space for the possibility that Georgian texts may not convey truth beautifully and with the harmony of their forebears, it asserts the validity of their attempts, it emphasises the importance of the truthful rendering of the human being who is Mrs Brown, and it mockingly offers the only alternative:

Ulysses, Queen Victoria, Mr Prufrock - to give Mrs Brown some of the names she has made famous lately - is a little pale and dishevelled by the time her rescuers reach her. And it is the sound of their axes that we hear - a vigorous and stimulating sound in my ears - unless of course you wish to sleep, when, in the bounty of his concern, Providence has provided a host of writers anxious and able to satisfy your needs. (The Captain's Death Bed 110)

To some extent, Woolf's writing career traces the changes that occurred in the British literary tradition with the onset of modernism. Her first two novels, The Voyage Out and Night and Day, are conventional in form, and they adopt the characteristic features of the realistic novel, all the while providing early evidence of the themes which come

to dominate the rest of her fictional prose. Both Rachel Vinrace and Katharine Hilbery are heroines who are conventionally represented, and located within and defined by the society of which they are a part. In both novels, Woolf provides an ample range of descriptions of physical appearance, actions, conversations, and of social milieu. Time is used conventionally in each novel, and the narrative in both instances is rendered chronologically with an emphasis on the external, and on scene-setting.

In a diary entry dated January 1920, however, Woolf describes the genesis of her third novel, Jacob's Room, and she highlights the differences between her new ideas and the methods that her first two novels adopted: "For I figure that the approach will be entirely different this time: no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen; all crespuscular, but the heart, the passion, humour, everything as bright as fire in the mist. Then I'll find room for so much - a gaiety - an inconsequence - a light spirited stepping at my sweet will" (A Writer's Diary 42). An approach that entailed "scarcely a brick" and a removal of formal "scaffolding" necessitated a movement away from a prose convention that had dominated the tradition out of which Woolf emerges. It is in another essay, "Modern Fiction", that Woolf explains why this is necessary:

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions - trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention,

there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it. Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? We are not pleading merely for courage and sincerity; we are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it. (The Common Reader 189)

This section of the essay implies that the superficial, the immediately apprehensible, the facts and details of life in society and the world outside the inner consciousness are the "gig lamps" on which are hung notions of chronology and logical meaning. Prose that is to convey those details can therefore be ordered "symmetrically", as is the case with Woolf's predecessors. Indeed, "[t]he lamps of a horse-drawn carriage and the buttons sewn on by the Bond Street tailor suggest the material as well as the methods of the Victorian and Edwardian novel" (Lee, Novels 15). If the focus is to fall elsewhere, however, a new form of writing is required. In the same essay, Woolf asserts that, for the moderns, this focus falls "in the dark places of psychology" (The Common Reader 192). Due to the "myriad impressions" that the mind receives, and the apparently random connections that exist between thoughts, and the manner in which the fantasies and dreams and notions of the mind effortlessly intermingle and ebb in and out of focus, Woolf sought to construct a style that would have the toughness that she admired in the fiction of Proust, but which would allow for the render-

ing of the fluid, loose, and ever-changing quality that characterises the human mind.

Her development of a new form echoes the artistic developments that the post-impressionist movement signals. Her descriptions of life as a "luminous halo" and as "a semi-transparent envelope" are "visual references which have ... a vague and shapeless quality" (Lee, Novels 15), and these notions reflect the changing techniques of an artist like Monet, for example:

Monet developed a technique whereby the *enveloppe*, the atmosphere in which the subject is bathed - composed, as it were, of solid particles of light - can be captured and registered in paint. His paintings of Rouen Cathedral are paintings of the light that surrounds the stonework, at different times of the day, as much as they are paintings of the stonework itself. The paint that represents the sky is as much worked, as heavily impasted, as is the paint that represents the building. (Batchelor 38)

In a similar fashion, Woolf begins, from Jacob's Room and Mrs Dalloway onwards, to give attention to the mind, to the individual's psychology, to the subjective and internal experience of reality, rather than emphasising the external, the factual, or the logical. She recognised that a change in focus, as difficult as changes are to accommodate, would allow for a new way of seeing and, in "Modern Fiction", her response to the experience of reading Chekov is testimony to the power of a new form of fictional presentation:

No one but a modern, no one perhaps but a Russian, would have felt the interest of the situation which Tchekov has made into the short story which he calls 'Gusev.' Some Russian soldiers lie ill on board a ship which is taking them back to Russia. We are given a few scraps of their talk and some of their thoughts; then one of

them dies and is carried away; the talk goes on among the others for a time, until Gusev himself dies, and looking 'like a carrot or a radish' is thrown overboard. The emphasis is laid upon such unexpected places that at first it seems as if there were no emphasis at all; and then, as the eyes accustom themselves to twilight and discern the shapes of things in a room we see how complete the story is, how profound, and how truly in obedience to his vision Tchekov has chosen this, that, and the other, and placed them together to compose something new. (The Common Reader 192-193)

Diary entries from August and October 1923 record the discovery, on Woolf's part, of how to convey the complexity of human personality through a change in writing style:

... my discovery: how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters: I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect and each comes to daylight at the present moment. (A Writer's Diary 86)

It took me a year's groping to discover what I call my tunnelling process, by which I tell the past by instalments, as I have need of it. This is my prime discovery so far.... (A Writer's Diary 87)

This "tunnelling process" allows for a movement away from linear representations of plot and character and allows for "the impression of simultaneous connections between the inner and the outer world, the past and the present, speech and silence: a form patterned like waves in a pond rather than a railway line" (Lee, Novels 93). The obscure and unapparent depths of the human mind, as well as the external constructions of the personality, can be presented simultaneously, allowing for the weaving of dreams through the matrix of everyday life, and the

accurate rendering of moments of vision in the midst of ordinary existence.

In the mechanisms of the fiction, shapes are used, together with colour, to suggest the fabric of life, and the flickering, diverse nature of the human consciousness. They are also used structurally and thematically, however, and it is significant that so many of the characters in the novels are either writers or artists who try to give shape to their artistic attempts at rendering life. The desire to create shapes is not only a purely aesthetic one, however:

In so far as it is possible to generalise about the meaning of the human activity in Woolf's fictional world, we can say that the characters in her novels constantly try, through widely different means, to establish for themselves from the chaos around them a coherent grasp of their world. What Woolf attempts to accomplish through her fiction, that is, Lily Briscoe attempts with her painting, Bernard with his novel, Miss La Trobe with her pageant. And although these are the specific aesthetic endeavors which most closely approximate to Woolf's own, the instinct to bring things together is not limited to painters and writers. Certainly it is the animating principle behind the soliloquies of all the voices in The Waves, not just Bernard's, and it is what impels that superficially least creative of souls, Clarissa Dalloway, to give her parties. Most memorably, of course, it is Mrs Ramsay's particular genius.... (Rosenthal 42)

The impulse to generate a form out of change and chaos, "to make of the moment something permanent" (To the Lighthouse 154), is the impulse that leads towards the visionary moment. While all of human life is subject to change and decay, and while time inevitably passes, as the clocks in Mrs Dalloway emphasise, the human strives to achieve the creation of a

moment of stasis. Lily Briscoe's experience of this is brought about by the completion of her painting. Hers is a visionary moment, and is instructive: it has the nature of a "revelation" (To the Lighthouse 154); she discovers that "[i]n the midst of chaos there was shape" (To the Lighthouse 154); she understands "this formidable ancient enemy of hers - this other thing, this truth, this reality" (To the Lighthouse 151) that she is driven to meet in her art to be the opposite of the normal "appearances" (To the Lighthouse 151) of things. She sees that it is the experience of the vision that the creation of an art work inspires that is important, and not the lasting quality of the piece: "[i]t would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter?" (To the Lighthouse 198). Most importantly, however, she apprehends the significance of the illuminations that the visionary moments bring about and acknowledges that they are the moments of relief and answer that the human has in the absence of an answer to "the old question which traversed the sky of the soul perpetually" (To the Lighthouse 153):

... the vast, the general question which was apt to particularise itself at such moments as these, when she released faculties that had been on the strain, stood over her, paused over her, darkened over her. What is the meaning of life? That was all - a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark.... (To the Lighthouse 153-154)

Lily's experience illustrates that the visionary moment is brought about by, and culminates in, the creation of a structure that contrasts with and defies, by its form, the chaotic. Shape and form are what Woolf

seeks in the process of completing her work, and these formal dimensions are what are emphasised repeatedly in her fiction. The novels themselves are tautly structured. Four of them follow the passage of a single day, which provides a unity of time that gives the fiction its strength, and which allows the flickering nature of the human mind to have free play without the prose becoming loose. Mrs Dalloway traces the occurrences of a single day in June, and the pageant that is the focus of Between the Acts occurs, and is prepared for, in one day. The Waves is marked out by a series of interludes which traces the movement of the sun during one day from sunrise to nightfall, and To the Lighthouse, while incorporating a ten-year time span in "Time Passes", figuratively follows the course of one day, with "The Window" taking place in the afternoon and evening of one day, "Time Passes" occurring through the night--it begins with fading light and ends with dawn--and "The Lighthouse" the next morning. Furthermore, as Forster points out, To the Lighthouse has the three-part structure of a sonata, and "the slow central section, conveying the passing of time, does demand a musical analogy" (13). Apart from the overall formal structures that Woolf adheres to, the content and themes of her writing also emphasise the human impulse to create structures, whether artistic or not, and hence to bring about a permanence and a stasis. In a novel like To the Lighthouse, for example, contained within the structure and shape of the novel are descriptions of the characters' impulses to do the same. The first part of the novel is called "The Window" which alludes to a formal structure through which the act of seeing occurs, and the appearance of shapes and visual structures is emphasised in that section. Mrs Ramsay sees a "wedge-shaped core of darkness" (To the Lighthouse 58), James cuts out shapes from a catalogue, and Lily paints, to give only three of many examples.

Another of the ways in which Woolf achieves the creation of a new form for her writing is through a change in her presentation of time. While it is unclear whether Woolf read Bergson (Batchelor 47; Richter, Voyage 38n), her treatment of time in her later novels can be connected to the notion, that Bergson posits, of time as a qualitative, expandable phenomenon that simultaneously incorporates both the past and the present. One of the reasons that the individual has a qualitative experience of time is due to the existence of memory. It is memory that determines the fluid nature of the personality and the lack of precise definition that personality has. Memory allows for the experience of receiving the "myriad impressions" that go into the making of any one moment. If time were purely quantitative, and memory did not exist, then the progression of human life would be not only monotonous but also caught irretrievably in the present. However, memory determines the human's experience of any one moment, as the present is determined by what has gone before it. Memory also allows for the imaginative recreation of the past, that which time has removed. The way in which Woolf adapts her form to accommodate the importance that memory has in the moulding of the present moment is by mimicking, in her prose, the flickering quality that characterises the human mind. The interior monologues through which she renders the thoughts of characters allow for the rendering of how associative links can connect the present with a moment from the past:

Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.

For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning - fresh as if issued to children on a beach.

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen; looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling; standing and looking until Peter Walsh said, "Musing among the vegetables?" - was that it? - "I prefer men to cauliflowers" - was that it? He must have said it at breakfast one morning when she had gone out on the terrace - Peter Walsh. He would be back from India one of these days.... (Mrs Dalloway 1)

Contained within this passage that opens Mrs Dalloway are not only present experiences and speculations about the future, but also a memory of a past of thirty years previously, a memory which allows for a repeated experience of the recalled moment: "a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now". The description of Clarissa's present is therefore constructed in a manner which conveys the diverse nature of experience, and which suggests the way in which the present moment is necessarily intermingled with what has gone before due to the existence of memory. Thus, for Woolf, time is experienced subjectively. Furthermore, the experience of it depends on emotional states of being. The cause for that claim is, to some degree, obvious, as time can pass quickly or slowly depending on the state of mind of the individual who is perceiving it. Woolf goes further, however, and posits the existence of single moments in which are contained a multiplicity of experience, a distilling of that experience into a single form, and a stasis of experienced

time that contradicts the fact of continual change in clock time. As Woolf's fiction is charged with an awareness of the mutability of human life, and of the ceaseless flow of time that necessitates the passing of the seasons, a cycle that asserts the fact of death, the brevity of life, and the inevitable experience of loss that each human being has to face, the individual moment that defies the passing of time provides a moment of transcendence from the remorselessness of change. In her essay "A Sketch of the Past", Woolf describes these experiences as "moments of being" (Moments of Being 87). They are moments when the individual can escape the world of change and exist in a timeless state in which past and present momentarily unite. That which exists outside of that moment is part of a changing and fragmented world of appearances. While the phenomenal world is commonly accepted as being fixed in its reality, Woolf claims that it is, in fact, an arena of change, and that reality and truth can be found in the unity that the visionary moment offers. This is not to deny, however, the power of the effect that the external world has on the individual, nor does it deny the terror that the individual experiences due to the fact of mortality. Hence, in Mrs Dalloway, a novel in which time is skilfully portrayed, the sounds of Big Ben, which serve as reminders of the passing of time, become oppressive. In that novel, two kinds of time are juxtaposed to emphasise the way in which subjective time, which offers moments of stasis, is interrupted by clock time, a ceaselessly flowing entity. The continual and powerful effect of time passing is also portrayed in the middle section of To the Lighthouse, "Time Passes", where the narrative focus falls on the changes that occur in nature with the passing of time and the seasons, and on the effect that these changes have on an unoccupied house. A similar process occurs in The Waves where the non-human voice of the interludes, which frame and intersect the novel,

traces the movement of the sun as a single day progresses towards night. Here, the remorseless march of time is placed in a terrifying juxtaposition with the expression and exploration of human life that the six voices articulate.

There is a duality at the heart of Woolf's presentation of time. She suggests that, beyond the surface passage of time, the possibility of an experience of stasis lies and a timeless realm exists. This offers the possibility that there is relief from change and suggests that individual perceptions are powerfully transformative. Woolf's work repeatedly makes "transparent a unity beneath phenomenological diversity, usually portrayed through ecstatic moments in which characters feel themselves merged - or lost - in a larger reality" (Miko 63), and the emphasis in this process of perceptual change falls on the individual consciousness. This notion of Woolf's makes even clearer her reasons for rejecting the Edwardian model of narrative fiction. The Edwardian novel settles on a fixed point of view of reality, yet Woolf's understanding is that reality depends on individual points of view. So much of human perception she presents as being determined by the individual's sense of isolation, yet as being relieved by occasional moments of communion, and the route to those moments of transcendence is found in the human imagination which can shape visions of harmony in the face of pain, and which can perceive an order where there is chaos. Thus, ways of seeing are privileged in the constructions of Woolf's fiction, and her emphasis on the visual and the visionary ties in with her emphasis on form, and with the enormous array of shapes that she creates in her fictional representations.

An incident which draws together all of these strands is Mrs Ramsay's dinner party. It is, in itself, a piece of art in that it unites the characters at the table and brings about a seeming order and stasis:

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. (To the Lighthouse 90)

The experience of communion that the characters feel--"they were all conscious of making a party together in a hollow, on an island" (To the Lighthouse 90)--is contrasted with "that fluidity out there" (To the Lighthouse 90), and the moment of stasis and safety that they experience renders distant and unreal the threatening, changeable world outside. The moment of communion is a structured one. The dinner party takes place within the confined structures of a room, the table itself is a unifying feature that brings together, with the help of the candle light, disparate elements into a unified group, and even the bowl of fruit is "a subsidiary symbol within the larger symbol: a small work of art within Mrs Ramsay's large work of art" (Batchelor 112). As with art, the success of this creation depends on an illusion: "here, inside the room, seemed to be order and dry land; there, outside, a reflection in which things wavered and vanished" (To the Lighthouse 90). An effect is created that is not a true reflection of the permanent nature of things, and yet, with all the people round the table joined in a "common cause" (To the Lighthouse 90), a permanence and stability is momentarily created. This constitutes a moment of communion that defies the reality of time passing. While this does not last, because the experience of communion, once felt, immediately passes, it does, as a momentary experience, also constitute a vision. Woolf admires the attempt to create a

moment of permanence, because the attempt to create stasis in the face of certain change is a valiant feature in the human attempt to give meaning to an often terrifying world. It is this triumph that Rhoda perceives. In The Waves, it is not only Bernard, the phrase-maker, who understands the importance of the attempt to make a structure in the way in which art does. Following the death of Percival, Rhoda describes, with images of shapes, the way in which a group of violinists has shown what exists beneath the "semblance" of things:

"An axe has split a tree to the core; the core is warm; sound quivers within the bark. 'Ah!' cried a woman to her lover, leaning from her window in Venice. 'Ah, ah!' she cried, and again she cries 'Ah!' She has provided us with a cry. But only a cry. And what is a cry? Then the beetle-shaped men come with their violins; wait; count; nod; down come their bows. And there is ripple and laughter like the dance of olive trees and their myriad-tongued grey leaves when a seafarer, biting a twig between his lips where the many-backed steep hills come down, leaps on shore.

"'Like' and 'like' and 'like' - but what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing? Now that lightning has gashed the tree and the flowering branch has fallen and Percival, by his death, has made me this gift, let me see 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 Waves 107)

The human attempt to create a meaning and a permanence which leads to the visionary experience provides a relief and meaning in the face of chaos and semblances.

CHAPTER ONE

Night and Day

Woolf's initial reading of "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" took place in 1924, five years after the first publication of Night and Day, and the critique that is contained in that essay of the Edwardian novel can be applied to this work, which is realist in form and, as such, is unlike the novels which it precedes. The most immediate and tangible differences between this and the later works are the novel's conventional structure, the linear narrative, the chronological description of events, and the emphasis that is placed on realist descriptions of social interaction, external appearance, and conversation. While the novel is often weighed down by these features, it nevertheless serves as an excellent introduction to Woolf's subsequent fiction and it also provides a general and well-articulated summary of the themes that dominate the rest of her work. Hence, it conveys the content of the fiction in general, while providing a formal model against which the other works can be juxtaposed. A reason for incorporating this novel, rather than Jacob's Room, into a critical study of Woolf's fictional prose is to illustrate, by comparison, why Woolf needed to make innovations in form if she was to render the processes of the mind, rather than just describe them. Jacob's Room, while undoubtedly the more skillful of the two texts, is formally more like Mrs Dalloway than like its predecessors, and it therefore cannot provide the same degree of contrast.

In "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown", the thrust of Woolf's attack centres on the necessity for the modern novelist to discard realist narrative forms, with their emphasis on that which is external to the inner self, and to favour, instead, the imitation of the internal processes of the mind. The essay thus serves as an introduction to, and explication of, the structuring of Woolf's later novels, the themes of which are generally "less concerned with outward realities than with the phenomenology of perception and expression" (Harper 5). While the themes of the later fiction have their genesis in both The Voyage Out and Night and Day, the traditional form and structure of these two novels, as well as their proliferation of realist detail, suggest that, at this early stage in her fictional writing, Woolf is still searching for a narrative perspective that is appropriate to her needs.

In Night and Day, the lives of four of the characters--Katharine Hilbery, Ralph Denham, William Rodney, and Mary Datchet--are interrelated, particularly due to a set of romantic connections that binds them, and much of the narrative describes their emotional circumstances as well as their daily routines. Intersecting the portrayal of these four young people are descriptions of the lives and attitudes of their families, colleagues, and social peers. This provides a vivid sense of the norms, views, and influences of the society in which these four characters find themselves, against which are set their attempts to define their personalities and inner worlds.

Throughout Woolf's fiction, a distinction is made between the life of the individual in society and the life of the mind and emotions. It is appropriate that this novel should have a title which metaphorically suggests a concern with two kinds of experience, that of the factual, social and external realm that day represents, and that of the inner visionary world that is characterised by night, as these together con-

stitute the typically dualistic nature of the experience of the human mind and are representative of the two realms that Woolf's fiction generally attempts to identify and to contrast. The novel explores social interaction and public behaviour but also offers an examination of what is not said in human conversation, and of what transcends the mundane interactions of daily life. Woolf emphasises the manner in which the characters seek truth in an inner visionary world, a world which is distinguishable and far from their externally-lived worlds. The book explores the possibilities of achieving individual fulfilment by means of creating links between the two areas of human existence that the private and social realms constitute.

Katharine, the heroine of the novel, is encumbered by convention. She is the granddaughter of Richard Alardyce, the nineteenth-century poet, and a member of a family that is informed by history and tradition. Due to the standing and wealth of her family, she has few responsibilities other than her household duties and the biographical research on her grandfather in which she and her mother are engaged. The main demands on her are social, necessities for which she has been well-prepared:

It was a Sunday evening in October, and in common with many other young ladies of her class, Katharine Hilbery was pouring out tea. Perhaps a fifth part of her mind was thus occupied, and the remaining parts leapt over the little barrier of day which interposed between Monday morning and this rather subdued moment, and played with the things one does voluntarily and normally in the daylight. But although she was silent, she was evidently mistress of a situation which was familiar enough to her, and inclined to let it take its way for the six hundredth time, perhaps, without bringing into play any of her unoccupied faculties. (1)

This quotation bears testimony to the fluidity with which Katharine performs her social duties, to the ease and familiarity with which she operates in her milieu, and to her knowledge of society's conventions and mores. However, it also emphasises the distance that exists between her social interactions and the inner processes of her mind. As she pours tea and remains silently attentive to her duties, the darting movements of her mind suggest the ability and tendency of such a faculty to strain to accommodate more than the literal or immediate.

To a large extent, Katharine is intolerant of, and restricted by, the demands that are made on her, and, from the outset of the novel, it is made clear that she is only superficially interested in her social duties--"she attended only with the surface skin of her mind" (5). Woolf is careful to emphasise the meaninglessness and repetitive quality of much of the social interaction that occurs in the novel, and large sections of the narrative are devoted to conversations and descriptions which reveal the extent to which life in society rotates around the unimportant or trivial: "Her aunt's stock of commonplaces, Katharine sometimes suspected, had been laid in on purpose to fill silences with, and had little to do with her private thoughts" (204). More interesting than this, however, is the revelation of the extent to which the demands of life in society are felt by her to be restrictive.

While it is true that Katharine's family history and class offer her a security, they also confine her attempts at self-examination and self-expression. At home, she is restricted to a life of tea-parties and to the writing of the biography which is her mother's passionate interest. Frustrated with the very slow progress that the biography is making and with her mother's temperament, Katharine splits her life and makes strict divisions between her responsibilities and her private pleasure so that, in public, she lives "an iceberg existence in which

most of her creative consciousness is submerged" (Cumings 340). She deliberately conceals her inner visionary world from those around her, just as she conceals her passion for mathematics, and one of the reasons for this is her realisation that the voices of her moral education, which articulate the guidelines for behaviour within the framework of her society, are incompatible with her inner reality:

Like all people brought up in a tradition, Katharine was able, within ten minutes or so, to reduce any moral difficulty to its traditional shape and solve it by the traditional answers. The book of wisdom lay open, if not upon her mother's knee, upon the knees of many uncles and aunts. She had only to consult them, and they would at once turn to the right page and read out an answer exactly suited to one in her position. The rules which should govern the behaviour of an unmarried woman are written in red ink, graved upon marble, if, by some freak of nature, it should fall out that the unmarried woman has not the same writing scored upon her heart. She was ready to believe that some people are fortunate enough to reject, accept, resign, or lay down their lives at the bidding of traditional authority; she could envy them; but in her case the questions became phantoms directly she tried seriously to find an answer, which proved that the traditional answer would be of no use to her individually. (299)

These traditional guidelines, ones which are privileged in the world of her society, demand that Katharine marry and, indeed, condemn and find unnatural any deviation from the accepted norm. William, for example, articulates this when he recommends to Katharine that a woman should, by necessity, marry:

"Certainly I should. Not for you only, but for all women. Why, you're nothing at all without it; you're only half alive; using only half your faculties; you must feel that for yourself." (57)

She, however, is intolerant of such a view and, when faced with the traditional morality of her parents and her peers, she is irritated and angered:

She was very angry, and yet impotent to give expression to her anger, or know with whom she was angry. How they talked and moralized and made up stories to suit their own version of the becoming, and secretly praised their own devotion and tact! No; they had their dwelling in a mist, she decided; hundreds of miles away - away from what? (113)

The conventions of behaviour in society with which Katharine is presented are far removed from her inner reality, and the narrative serves to highlight the distinctions between the two. Moody, describing the tenor of the first two novels, The Voyage Out and Night and Day, points out that in both novels "there is much direct criticism of the Victorian upper-middle-class family and social system" and "[a]t the same time against all that is set the struggle of the free and enlightened spirit, a Rachel Vinrace or a Katharine Hilbery, to achieve its freedom and a personal form of life" (5). Lying beneath the facade that Katharine socially presents is a private and solitary realm which allows her to ease her sense of maladjustment within her family and society, and which provides a balm that relieves her sense of the distance between her inner world and the society within which she operates.

For Katharine, there is a "perpetual disparity between the thought and the action" (325), between the inner workings of the mind and the life of the individual in society. She understands this opposition in terms of the opposition between day and night. She has an inner life, a

life of solitude, one which allows for her pursuit of her secret passion for mathematics and for her imaginary flights into the world of dreams. These two types of experience find their root in the same source. While it is true that her scientific interest lies in the mental rigour that mathematics demands, and while the lure of dreams is caused by their transformative power, the two are importantly linked by the way in which both mathematics and visionary dreams provide a glimpse of a fixed perfection which belies the flux and chaos of social interactions and personal entanglements. The narrative voice, when the fact of Katharine's love of mathematics is revealed, explains that "she preferred the exactitude, the star-like impersonality, of figures" (37) to the "confusion, agitation, and vagueness" (37) that she takes to characterise literature, for example. The biographical research on her grandfather that she grudgingly carries out is considered by her to be tedious because it demands a dedication to literature and limits the time she can spend enjoying mathematical precision. To her, literature is filled with a frustrating amount of "ambiguities" and "uncertainties" (Harper 63), whereas her search is for certainty and definition.

As with mathematics, the moments of vision that Katharine experiences answer this need as they are characterised by a stillness, where what is transitory to the human being is replaced by an experience of permanence. Given Katharine's preference for the "star-like impersonality" of figures, it is appropriate that one of her moments of vision should occur as she gazes at the stars:

Without knowing or caring more for Church practices than most people of her age, Katharine could not look into the sky at Christmas time without feeling that, at this one season, the Heavens bend over the earth with sympathy, and signal with immortal radiance that they, too, take part in her festival. Somehow, it

seemed to her that they were even now beholding the procession of kings and wise men upon some road on a distant part of the earth. And yet, after gazing for another second, the stars did their usual work upon the mind, froze to cinders the whole of our short human history, and reduced the human body to an ape-like, furry form, crouching amid the brushwood of a barbarous clod of mud. This stage was soon succeeded by another, in which there was nothing in the universe save stars and the light of stars; as she looked up the pupils of her eyes so dilated with starlight that the whole of her seemed dissolved in silver and spilt over the ledges of the stars for ever and ever indefinitely through space. Somehow simultaneously, though incongruously, she was riding with the magnanimous hero upon the shore or under forest trees, and so might have continued were it not for the rebuke forcibly administered by the body, which, content with the normal conditions of life, in no way furthers any attempt on the part of the mind to alter them. She grew cold, shook herself, rose, and walked towards the house.

(184-185)

This experience describes a disintegration of the boundaries of the self, and a merging of that being into a larger process, where differences are eliminated, and the pains and fears of the individual human life are reduced and put into relative perspective. As Cumings points out, "[t]he positive image of the pageant or procession, a dominant symbol of the continuity of life in Woolf's canon, is replaced by the negative primordial ape, but both must dissolve in the void of illuminated unity" (341). In this process of unification, opposites are resolved, flux is stilled, and what is impermanent and singular becomes part of a larger experience of connectedness. This constitutes a moment of being, a moment which provides the individual with relief from the burdens of

ordinary life, from the pressing cycles of clock-time, and from the changes that come with time passing.

While this novel is often comic in tone, particularly owing to the entanglements of the lovers, Woolf does portray life as being painfully transitory. After Katharine announces her intention to marry William Rodney, Ralph's vigorously full response to life is replaced by one that suggests the mutability of joy:

He could scarcely remember the look of them. His mind plunged lower and lower. Their marriage seemed of no importance to him. All things had turned to ghosts; the whole mass of the world was insubstantial vapour, surrounding the solitary spark in his mind, whose burning point he could remember, for it burnt no more. (148)

His response of despair and sadness affects his imagination, and so he sees a world filled with "the dun-coloured race of waters and the blank shore" (148). And yet, that imagination that has the power to so dampen his responses simultaneously allows him to maintain his passion, an emotion once reliant on those it was inspired by, but now able to exist autonomously:

... one may cast away the forms of human beings, and yet retain the passion which seemed inseparable from their existence in the flesh. Now this passion burnt on his horizon, as the winter sun makes a greenish pane in the west through thinning clouds. (148)

While Woolf's intention here is to emphasise the difficulty that individuals face in the process of making connections between themselves and others, she also aims to point out that it is the human imagination that provides a route into a visionary world which counters, and provides an alternative to, the fact of human pain. As Rosenthal indicates, "[t]he intersection of four lives, plunging people into a welter of perplexing and at times contradictory feelings, initiates the process of self-

discovery from which, in one form or another, the characters emerge with some sharpened sense of the limitations and possibilities of their lives" (69). The novel aims to explore the possibility of merging the realms of night and day, in order that the visionary moment can provide authentic relief, rather than mere escape from an often unbearable social world.

Lee points out that "[a]t the heart of the comic vacillations between different partnerships is the emphasis on the difficulty of knowing others and on the extreme obscurity and remoteness of the self. Underlying the comic cross-purposes and misunderstandings is the isolation of social beings" (Novels 65). Katharine is notable for her experience of this isolation. She regards human conversation as only partial communication, which a conversation with her cousin Henry makes clear:

On her side, directly Katharine got into his presence, and the sense of the stars dropped from her, she knew that any intercourse between people is extremely partial; from the whole mass of her feelings, only one or two could be selected for Henry's inspection, and therefore she sighed. (186-187)

Similarly, she feels the need to separate the worlds of solitude and society, and she cannot initially find a means of uniting them. Unable to recognise that, just as night and day are two parts of a single whole, her inner and outer selves are both a part of her, she longs to break free from her social demands and to be left to enjoy her solitude only. For her, the night world is the one time when the world of dreams and abstractions is allowed to take form.

The only truth which she could discover was the truth of what she herself felt - a frail beam when compared with the broad illumination shed by the eyes of all the people who are in agreement to

see together; but having rejected the visionary voices, she had no choice but to make this her guide through the dark masses which confronted her. She tried to follow her beam, with an expression upon her face which would have made any passer-by think her reprehensibly and almost ridiculously detached from the surrounding scene. One would have felt alarmed lest this young and striking woman were about to do something eccentric. But her beauty saved her from the worst fate that can befall a pedestrian; people looked at her, but they did not laugh. To seek a true feeling among the chaos of the unfeelings or half-feelings of life, to recognize it when found, and to accept the consequences of the discovery, draws lines upon the smoothest brow, while it quickens the light of the eyes; it is a pursuit which is alternately bewildering, debasing, and exalting, and, as Katharine speedily found, her discoveries gave her equal cause for surprise, shame, and intense anxiety.

(299-300)

The particular symbol that Woolf employs here of "a frail beam" is one which recurs in the later novels, most notably To the Lighthouse. In Night and Day it suggests Katharine's own "search for truth" (Lee, Novels 60), but as it gains meaning it comes to suggest the search for the resolution of the worlds of night and day. Initially, the moments of vision that occur in the private regions of the inner mind, and that are associated with the world of night and dreams, are used in the novel to explain, through contrast, the nature of the daylight world of fact and social interaction:

Here she sighed, and, putting the thought of marriage away, fell into a dream state, in which she became another person, and the whole world seemed changed. Being a frequent visitor to that world, she could find her way there unhesitatingly. If she had

tried to analyse her impressions, she would have said that there dwelt the realities of the appearances which figure in our world; so direct, powerful, and unimpeded were her sensations there, compared with those called forth in actual life. There dwelt the things one might have felt, had there been cause; the perfect happiness of which here we taste the fragment; the beauty seen here in flying glimpses only. No doubt much of the furniture of this world was drawn directly from the past, and even from the England of the Elizabethan age. However the embellishment of this imaginary world might change, two qualities were constant in it. It was a place where feelings were liberated from the constraint which the real world puts upon them; and the process of awakenment was always marked by resignation and a kind of stoical acceptance of facts. She met no acquaintance there, as Denham did, miraculously transfigured; she played no heroic part. But there certainly she loved some magnanimous hero, and as they swept together among the leaf-hung trees of an unknown world, they shared the feelings which came fresh and fast as the waves on the shore. (131)

Fleishman writes that "[a] number of characteristics of the Woolfian imagination may be discerned here: the fragmentariness of sensation in 'actual life' and the possibility of another way of perception, in which sensations are 'direct, powerful, and unimpeded'; the volitional character of this perceptual mode ('she could find her way there unhesitatingly') and the sense of freedom entailed ('feelings were liberated'); and the perceiver's tendency to credit his experience as revelatory ('there dwelt the realities of the appearances'), while acknowledging the necessary return to a 'stoical acceptance of facts'" (Critical 35). Certainly, the realm of Katharine's dreams stands quite apart from the realm of ordinary human communication and it allows for a

transformation in her experience and in her reality. The emphasis that this passage places on the changes that this type of visionary moment brings about stands in stark contrast to the description of the social constraints of the "real world". Importantly, the passage emphasises, in a Platonic way, the manner in which the "impressions" of the dream-world constitute the "realities of the appearances which figure in our world". The impressions of dreams are described as being more vivid, more powerful, than their equivalents in the ordinary world, equivalents which are normally understood as reality. However, despite the intensity of these dream-like appearances, the moments of vision are quickly shattered as the external world impinges on them:

But the sands of her liberation were running fast; even through the forest branches came sounds of Rodney moving things on his dressing-table; and Katharine woke herself from this excursion by shutting the cover of the book she was holding, and replacing it in the bookshelf. (131)

In her later fiction, Woolf suggests that it is a human structure, like art, that provides the consolation that soothes the fearful human apprehension that all relief is fleeting and that the transient nature of life inevitably conquers all that appears to be permanent. In this novel, however, the balm is love. This is a novel that focuses on romantic love, and it suggests not only the comic absurdities of romantic entanglements but also the profundity of the experience of love, an experience that has a visionary dimension.

Katharine's attitudes to her future and to love are rather cynical at the outset of the novel. She can see only bondage ahead, either to marriage or to a continuation of life in the stultifying household in which she has been reared. Love is, for her, as remote from her daily world as her private visions are:

... at this moment they seemed terribly in keeping with her own conclusions, so that she took up her knitting again and listened, chiefly with a view to 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.

(204)

She considers her mother's marriage and that of her aunt to be uninteresting and passionless, and deduces from those examples, and from the evidence of the world around her, that passion is not possible in real terms, and that life is not happily satisfying. Any hopes that she has beyond this cynicism she dismisses as idealistic, and so she accepts William Rodney's offer of marriage. It is tempting to blame Katharine's lack of belief in love on William who is bland and rigid and unsuitable for her. However, her willingness to accept a marriage of convenience is what is revealing as she is unable to conceptualise a situation in which the world of her fantasies can play a part. Indeed, until she falls in love with Ralph Denham, she is painfully aware of the divide between the worlds of night and day:

Why, she reflected, should there be this perpetual disparity between the thought and the action, between the life of solitude and the life of society, this astonishing precipice on one side of which the soul was active and in broad daylight, on the other side of which it was contemplative and dark as night? Was it not possible to step from one to the other, erect, and without essential change? (325)

Her eventual ability to reconcile the disparate worlds of night and day is caused by her experience of love and hence by her acceptance of her

mother's point of view, one that she had not previously understood. Her changing attitudes to her mother during the course of the novel are revealing. She mostly finds her mother irritatingly vague and rather eccentric, and she is initially infuriated with her as the two of them work through the requirements of the writing of the Alardyce biography. Despite her pride in her heritage, she thinks the book a "wild dance of will-o'-the-wisps, without form or continuity, without coherence even" (35), and this description more or less coincides with her disparaging attitudes to literature in general and contrasts with the precise appeal of mathematics.

It is interesting to note that the biography is unfinished, and that, despite the "spells of inspiration" (32) that Mrs Hilbery feels, she is never able to write for more than "a few breathless moments" (32). The effect of her brilliantly worded and illuminating paragraphs that have piled up over the years is that they "produced a sort of vertigo" (33) as the perceptions that are articulated in them "flickered over the gigantic mass of the subject as capriciously as a will-o'-the-wisp, lighting now on this point, now on that" (32). Contained in this description is an articulation of the problem that Woolf suggests the modern novelist has to confront, as well as an implied answer as to why her own prose had to develop away from a realist style. The unfinished nature of the biography suggests that a writer cannot define a life, and it ties in with Woolf's perception in "Modern Fiction" that "[l]ife is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged" (The Common Reader 189). Failure will be inevitable for a biography that attempts to define a person, to describe the facts and details of that person's life, and to make a definitive comment on the nature of that person's personality. Instead, life is complex and shifting, and it is her intuition of this that makes Mrs Hilbery the erratic author that she is.

In keeping with Mrs Hilbery's attempts to create "nobly phrased" (32) and beautiful paragraphs is her ecstatic response to literature, and "[w]hereas Katharine concentrates on the tools necessary for writing in the present - supplying her mother with work schedules, paper, pens, and rubber bands - Mrs Hilbery prefers to search for inspiration among words from the past" (Wussow 66). Mrs Hilbery delights in the arts. She feels "bliss" (400) when Cassandra plays Mozart, she yearns for a young and contemporary writer who could make "you believe that life was *beautiful*" (400), and she connects poetry with feeling (409). She is particularly moved by Shakespeare, considering Stratford-on-Avon to be "the heart of the civilised world" (411). In an experience not unlike that of Mrs Ramsay at the end of the first part of To the Lighthouse, thoughts of Shakespeare "roused an emotion in her" and "a passion that would not have been unseemly in a pilgrim to a sacred shrine" (411). Art constitutes a structure within which emotion can play, and it therefore carries with it a duality of containment and freedom. Mrs Hilbery's ability to feel and relish these emotions, and to incorporate them into her way of being, makes her the opposite of Katharine. And so, it is significant that, when she returns from her visit to Stratford, she goes to see Katharine who stands up to embrace her. This embrace metaphorically suggests the degree to which Katharine is finally able to embrace what her mother stands for and believes in. Mrs Hilbery returns with flowers from Shakespeare's tomb and, strewing them on the floor as if "to indicate an act of dedication" (462), realises that Katharine is in love with Ralph. She tells Katharine of her own memory of love and, taking Katharine down a "long corridor of days" (465), asserts that "'love is our faith'" (465). The effect of this on Katharine is to make her realise that love is "a soothing word when uttered by another, a riveting together of the shattered fragments of

the world" (466). Love is, in other words, a vision that transforms one's world and grants life a coherence.

Katharine had had hints of this already. It was only when Ralph began to share her night world that she was able to associate her visions with her love for him, and was able to move towards the resolution of the distinctions between night and day. The novel makes clear that love is an act of imagination, that the apprehension of a loved one is allowed for through the visionary ability of the lover:

Ralph held the door open for her, and then stood with clasped hands in the middle of the room. His eyes were bright, and, indeed, he scarcely knew whether they beheld dreams or realities. All down the street and on the doorstep, and while he mounted the stairs, his dream of Katharine possessed him; on the threshold of the room he had dismissed it, in order to prevent too painful a collision between what he dreamt of her and what she was. And in five minutes she had filled the shell of the old dream with the flesh of life; looked with fire out of phantom eyes. He glanced about him with bewilderment at finding himself among her chairs and tables; they were solid, for he grasped the back of the chair in which Katharine had sat; and yet they were unreal; the atmosphere was that of a dream. He summoned all the faculties of his spirit to seize what the minutes had to give him; and from the depths of his mind there rose unchecked a joyful recognition of the truth that human nature surpasses, in its beauty, all that our wildest dreams bring us hints of.

Katharine came into the room a moment later. He stood watching her come towards him, and thought her more beautiful and strange than his dream of her; for the real Katharine could speak the words which seemed to crowd behind the forehead and in the

depths of the eyes, and the commonest sentence would be flashed on by this immortal light. And she overflowed the edges of the dream; he remarked that her softness was like that of some vast snowy owl; she wore a ruby on her finger. (136-137)

This passage makes clear the difference between the dream world and outer reality. Ralph initially fears that his dream of Katharine will prove to be too painfully wonderful when compared to the person herself. Indeed, there is a possible problem here. The individual imagination is powerful. It is a faculty that permits the experience and expression of transformative dreams, and its strength is attested to by the vividness of the visions that any one person has of any other. Yet, as dreams are internal constructions, it is inevitable that a real problem has to do with the gap that exists between the dream and the outer reality from which that dream finds its shape. As Ralph thinks of Katharine while he walks through London, he makes clear the issue:

... was the Katharine whom he loved the same as the real Katharine? She had transcended her entirely at moments; her skirt had blown, her feather waved, her voice spoken; yes, but how terrible sometimes the pause between the voice of one's dreams and the voice that comes from the object of one's dreams! (289)

However, to return to the initial passage, Ralph soon discovers that, in fact, Katharine in herself surpasses his fantasy of her. This is not to suggest that outer reality is more concretely real than dreams are. Rather, the passage asserts the notion that the world we commonly take to be real is largely a world of appearances: "they were solid, for he grasped the back of the chair in which Katharine had sat; and yet they were unreal" (136). It is the human dream that transforms reality, allows it to be richer than it normally is, to overflow the outer limits

of the dream experience. The dream allows for the enrichment of the individual's apprehension of the outside world, and of other people.

The similarity between Katharine's development and that of Ralph is that both are able to merge apparent opposites. Ralph is able to accept that his vision of Katharine is connected to the real person, just as Katharine is able to accept the existence of love and to know that her inner and outer worlds are related. These happy discoveries are not limited to the two lovers, though. William, so seemingly priggish, discovers joy in love, and his relationship with Cassandra offers him a taste of the transformative power of human emotion. Similarly, while Mary decides on a future which is dedicated to a cause, rather than to love, "[h]er vision of a society reformed by her energies takes her beyond herself and constitutes her final triumph" (Rosenthal 72). The emphasis in this novel therefore falls on the transformative power of the visionary experience. Visions take people beyond the surface limitations of life and allow for meaning and unity, and "[h]uman perspective is what creates order and wholeness, and what defends those perceptions against the threats of chaos" (Harper 72).

The focus of the development of Woolf's notion of the importance of vision falls on the necessity for the blending of opposites, rather than the separation of them. In a quotation which traces the development of both Ralph and Katharine, Lee suggests that an avoidance of the ordinary world is as dangerous and narrow as a life without dreams:

The inward effect of her bondage to social tradition is that she has come to resent the demands made on her inner life by other people; she dislikes having to be involved in "all that part of life which is conspicuously without order". Looking out of her window, she yearns, not for participation, but for space, darkness, silence, "the nothingness of night". So that, when the hero and

heroine approach each other, they are engaged not only in a mutual defiance of their vision of a world entirely dark, but also against Katharine's wariness of daylight communication. Their desire, and their task, is to fill both "night" and "day" with meaning by linking the two, jumping "this astonishing precipice on the one side of which the soul was active and in broad daylight, on the other side of which it was contemplative and dark as night". They attempt to actualise their daydreams. Both have existed, in the earlier part of the novel, in a dream world which seems to have no possible meeting place with reality. Ralph is obsessed by a mythical "Katharine", but even before her advent he had been prone to "strange voyages" of the mind, and has had to divide his life "rigidly" into "hours of work and those of dreams". Katharine, similarly, has been used to wandering in a dream world with an ideal lover.... (Novels 67-68)

It is the process of combining the two realms of night and day, of allowing for the fluid movement of the self between these two realms, that the novel traces. It is therefore appropriate that the novel ends with Katharine and Ralph leaving the dinner table, a symbol of social convention and communion, and walking out into the night where she holds "for one brief moment the globe which we spend our lives in trying to shape, round, whole, and entire from the confusion of chaos" (485). She is able to create a formal structure, one which keeps dissolution at bay in much the same way that the dinner party does, and she is able to do this in the dark night, thus uniting the realms of night and day.

It is in its preoccupation with the importance of dreams and visions that this novel displays its central role in the development of Woolf's prose. The human search for meaning, order, and stability is emphasised in this work, as is the transience of human hopes. The later

novels have a preoccupation with the structuring of art, and this interest emerges in this novel, particularly in Mrs Hilbery's cogitations on the biography, on poetry, and on Shakespeare in particular. The later works also emphasise the transformative power of love, an idea that is articulated here. However, Night and Day differs markedly from the novels that follow it, primarily because of its narrative form. As well as the chronology of events that occurs in this novel, and the rendering of social conversation and habits that is "very much in the style of the traditional novel of manners" (Harper 59), there is a largely omniscient narrative. This manner of writing is unlike the style of the later novels where the interior monologues allow for the rendering of the movement of the mind, the processes of which defy chronology due to memory, emotion, imagination, and often submerged associative links. Despite these differences between Night and Day and the later fiction, the novel provides an articulation of the ideas with which the rest of the prose is charged. Similarly, its form provides evidence of what Woolf breaks away from in her later writing. Just as Katharine is able to unite the worlds of night and day, Woolf displays, in her next works, her ability to unite form and content. In her later fiction, Woolf mimics the lack of definition that exists between thoughts, between the inner dreams of individuals and their social interactions, and between different individuals. The comparison between a passage from Night and Day and one from the last novel, Between the Acts, illustrates the distance that Woolf moved from this early realist mode:

Katharine stirred her tea, and seemed to speculate, so Denham thought, upon the duty of filling somebody else's cup, but she was really wondering how she was going to keep this strange young man in harmony with the rest. She observed that he was compressing his teacup, so that there was danger lest the thin china might cave

inwards. She could see that he was nervous; one would expect a bony young man with his face slightly reddened by the wind, and his hair not altogether smooth, to be nervous in such a party. (3)

Mrs Sands fetched bread; Mrs Swithin fetched ham. One cut the bread; the other the ham. It was soothing, it was consolidating, this handwork together. The cook's hands cut, cut, cut. Whereas Lucy, holding the loaf, held the knife up. Why's stale bread, she mused, easier to cut than fresh? And so skipped, sidelong, from yeast to alcohol; so to fermentation; so to inebriation; so to Bacchus; and lay under purple lamps in a vineyard in Italy, as she had done, often; while Sands heard the clock tick; saw the cat; noted a fly buzz; and registered, as her lips showed, a grudge she mustn't speak against people making work in the kitchen while they had a high old time hanging paper roses in the barn. (Between the Acts 20)

These two passages have elements in common. They both have two characters described in them, and in both instances there are physical actions taking place on the surface that do not coincide with the private thoughts simultaneously taking place. There are, however, revealing differences. In the first passage, there is a distance established between what Ralph believes Katharine is thinking, and what she is actually contemplating. Yet, the omniscient narrator, who is in a position to know what each character is thinking, does not illustrate the workings of the minds in question. In the case of Katharine, the narrator illustrates that her social duties are, indeed, so simple for her to carry out that she can let her thoughts stray safely away from the pouring of tea, and that the external appearance of a person can be contrary to the workings of the inner mind. However, the narrative here

merely summarises her thought processes, and thus does not suggest a sense of the "myriad impressions" (The Common Reader 189) which fall on the mind. The main focus in the narrative in Night and Day is on exact descriptions of people, places, and thoughts, and yet the workings of the mind defy exactness, as the second passage asserts. In the second passage, there is no attempt on the part of the narrative to make a general summary of thoughts. The omniscient narrative smoothly gives way to Mrs Swithin's mental processes and, by skipping through a succession of thoughts that tumble one on top of the other, the narrative asserts the fluid, shifting, quickly-moving nature of the human consciousness. This passage suggests the role that memory plays in the functioning of the human mind as Mrs Swithin's thoughts slip into a memory of "a vineyard in Italy", and it also emphasises the qualitative nature of time as experienced by the person. As Mrs Swithin cuts bread in a kitchen in England, the "purple lamps" of the vineyard in Italy are as real to her as the loaf in front of her. The breakdown of the prose at this point into fragments and images reflects the rapidly shifting nature of the human mind and imaginary process.

A notable distinction between the presentation of dreams and visions in this novel and that of the later novels is that the narrative of Night and Day draws a sharp line between the characters' experiences of day-to-day life and their internal mind processes. As Katharine dreams of "some magnanimous hero" (131), for example, she is lost in a world which is entirely removed from the room she is in. When she hears William moving things on his dressing-table, however, she is taken with a start back to the physical world. In this instance, the dream world and the real world do not intersect. In the later novels, however, the two realms are interfaced. A quotation from To the Lighthouse makes this clear:

She looked up over her knitting and met the third stroke and it seemed to her like her own eyes meeting her own eyes, searching as she alone could search into her mind and her heart, purifying out of existence that lie, any lie. She praised herself in praising the light, without vanity, for she was stern, she was searching, she was beautiful like that light. It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone, one leant to things, inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one; felt an irrational tenderness thus (she looked at that long steady light) as for oneself. There rose, and she looked and looked with her needles suspended, there curled up off the floor of the mind, rose from the lake of one's being, a mist, a bride to meet her lover.

(To the Lighthouse 59)

Mrs Ramsay's visionary experience at the end of this section is one which smoothly and almost imperceptibly develops out of her cogitations about the Lighthouse beam. The practical task in which she is engaged is not abandoned by the narrative--her knitting needles are described as being poised when she has her vision--and the Lighthouse beam, the external object which catalyses her thought processes, flashes in and out of view as the narrative progresses. Additionally, her thoughts about what is real, such as her thoughts about the light, are rendered together with her fantastical visions. Her visionary experience is rooted, therefore, in her day-to-day world of thought and perception. In Night and Day, however, these areas are separated out and, hence, the narrative fails to mimic the effect of the "incessant shower of innumerable atoms" (The Common Reader 189) that the mind receives. A realist narrative style, which focuses on the external world of society, conversation, and physical appearance, is limited by the need to des-

cribe the external dimensions of life precisely. What Woolf's later fiction does, however, is to resist summaries, and to render instead the darting, rapid, unpredictable movements of the mind.

CHAPTER TWO

Mrs Dalloway

Jacob's Room and Mrs Dalloway together show the development of Woolf's style away from the conventional structures of her first two novels and towards a technique which dominates the rest of her fictional work. In Mrs Dalloway, the interior monologues through which the action of the novel is described serve a variety of purposes. They allow for the break away from a single narrative voice, and, importantly, for the juxtaposition and connection of perspectives that the conventional narrative would normally separate. For example, while two lines from Cymbeline, "Fear no more the heat o' the sun,/Nor the furious winter rages", haunt Mrs Dalloway all day as she prepares for her party, the lines recur in the mind of Septimus Warren Smith and, as the lines imply both a fear of life and an apprehension of death as a release, it is implied that these responses are felt by both Clarissa and Septimus. There are clear connections made between Septimus and Clarissa throughout the novel to the point that the experiences of both run parallel to each other. They hear the same sounds, see the same sights, and they "share an anxiety over lack of feeling and a faith in the inviolable integrity of the individual soul" (Beattie 530). However, their responses to the fear also differ, as is shown by the novel culminating, on the one hand, in Mrs Dalloway's party which is celebratory and life-affirming, and, on the other, in the suicide of Septimus. This difference emphasises that two threads are woven through the texture of the novel: Septimus' and Clarissa's simultaneous progressions towards

death and life respectively. The difference also serves to emphasise Clarissa's ability to feel joy and to renew faith in the face of death and mutability. As Beattie suggests, if "Septimus is Clarissa's double, ... he fulfills the role by way of contrast rather than complement" (530). As Woolf wrote in her diary as the novel was germinating "... I adumbrate here a study of insanity and suicide; the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side..." (A Writer's Diary 77).

Septimus' emotional make-up is characterised by numbness. While this kind of psychological anaesthesia shrouds him from the brutality of his friend's death--"when Evans was killed, just before the Armistice, in Italy, Septimus, far from showing any emotion or recognising that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably" (76)--it is also the catalyst which prompts his decline into his experience of fear which leads to his isolation, his insanity, and, finally, his death:

When peace came he was in Milan, billeted in the house of an inn-keeper with a courtyard, flowers in tubs, little tables in the open, daughters making hats, and to Lucrezia, the younger daughter, he became engaged one evening when the panic was on him - that he could not feel.

For now that it was all over, truce signed, and the dead buried, he had, especially in the evening, these sudden thunder-claps of fear. He could not feel. (76)

His numbness is pervasive. Beauty, for him, is "behind a pane of glass" (77), his pleasure in sensory responses is impaired--"[e]ven taste ... had no relish to him" (77)--and yet, his mind, saturated as it is with terror and paranoia, is abnormally sensitive to sensory stimuli. This is affirmed in the juxtaposition of the responses that he has to an array of incidents in the London streets with those that Clarissa has.

It is primarily her trip through London that we follow during the single day in June in which the action of the novel takes place. As she journeys down Bond Street, she sees the car in which some important person is travelling, she hears a motor-horn, pauses to view the sky-writing which so absorbs the passers-by, and she pops in and out of shops, thinking all the time not only about this city, but also about the war, marriage, Bourton, her daughter Elizabeth, Miss Kilman, and so on. The contrast with Septimus reveals the degree to which his mind is a disturbed one. He frequently displays an inability to separate himself from the world around him, and, for him, the nature of the real world becomes dictated by his responses to it. In Regent's Park, for example, not only does he have to remind himself that the "shocks of sound" which jar him come from a motor-horn--"The world has raised its whip; where will it descend?" (11)--but he also understands that the sky-writing is conveying a message to him, a message which reveals the nature of what he lacks and yearns for:

So, thought Septimus, looking up, they are signalling to me. Not indeed in actual words; that is, he could not read the language yet; but it was plain enough, this beauty, this exquisite beauty, and tears filled his eyes as he looked at the smoke words languishing and melting in the sky and bestowing upon him in their inexhaustible charity and laughing goodness one shape after another of unimaginable beauty and signalling their intention to provide him, for nothing, for ever, for looking merely, with beauty, more beauty! Tears ran down his cheeks. (17-18)

As Harper points out, the qualitative difference between the two sets of responses is that, in Septimus' case, they show a mind "wholly dominated by an inner reality" (125). Clarissa is able to enjoy the social contact which is provided by parties, hospital visits, and conversations

whereas, as the novel progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that Septimus' preoccupations are self-centred. Eventually, his inner drama becomes a battle between himself and the cruelty and demands of the outside world:

Human nature, in short, was on him - the repulsive brute, with the blood-red nostrils. Holmes was on him. Dr. Holmes came quite regularly every day. Once you stumble, Septimus wrote on the back of a postcard, human nature is on you....

So he was deserted. The whole world was clamouring: Kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes. But why should he kill himself for their sakes? Food was pleasant; the sun hot; and this killing oneself, how does one set about it, with a table knife, uglily, with floods of blood, - by sucking a gaspipe? He was too weak; he could scarcely raise his hand. Besides, now that he was quite alone, condemned, deserted, as those who are about to die are alone, there was a luxury in it, an isolation full of sublimity; a freedom which the attached can never know. Holmes had won of course; the brute with the red nostrils had won. But even Holmes himself could not touch this last relic straying on the edge of the world, this outcast, who gazed back at the inhabited regions, who lay, like a drowned sailor, on the shore of the world. (81)

There is much, however, that links Septimus with Clarissa. Lee points out that "[t]he similarity in the way they [Clarissa and Septimus] respond to life leads the reader to feel that madness is an intensification or distortion of the method of perception that Virginia Woolf feels to be normal" (*Novels* 107). Furthermore, Beattie points out that, although Clarissa shows no signs of madness, "she does fear a death of the soul caused by lack of passion" and "[t]he memory of a time when she had been in a 'tower and left them blackberrying in the sun' and the

sight of her narrow bed with its tightly stretched sheets crystallize her fear and bring her close to Septimus' sense of numb isolation" (531). Additionally, the narrative treatment of the two is similar. By means of multiple shifts of perspective, the narrative emphasises the connections between Clarissa and the world around her. Through her consciousness we first see Peter Walsh, Sally Seton and Richard Dalloway and then, in turn, we see her through their eyes, the effect being something of a prism through which a multitude of colours glitters. Similarly, Septimus is portrayed to us both through his thoughts, and through the thoughts of his wife, and others, like Peter Walsh, who observe him. These shifts of view-point emphasise that there are different levels of existence that layer character.

The time constructions in the novel are also built on different levels. Woolf's working title, The Hours, indicates her preoccupation with the presentation and importance of time. In Mrs Dalloway, Woolf achieves the creation of a narrative that breaks away from the chronological mould of the previous novels, The Voyage Out and Night and Day, and which contains multiple chronologies which allow for the intermingling of past and present. In the novel, two types of time are described--the measured and sequential time of clocks, of which the repeated strikes of Big Ben remind us, and internal time which allows memories of thirty years ago to mingle with, and inform, current experience. The two types of time are juxtaposed and clocks serve as the call that pulls people back "to the burden of real time and place" (Lee, Novels 113). Indeed, "[t]he party is the climax to the tension between the two kinds of time in the novel. The strictly limited 'clock-time', covering just over twelve hours, and impressed on the reader ... at regular intervals, is combined with a continuous flowing of various consciousnesses (reflected by the fluid sentence structures) in which past,

present and future are merged" (Lee, Novels 111). However, clock time is not only a burden as, after Clarissa's apprehension of the joy that is part of life, she hears the clock strike and knows that she wants to return to the party, her affirmation of life and human communion. Time not only signals the passing of moments that emphasises the mutability of human life and the inevitability of death, but also functions as part of the vital processes of life.

In Mrs Dalloway, there is a tension between the inner self and the social self. The title first introduces and emphasises the social identity of its heroine and, from the outset we see public responses to Mrs Dalloway, such as those of the neighbours: "A charming woman, Scrope Purvis thought her (knowing her as one does know people who live next door to one in Westminster); a touch of the bird about her, of the jay, blue-green, light, vivacious, though she was over fifty, and grown very white since her illness." (1-2) However--and this is where Woolf begins to weave her subtle matrix--as Mrs Dalloway walks through Bond Street, we see her own perceptions regarding the divide between the personal and the public, which serve to contrast her own mental contemplations with those of her neighbours and hence to emphasise the division:

But often now this body she wore (she stopped to look at a Dutch picture), this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing - nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway. (7-8)

This kind of division is true for all the characters in the novel and is emphasised by Woolf through her constant creation of multiple and dif-

fering viewpoints. While we, for example, understand the conversation between Rezia and Septimus in the park to be painful and taut with his madness, Peter Walsh thinks them lovers "squabbling under a tree" (62). The distance between the reality of Septimus' dementia and the perception that he is just another young lover "having an awful scene" (62), as young lovers do, is marked. While Septimus is undoubtedly the most striking example of an isolated person, many of the characters in the novel share the experience of being cut off from their milieu, their friends, and, indeed, from themselves. Curiously, while Septimus is inescapably doomed to loneliness and is caught in a madness induced by the brutality of a society that does not understand him, it is he who "intuits in his madness the degree to which he is part of the larger process around him" (Rosenthal 91). Sitting on the park bench with Rezia he has a series of experiences that suggests the existence of "an impersonal realm in which everything is connected" (Rosenthal 92):

But they beckoned; leaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body, there on the seat, fanned it up and down; when the branch stretched he, too, made that statement. The sparrows fluttering, rising, and falling in jagged fountains were part of the pattern; the white and blue, barred with black branches. (18)

Men must not cut down trees. There is a God. (He noted such revelations on the backs of envelopes.) Change the world. No one kills from hatred. Make it known (he wrote it down). He waited. He listened. A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus, four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words how there is no crime and, joined by another sparrow, they sang in

voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death. (20)

These perceptions counter the fact of death, change and loss, and, despite their madness, they articulate a theme which is part of the novel's fibre. Walking towards Bond Street, Clarissa has a similar recognition of a universal process that means that death is merely an ending of the present moment:

Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? but that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself.

(6)

These moments of connectedness are not limited to Septimus and Clarissa. Peter Walsh, who is, in terms of his public persona, something of a failure--he is without a job, and is in need of a divorce, having fallen in love with a young woman--is nevertheless aware, when he sees the old woman singing near the tube, of something he shares with her. The sound of her singing is "a frail quivering sound, a voice bubbling up without direction, vigour, beginning or end" (70), and it seems to constitute an inarticulate jumble of expression:

ee um fah um so

foo swee too eem oo - (70)

However, the narrative affirms that the old woman's voice is like "the voice of an ancient spring spouting from the earth" (70-71) and, sounding like a "voice of no age or sex" (70), what it sings are words which tell of vanished love, and of the human experience of loss. J. Hillis Miller points out that "Woolf has woven into the old woman's song, partly by paraphrase and variation, partly by direct quotation in an English translation, the words of a song by Richard Strauss, 'Allerseelen,' with words by Hermann von Gilm" (190). He provides a translation which is worth quoting in full:

Place on the table the perfuming heather,
Bring here the last red asters,
And let us again speak of love,
As once in May.

Give me your hand, that I may secretly press it,
And if someone sees, it's all the same to me;
Give me but one of your sweet glances,
As once in May.

It is blooming and breathing perfume today on every grave,
One day in the year is free to the dead,
Come to my heart that I may have you again,
As once in May.

The images employed in the song appear in the narrative's description of what the old woman is singing of: "but in the course of ages, long as summer days, and flaming, she remembered, with nothing but red asters" (71); "she implored the Gods to lay by her side a bunch of purple heather" (71); "her lover, who had been dead these centuries, had

walked, she crooned, with her in May" (71). Furthermore, she verbalises sections of the song: "'look in my eyes with thy sweet eyes intently'" (72); "'give me your hand and let me press it gently'" (72); "'and if someone should see what matter they?'" (72). She is singing Strauss' song which tells of the one day in the calendar year when "the bereaved lover can hope that the beloved will return from the grave" (Miller 190). She sings of the experience of loss through death, and of the desire for connection with that which has been lost. It is a song of hope, and of appeal; one which emphasises the beauty of the world and the transformative power of love, and yet one which asserts the fact of death:

Through all ages - when the pavement was grass, when it was swamp, through the age of tusk and mammoth, through the age of silent sunrise - the battered woman - for she wore a skirt - with her right hand exposed, her left clutching at her side, stood singing of love - love which has lasted a million years, she sang, love which prevails, and millions of years ago, her lover, who had been dead these centuries, had walked, she crooned, with her in May; but in the course of ages, long as summer days, and flaming, she remembered, with nothing but red asters, he had gone; death's enormous sickle had swept those tremendous hills, and when at last she laid her hoary and immensely aged head on the earth, now become a mere cinder of ice, she implored the Gods to lay by her side a bunch of purple heather, there on her high burial place which the last rays of the last sun caressed; for then the pageant of the universe would be over. (71)

Her song is one that expresses the fact of human mortality, and yet one that suggests there is a connection between all people, and across all time. The song is a structure which gives a form to, and articulates

the nature of, the human condition and, while it does not deny the fact of change and mutability, it affirms a connection between all human beings in the experience of yearning for what is lost.

The novel incorporates a tension between the connections that link people and the private agonies of isolated individuals and their fears about mortality and mutability. The fact of connection does not, however, constitute an attempt to undermine the reality of individual agony, and particularly noted by Woolf are the effects of society on the individual. It is made clear by the narrative that Septimus' confidence and capacity for joy have been shattered by the war, that he is suffering from a condition akin to shell-shock. The implicit critique that Woolf is presenting of the effects of war goes hand in hand with her stinging parody of mental health services that she develops through her focus on two of its practitioners, Bradshaw and Holmes. However, it is neither of these indictments that dominates the novel but, rather, a focus on the ways people see, an exploration of points of view, and an examination not only of what the results of lack of human communion are, but also of what possibilities exist for transcendence in a world wracked by mutability.

Immediately following his morning visit to Clarissa, Peter Walsh walks through London and his journey ceases when he settles down on a bench in Regent's Park and falls asleep. At this point, the narrative is interrupted by the description of a solitary traveller's vision which Elizabeth Abel asserts is "loosely attached to Peter Walsh's dream" (42), but which transcends "through its generic formulation the limits of private consciousness" (42). This traveller looks up in the woods to see a giant figure made of "sky and branches" (49), and is surprised by the sensation of "extraordinary exaltation" (49) that he experiences. He sees the world around him transform, and he witnesses the dispensing

by that world of "charity, comprehension, absolution" (49). Abel claims that "the dream vision ... names the absence that haunts Mrs Dalloway" (42) and it seems clear that Woolf is, indeed, suggesting that it is visions which "proffer great cornucopias full of fruit to the solitary traveller" (49) who is everyone and who searches for generosity, understanding and forgiveness. These visions suggest that possibilities exist for the merging of distinctions, as do alternatives to life in the outside world:

Such are the visions which ceaselessly float up, pace beside, put their faces in front of, the actual thing; often overpowering the solitary traveller and taking away from him the sense of the earth, the wish to return, and giving him for substitute a general peace, as if (so he thinks as he advances down the forest ride) all this fever of living were simplicity itself; and myriads of things merged in one thing; and this figure, made of sky and branches as it is, had risen from the troubled sea (he is elderly, past fifty now) as a shape might be sucked up out of the waves to shower down from her magnificent hands compassion, comprehension, absolution. So, he thinks, may I never go back to the lamplight; to the sitting-room; never finish my book; never knock out my pipe; never ring for Mrs Turner to clear away; rather let me walk straight onto this great figure, who will, with a toss of her head, mount me on her streamers and let me blow to nothingness with the rest. (50)

The way in which the solitary traveller detects in sky and branches a giant maternal figure, and the manner in which he as a representative type of many is moved--"[s]uch are the visions which ... murmur in his ear like sirens lolloping away on the green sea waves ... or rise to the surface like pale faces which fishermen flounder through floods to

embrace" (49-50)--is very similar to the way in which Septimus detects a message to himself in the sky-writing:

... tears filled his eyes as he looked at the smoke words languishing and melting in the sky and bestowing upon him in their inexhaustible charity and laughing goodness one shape after another of unimaginable beauty.... (17-18)

An incident which makes the connection with Septimus clearer is the moment when he sees trees in Regent's Park beckoning to him--"... leaves were alive; trees were alive" (18). He, too, yearns for nothingness and oblivion. That Septimus should ultimately describe death as "an attempt to communicate" and cry out, in a curiously ambiguous way, "I'll give it you!" when he kills himself, suggests that death is not only a gift but also constitutes a revelation of the nature of his own soul, an entity which is shrouded by his madness. Clarissa's attitudes can be linked with these sentiments. She, like Mrs Ramsay in To the Lighthouse, recognises that "our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide" (135). As with all of Woolf's novels, it is what exists beneath the surface apparitions of the personality that is granted particular attention, and is seen as being more real than the immediately apparent. The difficulty is moving beyond the superficial, and Clarissa understands that it is in death that the unseen may perhaps be discovered, may perhaps survive. Her "horror of death" (135) may be strong, yet her recognition of facade and her knowledge that "these semblances ... had a hollowness; at arm's length they were, not in the heart" (154) allow her to meditate on and examine, and finally understand, the nature of human mortality. After her initial irritation that the Bradshaws, by announcing Septimus' suicide, have brought death into her party, she recognises that death is an "embrace" (163) and that there is sig-

nificance in Septimus' suicide. In a moment of epiphanic intensity, she understands that death is a way of resisting the attempts of others to mould one, of ensuring the integrity of the soul:

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; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death. (163)

This quotation reveals a sad paradox in the human condition: that the desired communication that is attempted through death is never wholly possible due to the loss of contact that death entails. Nevertheless, what is tangible is both Clarissa's degree of empathy for "the young man who had killed himself" (165) and also the similarities between their apprehensions of the meaning of death. Her ability to accept the message of the lines from Cymbeline comes about because of Septimus' death. And so, she hosts her party and brings people together in an experience of harmony and unity. Significantly, the ending of the novel emphasises her love of life and, as Beattie makes clear,

[b]oth Sally and Peter continue to be drawn to Clarissa because she connects them with a vitality they lack, with that delight in the process of living Clarissa has just tested against the claims of passion and intelligence. Peter's "terror," "ecstasy," and "extraordinary excitement" when a radiant Clarissa re-enters the drawing room indicate that he perceives her renewed faith in life and feels its power. (534)

Clarissa's entrance at the end of the novel affirms her presence--"For there she was" (172)--and, hence, her vitality, her aliveness. The two

threads of the novel take different paths finally, and so, alongside the fact of death, life stands, is seen, and serves as a transformative catalyst for the joy and communion that is a part of her social gathering that unites and connects a whole set of separate individuals. It is in this gathering that the possibilities that exist for human harmony and unity are finally realised. Clarissa creates, by means of her party, a structure that brings about a transformative experience of communion and order. She, like Mrs Ramsay in To the Lighthouse, is able to create a still moment of unity in the face of the chaos that is time passing. It is in this that she achieves her vision, one which affirms the greater processes of life, despite the fact of the private agonies of the individual.

CHAPTER THREE

To the Lighthouse

Towards the close of To the Lighthouse, James, Cam, and Mr Ramsay embark on their journey to the Lighthouse and, as they come close, James remembers how it appeared to him as a child, and his memory of it differs from what he sees now:

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. (177)

This mode of perception, where two differing viewpoints are simultaneously acknowledged as accurate representations of reality, and where no single viewpoint can encompass the reality of the object being regarded, is one which typifies the novel as a whole. Woolf makes the point again and again in her presentation of character where the individual identity is presented as being elusive and insubstantial, determined partly by social environment and relationships and partly by memory which entails that the present moment is moulded by what is past and that what is past is re-determined by the present. This active inter-penetration of past and present causes constant re-arrangements of

the personality, and yet it also makes clear that the identity is a continuous entity. Similarly, the personality works on two planes--on a personal level determined by dreams and the imagination, and on a social and physical level which, for the most part, is presented as an arena characterised by appearance and change. The novel follows the movements of the mind and not those of the outside world, and so "[t]he significant action of the novel is ... firmly located in the sphere of mind" (Moody 30). By tracing the movements of memory and thought which tend to deny logic, consistency, and chronology, Woolf structurally and linguistically emphasizes that nothing is only one thing. Similarly, what is conventionally called the real world is affected by the complexities of emotions, just as the individual consciousness is located within--and to an extent limited by--what is external to it. This interplay between inner and outer is constant, with the exception of a few heightened moments of epiphany where the individual consciousness transcends its usual limitations and the limitations of the external world.

As a result of the diverse nature of the personality, the presentation of character in the novel emphasises the complex, the shifting. Mr Ramsay, for example, initially appears to be uncompromising, egocentric and determined on his quest for objective truth. The novel opens with Mrs Ramsay's assurance to her young child James that, given clement weather, he will be able to travel to the Lighthouse the following day. Hers are words which convey an "extraordinary joy" (3) to the child, a joy, however, soon crushed by Mr Ramsay's pragmatic statement that "it won't be fine" (4), a comment and attitude set in opposition to Mrs Ramsay's soothing words. His is the voice of objective truth and he is right as the wind is blowing due west, "the worst possible direction

for landing at the Lighthouse" (5). However, what is emphasised is not only his refusal to compromise but also his pride in his own accuracy:

What he said was true. It was always true. He was incapable of untruth; never tampered with fact; never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being, least of all his own children, who, sprung from his loins, should be aware from childhood that life is difficult; facts uncompromising; and the passage to that fabled land where our brightest hopes are extinguished, our frail barks flounder in darkness (here Mr Ramsay would straighten his back and narrow his little blue eyes upon the horizon), one that needs, above all, courage, truth, and the power to endure. (4)

His adherence to facts is satirised by Woolf later in the novel as he strains to move beyond the letter Q on his alphabet of the mind. He likens the journey through to Z to an arduous expedition which requires "endurance and justice, foresight, devotion, skill" (31), and himself to a toiling leader all the time preoccupied with the impermanence of fame and the possibilities of failure. Satirised, too, is his acolyte Charles Tansley who is one of the young men who follow the Ramsays to the Hebrides in search of Mr Ramsay's advice on a dissertation or an academic future. As Mrs Ramsay notes, "[a]ll these young men parodied her husband ... he said it would rain; they said it would be a positive tornado" (14). Tansley admires, praises and imitates Mr Ramsay and demonstrates a similar adherence to the belief in the importance of fact and academic success. This, however, is not all they have in common. They both crave sympathy and demand attention. The children object to Charles Tansley because of his egocentricity:

When they talked about something interesting, people, music, history, anything, even said it was a fine evening so why not sit out

of doors, then what they complained of about Charles Tansley was that until he had turned the whole thing round and made it somehow reflect himself and disparage them, put them all on edge somehow with his acid way of peeling the flesh and blood off everything, he was not satisfied. (7)

And it is with much the same attitude that James regards the demands of his father which call on Mrs Ramsay's capacity for sympathy and care:

But his son hated him. He hated him for coming up to them, for stopping and looking down on them; he hated him for interrupting them; he hated him for the exaltation and sublimity of his gestures; for the magnificence of his head; for his exactingness and egotism (for there he stood, commanding them to attend to him); but most of all he hated the twang and twitter of his father's emotion which, vibrating round them, disturbed the perfect simplicity and good sense of his relations with his mother.... There he stood, demanding sympathy. (34)

Mr Ramsay's desire to be "assured of his genius" (35) and to be "taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed, to have his senses restored to him, his barrenness made fertile" (35) reaches out for relief, beyond the soothing assurances of Mrs Ramsay, to the children and to Lily Briscoe. Lily's initial irritation with Mr Ramsay is akin to that of James. She regards his gesticulations as wild and intrusive as he rushes through the garden quoting "The Charge of the Light Brigade". She cannot endure the idea of him looking at her painting and thinks him "tyrannical" and "unjust" (43), a presence that is self-absorbed and demanding. She is aware of his demands on Mrs Ramsay--"he wears Mrs Ramsay to death" (23)--and she also feels invaded by him. He is never more insistently intrusive than after the death of Mrs Ramsay: "His immense self-pity, his demand for sympathy poured and spread itself

in pools at her feet...." (146). To her, his approach seems like the coming of "ruin" and "chaos" (141) and she wants "to escape his demand on her" (140) knowing that "[t]hat man ... never gave; that man took. She, on the other hand, would be forced to give" (143). Indeed, the nature of his self-indulgence and vanity is stressed by Woolf:

Sitting in the boat he bowed, he crouched himself, acting instantly his part - the part of a desolate man, widowed, bereft; and so called up before him in hosts people sympathizing with him; staged for himself as he sat in the boat, a little drama; which required of him decrepitude and exhaustion and sorrow (he raised his hands and looked at the thinness of them, to confirm his dream) and then there was given him in abundance women's sympathy.... (158)

However, just as Mrs Ramsay recognises complexities in Charles Tansley's character--"[y]et he looked so desolate; yet she would feel relieved when he went; yet she would see that he was better treated tomorrow; yet he was admirable with her husband; yet his manners certainly wanted improving; yet she liked his laugh...." (107-108)--so too is Lily's opinion of Mr Ramsay ambivalent. She may feel that his gaze discolours the sunny grass in front of him, but she also admires him and his marriage, praises his intellect, and yearns for his approval. Interspersed with her irritation and anxiety about his stifling and demanding proximity is her belief that he is honest and has the mind of a philosopher. Her two reactions to him constantly conflate:

A bit of a hypocrite? she repeated. Oh no - the most sincere of men, the truest (here he was), the best; but, looking down, she thought, he is absorbed in himself, he is tyrannical, he is unjust; and kept looking down, purposely, for only so could she keep steady, staying with the Ramsays. Directly one looked up and saw them, what she called "being in love" flooded them. (43)

In the final section of the novel, her sympathy and admiration well uncontrollably in her as he bends over his boots, noticing that the laces are undone. She praises his boots and recognises in response a change in him from the "lion seeking whom he could devour" (149) that alarmed her and "made her pull her skirts about her" (149):

... there was that sudden revivification, that sudden flare (when she praised his boots), that sudden recovery of vitality and interest in ordinary human things, which too passed and changed (for he was always changing, and hid nothing) into that other final phase which was new to her and had, she owned, made herself ashamed of her own irritability, when it seemed as if he had shed worries and ambitions, and the hope of sympathy and the desire for praise, had entered some other region.... (149)

The nature of Lily's ambivalent response has a central importance in this novel as it points not only to the different strains at work in character but also to the infinite shifts that take place within the spectrum of forces in the personality. Cam displays a similar change in attitude on the journey to the Lighthouse and, despite her compact with her brother, feels real love for her father. Both she and James express a desire to give to, and not to shy away from, this man--"[a]sk us anything and we will give it you" (197)--and hence mirror Lily's response. Importantly, this change occurs during the journey to the Lighthouse and symbolically allows for the arrival there. Similarly, it is not until Lily understands Mr Ramsay and traces his journey to the Lighthouse that her painting can be finished and the two masses in the picture united. The two opposing masses suggest two opposing views of reality, and so, when the final stroke is made, those two views are comprehended, related and united. The painting therefore carries the force of James' understanding that "nothing was simply one thing" (177), that implies

the necessity of incorporating two different ways of seeing in the process of understanding reality.

It is Mrs Ramsay who, from the first, understands the complexities at work in the personality, who understands the real self to be "a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others" (58) which allows her to feel she can become one with all things. Her irritation with Mr Ramsay is balanced by her love for him and her acknowledgement of the difference between herself and her husband, and "[i]n her ability to adore Ramsay one minute and despise him the next, Mrs Ramsay exemplifies perfectly the truth about the fluidity of human feelings which is so crucial to the novel's meaning" (Rosenthal 112). It is through her that we come to understand Mr Ramsay. This transformative power of Mrs Ramsay functions to emphasise the importance of her "as the source and creator of life, vitality, community, love (she is sometimes described by references to the fecundity of the sea and in images of the fountain and the fruit tree - images that suggest a life and vitality drawn from underground sources)..." (Whitehead 407). Her impulse is to draw people together in a communion which momentarily defies the insistent and terrifying passing of time of which she is so acutely aware, and which is so terrifyingly portrayed in "Time Passes". Early in the novel, as she sits looking for a picture of a rake or a mowing-machine for James to cut out, she listens to the sound of the sea which, in keeping with the dualities that constitute the nature of reality, is double-edged in its effect on her:

... the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach, which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts and seemed consolingly to repeat over and over again as she sat with the children the words of some old cradle song, murmured by nature, "I am guarding you - I am your support", but at other times sud-

denly and unexpectedly, especially when her mind raised itself slightly from the task actually in hand, had no such kindly meaning, but like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life, made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea, and warned her whose day had slipped past in one quick doing after another that it was all ephemeral as a rainbow - this sound which had been obscured and concealed under the other sounds suddenly thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror. (14-15)

The language in this passage emphasises not only the mutability that is a part of life, but also the drumming insistence with which it pounds. It is Mrs Ramsay's awareness of the frailty of life which makes her create the dinner party later that evening, the result of which is the achievement of "a permanence in people's minds which belies their insubstantiality" (Rosenthal 108). At the dinner she orders the lighting of candles which seem to unite the party and make the dining-room radiate light like the Lighthouse in the bay and promise safety from the outside.

Whitehead, dealing with an incident that occurs soon after the dinner party, explores Mrs Ramsay's attempts to create illusions of safety. In order to quell a quarrel between her two youngest children, Mrs Ramsay wraps her shawl around the source of the fight, a boar's skull that is nailed to the wall. As Whitehead points out, this action functions as the creation of the dinner party did--it serves to conceal "the knowledge of death, terror, and dissolution behind a veil - in this case the illusion of a beautiful mountain, in the other the illusion of 'making a party together in a hollow, on an island'" (402)--but both instances are examples of the way in which she creates an illusion by means of a structure. Mrs Ramsay feels that veils need to be

deliberately drawn, and her desire to love and protect in this way is as conscious as the careful constructions which characterise Lily's paintings. She too is an artist and it is no surprise that the shawl she hangs over the skull "had earlier been draped over the edge of a picture frame" (Whitehead 404), and is later worn by Lily as she paints. However, while the veils that she draws are presented as being necessary for human communion and calm they "only thinly and precariously" (Whitehead 403) cover the destructive forces beneath them. The point is made during the "Time Passes" section when Mrs Ramsay's shawl unfolds, and hence the fact of mutability is uncovered, as each death is revealed to us in brutally clinical parentheses. After the death of Mrs Ramsay, "one fold of the shawl loosened and swung to and fro" (124) and, following Prue's death in childbirth, "another fold of the shawl loosened; there it hung and swayed" (126). This asserts that the human effort to keep chaos and dissolution at bay is ultimately beaten by the insistence of time passing. However, to return to the incident with the children, Whitehead shows that, while Mrs Ramsay does use the shawl as a veil in order that Cam can sleep, she also reassures James, who wants to see the skull, that it is still there, and she appeals to him to employ his imagination in order to see it (402). This duality in her impulses recurs through the novel. Indeed, as Whitehead points out, in spite of her desire to create unity, it is Mrs Ramsay, of all the characters, who is "the one most aware of and attracted by the all-pervading darkness that lies behind the veils of life" (407). She identifies herself with the Lighthouse beam, her unifying creations are described by images of light, and, like the Lighthouse, she provides clarity and a centre which gives the characters direction. And yet she is a "wedge-shaped core of darkness" (58) and it is she who desires to be "at one with the unknown, mysterious darkness that is veiled by the world of our fleeting

appearances" (Whitehead 408). At the dinner party, Lily notices "the bright mask-like look of faces seen by candlelight" (91), but it is Mrs Ramsay who draws back these veils that hide the others as she listens to their conversation in order that she can see the unity and flickering beauty that resides in the silence and shadowy darkness behind:

Now she need not listen. It could not last she knew, but at the moment her eyes were so clear that they seemed to go round the table unveiling each of these people, and their thoughts and their feelings, without effort like a light stealing under water so that its ripples and the reeds in it and the minnows balancing themselves, and the sudden silent trout are all lit up hanging, trembling. So she saw them; she heard them; but whatever they said had also this quality, as if what they said was like the movement of a trout when, at the same time, one can see the ripple and the gravel, something to the right, something to the left; and the whole is held together; for whereas in active life she would be netting and separating one thing from another; she would be saying she liked the Waverley Novels or had not read them; she would be urging herself forward; now she said nothing. For the moment she hung suspended. (99)

The complexity and duality at the heart of her presentation make clear that Mrs Ramsay, like an artist, understands and creates meaning through the balance of opposites, and her creations, like artworks, momentarily hold at bay the insistent onslaught of mutability. Mr Bankes, watching Mrs Ramsay tell the story of the fisherman and his wife to James, understands her action to be a means by which "barbarity was tamed, the reign of chaos subdued" (44). At the dinner party, the communion of people round the table allows for the feeling that in the room there is "order and dry land" (90) and Lily, attempting to resist acting in a

dutiful and appropriately communicative fashion, recognises the effect that a resistance to the ordering would have:

"Will you take me, Mr Tansley?" said Lily, quickly, kindly, for, of course, if Mrs Ramsay said to her, as in effect she did, "I am drowning, my dear, in seas of fire. Unless you apply some balm to the anguish of this hour and say something nice to that young man there, life will run upon the rocks - indeed I hear the grating and the growling at this minute. My nerves are taut as fiddle strings. Another touch and they will snap" - when Mrs Ramsay said all this, as the glance in her eyes said it, of course for the hundred and fiftieth time Lily Briscoe had to renounce the experiment - what happens if one is not nice to that young man there - and be nice.

(85)

Mrs Ramsay affirms that her creation of a moment of communion is an artistic endeavour when she links herself "with Lily, the painter, and Augustus Carmichael, the poet, ... [and] thinks 'one after another, she, Lily, Augustus Carmichael, must feel, our apparitions, the things you know us by, are simply childish. Beneath it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is unfathomably deep; but now and again we rise to the surface and that is what you see us by'" (Whitehead 408). These three have a route to knowledge which stands in contrast to the alphabetical progression of Mr Ramsay's journey towards factual truth, and yet, this other way of understanding needs to be incorporated into the artistic vision in order for it to be complete. And so, to reiterate, Lily completes the painting, and the Lighthouse is reached, only when Mr Ramsay is recognised and understood in his human multi-facetedness. Indeed, the fact that James is able to acknowledge that the Lighthouse is more than one thing implies that the "stark" nature of Mr Ramsay has been given equal status to the "misty", less austere, attitude of Mrs Ramsay.

Significantly, Woolf's rendering of the journey to the Lighthouse incorporates descriptions of what the view is from the boat, as well as that from the land. The emphasis in this process is on perception and, indeed, much of the imagery of the novel focuses on shapes and ways of seeing things. As Lee points out, this begins with James cutting out objects from the Army and Navy Stores catalogue, and continues with the changing forms of the Lighthouse and the shapes of Lily's picture. Similarly, as Lee indicates, Mrs Ramsay sinks into a "wedge-shaped core of darkness" (58), is represented by the shape of an august "dome" (48), and admires the form of the sonnet. Mr Ramsay sees letters stretching out in front of him and the island seems to be "shaped something like a leaf stood on end" (179) (Intro xxi). In other words, the narrative is constructed to centre on certain shapes, emphasising the importance of different ways of looking, as when "Lily looks along Mr Bankes's 'beam' and adds it to 'her different ray', or when Mrs Ramsay observes Mr Carmichael looking at the fruit bowl: 'That was his way of looking, different from hers. But looking together united them'" (Lee, Intro xxii). Indeed, the novel ends with Lily's affirmation: "Yes ... I have had my vision" (198) which implies that the novel, with its emphasis on different ways of perceiving, has moved towards the incorporation of Lily's quest for a form that can meaningfully render an answer to "the old question which traversed the sky of the soul perpetually" (153). During the construction of her painting, Lily becomes aware that there is no "great revelation" (153) that provides an answer to this question about "the meaning of life" (153), but rather that there are "daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark" (154), one of which is the "making of the moment something permanent" (154) that an artistic construction allows for. The fact that the novel ends with Lily saying "I have had my vision" (198), rather than "I have my

vision", suggests that this illumination is a momentary one, one that inevitably passes. Nevertheless, in that moment there is clarity and permanence.

The visionary moments that the dinner-party and the painting allow for provide an answer to the questions that the novel poses about identity and perception. In "Time Passes", the questions are posed anonymously. There is "an inversion of the focus on people ... to a vaster, more impersonal frame of reference" (Hoffman 189), which is achieved by the change of subject away from the individual to the forces of nature. This section of the book "counterbalances the first and third sections which evoke the responses of the human imagination ... with nature as it is revealed to the imagination" (Whitehead 414). As a narrative device, the counter-balancing suggests the extent to which Woolf disrupts literary expectation, as it is a "savage break of narrative down the middle of the book" (Lee, Intro xxxvii) which, "like Lily's line down the middle of her painting, is a break with literary tradition" (Lee, Novels xxxvii). The narrative switch brings about the incorporation of a different perspective, an important change because it emphasises "the anonymity of all living creatures, [and hence asserts] a level of meaning antithetical to the thrust of the novel which works to establish the individuality of its characters" (Hoffman 190):

... the little airs mounted the staircase and nosed round bedroom doors.... And so, nosing, rubbing, they went to the window on the staircase, to the servants' bedrooms, to the boxes in the attics; descending, blanched the apples on the dining-room table, fumbled the petals of roses, tried the picture on the easel, brushed the mat and blew a little sand along the floor. At length, desisting, all ceased together, gathered together, all sighed together; all together gave off an aimless gust of lamentation to which some door

in the kitchen replied; swung wide; admitted nothing; and slammed to. (120-121)

The narrative emphasises the relentless progression of time, and the indifference that the passing of the seasons has to human life and its comforts. Juxtaposed, and interspersed with, the description of the relentlessness of time passing, are the questions that the visionary asks about the meaning of existence. The narrative suggests that there is an answer which allows the visionary to be "warm in the frost" and to have "comfort in the desert" (125), and that that answer is contained in the beauty of the natural realm, particularly in spring, and in the way in which "beauty outside mirrored beauty within" (127). This natural realm, like the characters of the novel, is also seen from different perspectives and "Time Passes" reveals both its terrifying aspects and its beauty. The waves are not only frightening in their drumming insistence of the presence of mutability and the inevitability of change but also lulling and comforting. Similarly, nature is presented as being both chaotic in its destruction and yet beautiful:

In spring the garden urns, casually filled with wind-blown plants, were gay as ever. Violets came and daffodils. But the stillness and the brightness of the day were as strange as the chaos and tumult of night, with the trees standing there, and the flowers standing there, looking before them, looking up, yet beholding nothing, eyeless, and so terrible. (128-129)

Nature is simultaneously alien and harmonious and something which, in its beauty, seems to the individual to be as gentle as the impulse that exists in a character like Mrs Ramsay to unite and protect:

... the spring with her bees humming and gnats dancing threw her cloak about her, veiled her eyes, averted her head, and among pass-

ing shadows and flights of small rain seemed to have taken upon her a knowledge of the sorrows of mankind. (126)

However, as the word "seemed" suggests, there is an illusion in this. The powerful beauty of this passage is undermined by the intrusive and sudden description of Prue's death which follows it, and which serves to emphasise the persistence of nature's destructive power and the presence of death behind all things. Life is presented as being rooted in death, and the dream that the visionary has of "sharing, completing, finding in solitude on the beach an answer" (128) seems merely a "reflection in a mirror" (128). Despite the serenity and harmony of nature, and the fact that "beauty offers her lures, has her consolations" (128), the presence of death and loss and change is continual: "There was the silent apparition of an ashen-coloured ship for instance, come, gone; there was a purplish stain upon the bland surface of the sea as if something had boiled and bled, invisibly, beneath" (127). Despite the human attempts to veil transience by custom, communion, or creation, and while nature appears to slumber through spring and summer, with a terrifying inevitability there come "ominous sounds like the measured blows of hammers dulled on felt" (127). These sounds "further loosened the shawl" (127) and "cracked the tea-cups" (127). The shawl has been used by Mrs Ramsay as a veil in an attempt to cover the fact of mutability, and the cups operate as an image of human community. The changes that time brings to them both imply the indifference with which nature treats the human effort to keep dissolution at bay.

As the narrative in "Time Passes" progresses, with its emphasis on the relentless processes of change, which constitute so over-powering a phenomenon that the facts of the human deaths are relegated to parentheses, a detail about a new book of poetry that Mr Carmichael has brought out is added, also in parentheses. The book has enjoyed great

success, and the narrative offers an explanation: "The war, people said, had revived their interest in poetry" (128). During a time like war, when the fact of human mortality is constantly emphasised, a renewed interest in poetry suggests that it is in art that people find their consolation. This is emphasised again and again in the novel. For example, when Mrs Ramsay sits by a window and reads after the dinner party, "the window ..., the sonnet that she reads, Lily's painting, the text of the novel - all are structural equivalents of a sort: they frame experience and so turn it into art" (Hoffman 191). At the end of the first section of the novel, the shape of the sonnet is emphasised--"And there it was, suddenly entire shaped in her hands, beautiful and reasonable, clear and complete, the essence sucked out of life and held rounded here - the sonnet" (112)--and within its form lies a distilled meaning. Mrs Ramsay reads the last lines of the sonnet--"Yet seem'd it winter still, and, you away,/ As with your shadow I with these did play" (113)--and they describe absence. Nevertheless, she finds a beauty and pleasure and meaning in the sonnet. This mirrors the function of the novel where the splendour of a vision is first evoked and then turned inside out and shown to be ephemeral, as in "Time Passes" when the visionary walks on the beach asking questions about permanence and reality--"What am I? 'What is this?'" (125). The chaos and terror of nature surround him, and they suggest that all dreams of meaning merely constitute a "surface glassiness" (128). Nevertheless, the pacings of the solitary visionary are balanced by Mr Carmichael's solitary vigil by the light of a candle. The presence of this light and the book that Mr Carmichael is reading are implied answers to the visionary's questions. In the face of certain destruction, the structure of art is an attempt to maintain a fabric and create a permanence. Importantly, it is Mr Carmichael who, in the third part of the novel, "provides the guiding

presence, whose instructive company allows for the mediation of experience into art" (Hoffman 194).

It is interesting to note the way in which Lily's movement away from traditional artistic representation mimics Woolf's own innovations in her prose forms in this work. Lily constructs her canvas around shape and colour, rather than around realistic "likeness" (48). Mr Banks, expressing interest in the "triangular purple shape" (48) that indicates a mother and child, admits that his preference is for traditional representation of the kind used in his painting of cherry trees in blossom on the banks of the Kennet. It is this kind of representation that Woolf moves away from, and so she, like Lily, centres on shapes, on "the relations of masses, of lights and shadows" (49). This, however, requires invention, and leads to problems for which no earlier form of representation can provide the answer. Lily faces the problem of how to connect the two masses in her painting; she eventually does so with a line through the middle. Woolf uses "Time Passes" as a way of connecting the two masses of her novel, "The Window" and "The Lighthouse". In its focus on the non-human, this solution constitutes as marked a break from tradition as does Lily's purple shape, and what links the impulse behind the changes in both instances is the desire to "fix the precise nature of reality" (Rosenthal 113), to make it permanent, and to do so in a form that is true to content. The fixing that is required stands in stark contrast to the flow of time that is traced in "Time Passes", and can be compared to Mrs Ramsay's desire to "make of the moment something permanent" (154), to make "'Life stand still here'" (154). Because of the merciless flow of time, all permanence that human structuring attempts, whether through art or writing or the holding of a dinner-party, is necessarily transient. The dinner party passes, the painting could be confined to a dusty attic,

yet it is the impulse to create permanence and the achievement of the visionary moment that goes into the completion of human ordering that Woolf celebrates in this novel.

Order leads directly to harmony in To the Lighthouse. A "sudden exhilaration" (91) is felt as the candles round the table are lit and the dinner-party begins, for example. Significantly, a harmony within the Ramsay family occurs at the end of the novel as they reach the Lighthouse, a moment that coincides with the completion of Lily's painting. In this ending of the novel, Woolf's themes dovetail. James is able to assert that "nothing was simply one thing" (177), Lily is able to solve her structural puzzle and to have her vision, and the Ramsay children are able to see in their father a goodness, and to feel for him a compassionate love. As this series of resolutions occurs, it is appropriate that so much of the narrative should be devoted to memories and mental pictures of Mrs Ramsay, as she was able to make sense of opposition, to both love and be angry with her husband, to create moments of permanence in human life that were as real as artistic creations. Importantly, the memories of her, and her presence in the minds of others during the third section of the novel, assert Woolf's understanding that contained within the present is the past. Just like the third stroke of the Lighthouse, with which she feels an identification, she is a light that stretches out far beyond herself, and that acts as a guide.

While Woolf was quick to point out that she "meant *nothing*"¹ by the Lighthouse, it has an intended significance in the novel as it is looked at by so many of the characters, it and its beams have a variety of effects, it is a dominant shape in the text, and it allows for more than one response to it. James sees it one way when he is a child, and from the perspective of the shore. His view of it at that time is much like

his mother's. Ten years later, from the perspective of the boat, and with his father, he is able to see that it is also "stark and straight" (177). This implies his incorporation of his father's perspective, his ability to reconcile the two masses of influence in his family. The dual nature of the Lighthouse therefore symbolises the fluidity of human perception, and the duality of influence in human personality. This double-sidedness is given symbolic shape by the Lighthouse beams which are interspersed with wedges of darkness. Together, the dark, obscure shapes and the clear beams make a complete entity. Neither can exist or be defined without the other and, within the unifying image of the Lighthouse, they are related. The link to the nature of human personality is provided because of Mrs Ramsay who feels herself to be both "a wedge of darkness" (58) and attached to "the long steady stroke" (58) of the Lighthouse. As she regards the beam, she is aware of the way in which the individual can feel a connection with things--"felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one" (59)--and yet she is simultaneously aware of "the pitiless, the remorseless" (60) quality of the light beam and its rhythms. A passage from "Time Passes" is a significant follow-on from this:

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. (126)

Following on directly after the description of Prue's death in childbirth, this passage emphasises that the rhythm of this beam, like all

the rhythms in the novel, such as those of the waves, is soothing and yet, in its rhythmical motion, an indicator of the terrifying and relentless pattern that cycles of rhythm have. Just as the Lighthouse beam rotates, so too do the seasonal cycles which necessitate death and destruction. Despite this, however, Mrs Ramsay is able to lose "the fret, the hurry, the stir" (58) by "losing personality" (58) and becoming a "wedge of darkness" (58). She exclaims in triumph when she feels "this peace, this rest, this eternity" (58) that follow on from a loss of personality with its constructed dimensions that are necessary for human communication. Personality, "the things you know us by" (58), is a surface apparition, and beneath it lies a dark, inchoate, unfathomable expanse, which, far from being frightening, allows for "a summoning together" (58) and a freedom from human fear. As Mrs Ramsay feels herself become a wedge of darkness, she recognises that "there curled up off the floor of the mind, rose from the lake of one's being, a mist, a bride to meet her lover" (59). The imagery in that articulation suggests that it is an ability to lose shape and form, like mist, and to greet one's situation with expectation and a sense of promise, like the bride waiting for her lover, that allows the human to merge with what else exists, and find a vision and meaning in a world that would otherwise be intolerable. In that instant, brief sense can be made of the chaos of life, the beauty and meaning of which is as "ephemeral as a rainbow" (15).

Notes

1 Virginia Woolf, "To Roger Fry," 27 May 1927, letter 1764 of The Letters of Virginia Woolf, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, 6 vols (London: Hogarth, 1975) 3: 385.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Waves

Like the novels that come before it, The Waves seeks to describe the nature of reality and "to unite the factual and visionary worlds ... within the symbolic structure of vision" (Kelley 144). It does, however, differ from its predecessors, primarily, and most noticeably, in its narrative structure. Its narrative is expressed through six voices. Describing the nature of human experience, they speak "a formalized, highly artificial language that is altogether different from the way people either think or speak" (Rosenthal 143), one which implies the content of speech but which actually conveys the thoughts that underly it. Intersecting these first-person soliloquies is a series of interludes which describes and follows the passage of the sun across the sky during the course of a single day, providing a temporal frame which serves as a reminder of the relentlessness of time passing. In these interludes, the first-person "I" of the voices is replaced with a third-person recording voice which remains neutral. The structure of the narrative is therefore binary, and its dual nature serves to set up a contrast between the two strands which are its main components.

The use of such contrasts within the narrative structure is reminiscent of Woolf's narrative treatment in To the Lighthouse, where the human encounters of "The Window" and "The Lighthouse" sections are divided by the impersonal narrative of "Time Passes" which focuses on the non-human, and which relegates the pains and losses of human life to parenthetical notes. In the case of both novels, Woolf's intention is

to portray sharply the isolation of the human in a natural realm that is cyclical and is indifferent to all that lives and dies in the movement of its cycles. In *The Waves*, the demarcation between the two strands of the narrative stresses this isolation.

The interludes convey nature's beauty, all the while portraying the power and relentlessness of time within a realm which is ultimately destructive and indifferent to the fragility of human life and hopes:

The sun had risen to its full height. It was no longer half seen and guessed at, from hints and gleams, as if a girl couched on her green-sea mattress tired her brows with water-globed jewels that sent lances of opal-tinted light falling and flashing in the uncertain air like the flanks of a dolphin leaping, or the flash of a falling blade. Now the sun burnt uncompromising, undeniable. It struck upon the hard sand, and the rocks became furnaces of red heat; it searched each pool and caught the minnow hiding in the cranny, and showed the rusty cartwheel, the white bone, or the boot without laces stuck, black as iron, in the sand. (96-97)

The derelict cartwheel, the boot, and the bone act here as shocking reminders of human mortality and these images are juxtaposed with those that convey the lulling beauty of the rising of the sun. In the initial interludes, a great deal of the beauty of the natural realm is conveyed through a use of human detail and description. In the first of these, "every figure of speech is used to relate the processes of nature to those of human beings. Sea, air, waves and light, become a cloth, a veil, the sediment in an old wine bottle, the arm of a woman, a lamp, the blades of a fan and a bonfire" (Lee, *Novels* 167). In the first few interludes, both the birds--"*[t]he birds, whose breasts were specked canary and rose, now sang a strain or two together, wildly, like skaters rollicking arm-in-arm*" (16)--and the waves--"*[t]he wave paused, and then*

drew out again, sighing like a sleeper whose breath comes and goes unconsciously" (1) are anthropomorphised. These images are comfortingly familiar and, in keeping with this, the beauty of nature is conveyed through luxuriant images of jewels and descriptions of rich colours, and nature itself is described as being soothingly tranquil--"[t]he surface of the sea slowly became transparent and lay rippling and sparkling until the dark stripes were almost rubbed out" (1).

However, as the interludes progress and the passage of both the day and the seasons is traced, the images become darkly powerful and increasingly violent. Delicate buds are described as being *"split asunder"* (16) as they shake out flowers. Human detail continues to be used and so the birds which had been like *"skaters rollicking arm-in-arm"* (16) fall silent, *"breaking asunder"* (16). Additionally, the power and cruelty of the cycles of growth and decay are suggested in the interludes by images of warfare--the sea beats *"like a drum that raises a regiment of plumed and turbaned soldiers"* (71), the waves are like *"turbaned men with poisoned assegais ... whirling their arms on high"* (48)--and the frailty of human hopes is suggested by the image of *"the feeding flocks, the white sheep"* (48) on whom the warriors advance. This is echoed by the description of the attacks on slugs and worms by birds. As the day progresses, the tranquility of the water changes and the sea's motion becomes violent. The initial description of the waves is ominous--*"the concussion of the waves breaking fell with muffled thuds, like logs falling, on the shore"* (16)--and the momentum of the description of them accelerates through the course of the interludes until they become like warriors and like a stamping beast, and finally the waves described become the *"waves of darkness"* (158) that envelop the natural world and even cover *"girls, sitting on verandahs"* (158). The image here is emotive as the girls are young and seem immune to

change and decay. Additionally, they are seated on a verandah, a place of human shelter. The force of the cycles of nature triumphs, however, as the girls are engulfed by a power that is indifferent to their youth and to their beauty. This power is a fact that is established by the accumulation in the interludes of images of decay, and its indifference to the frailty of human life is ironically suggested by the proliferation of human detail that is used to describe it in the interludes.

It is not only the range of images in the interludes that emphasises the brevity of human life, though; the juxtaposition of the human voices with the impersonal recording voice of the interludes strongly conveys the manner in which individual lives are subject to the indifferent persistence of the passing of time. Additionally, the way in which Woolf blends into the interludes specific images that are used by the human voices stresses the human fear of mortality and sense of isolation in an indifferent universe. For example, at the point that Percival dies, when nature is at its most brutal--the sun is described as burning, beating, glaring--the interlude unwinds and, as it does, it incorporates into its description one of the images that is woven into the narrative of one of the voices:

The waves broke and spread their waters swiftly over the shore. One after another they massed themselves and fell; the spray tossed itself back with the energy of their fall. The waves were steeped deep-blue save for a pattern of diamond-pointed light on their backs which rippled as the backs of great horses ripple with muscles as they move. The waves fell; withdrew and fell again, like the thud of a great beast stamping. (98)

Louis' image of the chained beast that stamps serves as an image of his anxiety throughout the novel, and Woolf, by mirroring his phrase in a description of the crashing of waves, suggests the degree to which the

terror he feels is induced by a remorselessly changing and arbitrary natural realm. Significantly, Percival, a symbol of untouched and carefree youth, dies by falling from a horse.

The interludes begin with a suggestion of spring--buds shake out flowers that are "*green veined and quivering*" (16)--and end in winter--"*darkness blew along the bare upland slopes*" (158)--and hence they not only trace the passage of the day from dawn to dusk but they also trace the changing cycle of nature, and these movements parallel the development of the characters from their childhood to their old age. Spring is described and the sun rises when they are children, winter is reached and the sun sets as they reach old age. Importantly, mid-summer occurs and the sun "reaches its zenith (and thus begins its decline) at the moment when everyone is informed of Percival's death, a death which marks the end of their youth and hope" (Rosenthal 148). At first, before the sun rises, the voices mainly articulate sense perceptions, and the responses of the voices to the external world are those of children:

"I see a ring," said Bernard, "hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light."

"I see a slab of pale yellow," said Susan, "spreading away until it meets a purple stripe."

"I hear a sound," said Rhoda, "cheep, chirp; cheep, chirp; going up and down."

"I see a globe," said Neville, "hanging down in a drop against the enormous flanks of some hill."

"I see a crimson tassel," said Jinny, "twisted with gold threads."

"I hear something stamping," said Louis. "A great beast's foot is chained. It stamps, and stamps, and stamps." (2)

As the novel progresses, the voices talk in turn of school, university, their work, love, marriage, children, middle age, and death, and these developments stress the degree to which human beings are subject to change, just as the seasons are. To return to the above quotation, the narrative structure that Woolf chooses for this novel, and which is introduced here, is revealing. Contained in this section of the novel are the first of "the terse markers, 'Louis said', 'Rhoda said', 'Jinny said', [which] administer a jolt with each switch in speaker ... [and keep] the reader aware of the lines of demarcation between speakers." (Bishop 99-100). This suggests that people are not only victims of the indifference of time passing but are also largely isolated from each other by, as Bernard says, a "thin, hard shell which cases the soul, which, in youth, shuts one in" (193). However, the narrative in the quotation is united in its dependence on seeing and hearing, and these "first utterances of the six as children immediately suggest how fluid is the relationship between individual and common experience" (Lee, Novels 165). Therefore, contained within the rendering of the language of the voices is a suggestion of both the isolation of the human being and the existence of connections which contradict it.

The isolation of individuals is a matter to which Woolf turns her attention in all of the novels, and is a condition that accounts for the pathos with which she renders the private cogitations and yearnings of the inner self. In keeping with this, while the six voices of this novel are attached to human identities--those of Bernard, Susan, Rhoda, Neville, Jinny, and Louis--they tend to express and describe immediate perceptions, and the narrative does not directly render any interaction between them in the form of a conversation or dialogue. They have shared experiences from childhood, and all refer to interactions that have occurred between them, yet they articulate the thoughts that go

into the making of speech rather than the actual words of speech. The impression often given is that conversations are taking place between them, but it is what is private to each individual that is recorded. Furthermore, there is no authorial interpolation between them. It is important to note that, although "their language is indeed referential, speaking about recognizable human experiences and feeling such as school, jealousy, love, business, marriage, death, and the like, the voices were not intended to be fictional characters participating in any kind of felt social ... world" (Rosenthal 144).

The six voices of The Waves do not interact linguistically and they do not construct human language typically, in the sense that their speeches "remain in a kind of suspended present tense" (Miko 69). The voices all have their own discernible characteristics and they show individual consistency in their responses. As Miko suggests, "[e]ach voice is preoccupied with singing its own special place, in obvious hope of finding or creating security against external threats (time, accident, other people's judgments) as well as internal fears (Is my song an illusion?)" (70). Threads begin to dominate the weaving of the various voices of the narrative, and hence convey the differentiation between one and another. The image of the great beast is one that is regularly repeated in Louis' narrative expressions. The other voices also have preoccupations--Bernard with his "phrases", Jinny with her body, and so on--and themes emerge in the language of each. Jinny, the least cognitive of the speakers, is sensual, and her language is dominated by her descriptions of bodily responses: "'I open my body, I shut my body at my will'" (40). Susan is also sensuous, yet she is maternal, although often sullen and prone to jealousy. In contrast to these two, Rhoda is not at all sensually physical, but rather her physicality expresses the degree of her mental anguish: "'I am whirled down caverns, and flap like

paper against endless corridors, and must press my hand against the wall to draw myself back'" (85). Her impulse is to flee from the world in which she is situated as she feels such a keen sense of isolation in it, and eventually she kills herself. Louis also experiences a world which is hostile to him, and he feels an enormous sense of inadequacy in the face of the demands that the world makes, whether that is the world of school, business, or human relationships: "'I cannot read my book, or order my beef, with conviction'" (60). However, his response is to impose order on his surroundings: "'I will reduce you to order'" (61). Neville has a similar desire for order, yet his mind is more detached than Louis'. Bernard, the artist figure of the novel, is concerned with phrases and has an insight into human behaviour which allows him to articulate his own situation as well as the collective experiences that the six of them have. His individual perceptions point to a unity that underlies the diversity of human experience. He understands that, despite differences of personality or perception, there exist connections between people and that "we are not single, we are one" (43). This perception of Bernard's is lived out in the constructions of the novel because, as the narrative progresses, it becomes evident that the voices use images in the same way, that they use similar sentence constructions, and that they tend to describe one of the others in the same way in which that other describes him or herself.

It is interesting that it is Bernard, the phrase-maker and artist who attempts to fix the nature of reality and separate out its strands in phrases, who is ultimately able to express the degree to which the six voices are able to fuse, and to which individual identities are able to merge:

"I begin now to forget; I begin to doubt the fixity of tables, the reality of here and now, to tap my knuckles smartly upon the edges

of apparently solid objects and say, 'Are you hard?' I have seen so many different things, have made so many different sentences. I have lost in the process of eating and drinking and rubbing my eyes along surfaces that thin, hard shell which cases the soul, which, in youth, shuts one in - hence the fierceness, and the tap, tap, tap of the remorseless beaks of the young. And now I ask, 'Who am I?' I have been talking of Bernard, Neville, Jinny, Susan, Rhoda and Louis. Am I all of them? Am I one and distinct? I do not know. We sat here together. But now Percival is dead, and Rhoda is dead; we are divided; we are not here. Yet I cannot find any obstacle separating us. There is no division between me and them. As I talked I felt 'I am you.' This difference we make so much of, this identity we so feverishly cherish, was overcome. Yes, ever since old Mrs Constable lifted her sponge and pouring warm water over me covered me with flesh I have been sensitive, percipient. Here on my brow is the blow I got when Percival fell. Here on the nape of my neck is the kiss Jinny gave Louis. My eyes fill with Susan's tears. I see far away, quivering like a gold thread, the pillar Rhoda saw, and feel the rush of the wind of her flight when she leapt." (193-194)

While separate identities are conveyed through the six different voices of the narrative, Bernard understands that the "linked phrases" (30) of their language which constitute a "wandering thread" (30) of meaning are an attempt to create a stability that is opposed to the flux and "incoherence" of life (30). Despite the strong strands of characterisation that develop in this novel, there is a great difficulty attached to the creation of fixed definitions of character. Bernard understands that "'I am not one and simple, but complex and many'" (48), and that there are "'several different men who alternately act their parts as

Bernard'" (48). No one statement of his character can therefore be made without the complexity of his nature being denied. When he sums up at the end of the novel, he begins by acknowledging that what his companion sees--"'[y]ou see me, sitting at a table opposite you, a rather heavy, elderly man, grey at the temples'" (159)--is different to his own experience of himself, and that language is what is required in order for him to communicate: "'But in order to make you understand, to give you my life, I must tell you a story'" (159). However, he simultaneously acknowledges that none of his stories is true (159). This realisation makes his situation as a writer a little like that of Mrs Hilbery. His room is "'always scattered with unfinished letters'" (54), just as her study is littered with phrases and sentences that are beautiful yet so chaotic that there seems no possibility of the finishing of an ordered and complete biography of her father. The situation of both of these writers attests to the difficulty that there is in the attempt to describe life, and to the impossibility of an exact definition of reality. Faithful to the notion that human character is too complex to be given precise definition in language, Woolf has made her fullest revolt against the Edwardian novel form in The Waves as this novel resists a single narrative voice that filters, divides and defines experience. Instead, she has chosen an array of voices which together describe the nature of the workings of the human mind in daily life.

While stressing the lines of demarcation between individuals, and while emphasising individual isolation, Woolf suggests that individuals experience a merging with each other, and that separate identities mingle in an undifferentiated flow of life. Individual perceptions do differ, each human voice articulates the uniqueness of an individual experience, and the distinctions between people bring about the pain of human isolation: "'But we were all different.... Louis was disgusted by

the nature of human flesh; Rhoda by our cruelty; Susan could not share; Neville wanted order; Jinny love; and so on. We suffered terribly as we became separate bodies'" (161). But beneath the distinctions between people is a unity. To the outsider, an individual's character may be definable and separate, but beneath the surface definition is a connectedness:

"I am merely 'Neville' to you, who see the narrow limits of my life and the line it cannot pass. But to myself I am immeasurable; a net whose fibres pass imperceptibly beneath the world. My net is almost indistinguishable from that which it surrounds. It lifts whales - huge leviathans and white jellies, what is amorphous and wandering; I detect, I perceive. Beneath my eyes opens - a book; I see to the bottom; the heart - I see to the depths. I know what loves are trembling into fire; how jealousy shoots its green flashes hither and thither; how intricately love crosses love; love makes knots; love brutally tears them apart. I have been knotted; I have been torn apart." (142)

This quotation suggests that the divisions between people are less defined than they appear to be and this allows for the mergings and connections between people which in turn allow for unifying visionary possibilities that stand in opposition to the isolation of the individual as well as to the flux of life:

"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. Neville, for example, sat with me on the turf. But can

anything be as clear as all that, I would say, following his gaze, through the branches, to a punt on the river, and a young man eating bananas from a paper bag? The scene was cut out with such intensity and so permeated with the quality of his vision that for a moment I could see it too; the punt, the bananas, the young man, through the branches of the willow tree. Then it faded." (168)

Bernard's recollection is of a shared moment of vision, when the boundaries between himself and Neville faded, and a "'stable'" and "'still'" image showed through the flux and change that characterises life. Like all visions it faded, and yet it was one of transforming intensity, and one which articulated the possibility that human isolation can be overcome by a still moment of connectedness.

In the novel, one of the images that suggests the existence of connections that exist between people is that of the carnation. When the six speakers dine with Percival because he is going to India, Bernard describes their coming together as caused not by "'love of Percival'" (82), but by their desire "'to make one thing, not enduring - for what endures? - but seen by many eyes simultaneously'" (82). Looking at the red carnation, he understands that the carnation was just "'[a] single flower as we sat here waiting'", and that now, with the company of Percival, it is "'a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution'" (82). Despite the fact of individual mutability and isolation, Percival is able to act as a catalyst which allows for the unification of a variety of viewpoints and hence for the temporary overcoming of individual isolation.

Percival's importance is conveyed in the novel in terms of what he symbolically represents. He is young, he appears to be untouched by the changes that time brings about, and he is never worried by doubt, fear, or a troubled self-consciousness. In this way, he is the opposite of

the six speakers, all of whom are beset by anxieties about time passing and their own mutability. As a result, he becomes "everyone's image of perfection" (Miko 81). The party that the speakers hold for him before his departure to India offers the same possibilities as are provided by the dinner parties of Clarissa Dalloway and Mrs Ramsay respectively. In that moment of social communion, with the gathering of disparate elements around the unifying structure of a table, a moment of communion is possible. The six voices are united in their focus on Percival. They all watch the swing-door at the restaurant and wait for his arrival, they are all aware of the moment of unity that his presence in their company offers, and they all resist the breaking, that his departure causes, of the transforming and visionary moment. Using the image of a globe, an image of connectedness that is employed both at the end of Night and Day and during the course of To the Lighthouse, the narrative provides evidence of moments of contact which defy the passing of time. Jinny calls the moment a "'globe whose walls are made of Percival, of youth and beauty'" (95); Louis describes it as "'the thing that we have made, that globes itself here, among these lights, these peelings, this litter of bread crumbs and people passing'" (95).

Working alongside the conveying of the experience of connectedness that the voices have are the speakers' acknowledgements of the mutability of life and of the fleeting nature of the vision. A veil is drawn over chaos in social communion, as is emphasised by the dinner party in To the Lighthouse, and as Bernard acknowledges in his summing up:

"... the fringe of my intelligence floating unattached caught those distant sensations which after a time the mind draws in and works upon; the chime of bells; general murmurs; vanishing figures; one girl on a bicycle who, as she rode, seemed to lift the corner of a

curtain concealing the populous undifferentiated chaos of life which surged behind the outlines of my friends and the willow tree." (166)

And so, after the dinner, Louis knows that "disorder" (93) will inevitably return and Bernard understands that "too soon.... [t]he stone is sunk; the moment is over" (94). Nevertheless, despite this, and because of their vision of harmony and permanence that Percival has inspired, they feel this dinner to be their moment of triumph. Understanding the dinner as a structure that operates much in the way of the constructions of art--"[t]he yellow canopy of our tremendous energy hangs like a burning cloth above our heads. Theatres, music halls and lamps in private houses make that light'" (96)--Bernard is confident of the future that he and his companions share. He is sure that this moment has beaten back the remorseless flow of time, and will carry over into life, warding off the pains and losses that change brings about:

"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 part of the illumined and everlasting road." (95-96)

Both Neville and Jinny confidently stare the fact of mutability in the face, thinking themselves immune because of their youth--"'we who are not yet twenty-five'" (92)--and considering their own possibilities in the "'infinite time before us'" (92). However, Rhoda describes a funeral procession with a vivid sense of the inevitability of death:

"The great procession passes, flinging green boughs and flowering branches. Their horns spill blue smoke; their skins are dappled red and yellow in the torchlight. They throw violets. They deck the beloved with garlands and with laurel leaves, there on the ring of turf where the steep-backed hills come down. The procession passes. And while it passes, Louis, we are aware of downfalling, we forebode decay. The shadow slants. We who are conspirators, withdrawn together to lean over some cold urn, note how the purple flame flows downwards." (92)

It is with pathos, then, that the death of Percival is immediately described.

The juxtaposition of the voices' articulations of hope and the description of Percival's death in India emphasises not only the mortality of humans, but also the transience of the human attempt to create moments of visionary unity that contradict death and change and loss. The moments themselves are full and rounded and whole, like the image of perfection that the globe constitutes. Nevertheless, they inevitably pass, and the remorseless beat of time passing asserts its dominance. Inevitably, the flow of human life continues, the speakers move into middle-age, and when they return for the second meal at Hampton Court, they are each painfully aware of their failures, their limitations, their lost hopes and their essential isolation. Despite this, however, the divisions between them begin to dissolve during the dinner, and the connections between the individual speakers are once more emphasised.

The enduring connections between the six speakers allow Bernard to declare that the seven-sided flower, "'the red carnation that stood in the vase on the table of the restaurant when we dined together with Percival'" (152), has become " 'a six-sided flower; made of six lives'" (152). The image has maintained its meaning in spite of the death of

Percival, yet, this time, it is "[b]uilt up with much pain, many strokes'" (152), the "'many-faceted flower'" is made up of "'[m]arriage, death, travel, friendship ... town and country; children and all that'" (152). The sight of this flower is visionary--"'a mysterious illumination'" says Louis (152)--and leads to a moment of transcendence which is free from the constraints of existence and consciousness, "the experience of which Louis articulates by saying "'[a]ll seems alive ... I cannot hear death anywhere to-night" (153-154). Yet, like all moments of unity in Woolf's novels, this experience blazes and then goes out. The dream-like moment of vision is necessarily brief, and there is an inevitable return to the isolation of individual life. Accordingly, the six of them all leave, and their departures signal the return of their individual preoccupations:

"Now they vanish," said Louis. "Susan with Bernard. Neville with Jinny. You and I, Rhoda, stop for a moment by this stone urn. What song shall we hear now that these couples have sought the groves, and Jinny, pointing with her gloved hand, pretends to notice the water-lilies, and Susan, who has always loved Bernard, says to him, 'My ruined life, my wasted life.' And Neville, taking Jinny's little hand, with the cherry-coloured finger-nails, by the lake, by the moonlit water, cries, 'Love, love,' and she answers, imitating the bird, 'Love, love?' What song do we hear?" (153)

It is interesting to note, though, that, after this dinner, the speakers retreat back to their worlds and "welcome the relief of a return to the 'illusory' rhythms of life which generally sustain us" (Rosenthal 160). The rhythms and flux of the mundane, of the outer world, have a soothing effect. For Bernard, the sounds of railway trucks knocking in a siding cause relief, much in the way that the sounds of the clocks in Mrs Dalloway, despite emphasising the passing of time, are sometimes soothing:

"There is a sound like the knocking of railway trucks in a siding. That is the happy concatenation of one event following another in our lives. - Knock, knock, knock. Must, must, must. Must go, must sleep, must wake, must get up - sober, merciful word which we pretend to revile, which we press tight to our hearts, without which we should be undone." (156)

In this response, Woolf is conveying the extent to which the processes of life allow for individual existence. The stillness and completeness of the moment of vision is transformative, but the pulse of life constitutes a source of sustaining rhythms. As Bernard asserts, "'Life is pleasant. Life is good. The mere process of life is satisfactory'" (175). In the daily cycles of life, where "'Tuesday follows Monday; Wednesday Tuesday'" (175), there is to be found again and again "'the same ripple of wellbeing ... the same curve of rhythm'" (175).

The novel's emphasis on language is interesting to consider at this point. Bernard is an artist, and, like all the artist figures in Woolf's fiction, he is engaged in a human attempt to create permanence, however paradoxically fleeting the moment of permanence may be. He understands that what is important is the effort that goes into the attempt to create stasis in the midst of flux, and that a vision of truth occurs in the process of this attempt. The ending of To the Lighthouse, with its use of the past tense in Lily's final assertion that she has "had" her vision, stresses the fleeting nature of the visionary experience. In The Waves, Woolf is continuing her exploration of the importance of art as a structure that creates meaning in a universe that is hostile to frail human hopes and the novel is filled with examples of how the voices view art. For example, Rhoda, describing what lies beneath the "'semblance'" (107) of existence, sees the shapes and structures that exist in art--"'we have made oblongs and

stood them upon squares'" (107). In this ordering and structuring, she sees "'our triumph'", "'our consolation'" (107). Bernard, understanding the dinner party that is held in honour of Percival to be like an artistic construction, claims "'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 part of the illumined and everlasting road'" (96). His assertion here is that human structures resist the forces of chaos outside them. The language of the quotation above implies that he sees in the human attempt to create structures the possibility of uniting time past, time present and time future, as opposed to the fragmented flux that characterises human experience. Furthermore, he sees in the act of creation a conquering of what is temporal. Bernard, however, is a complex commentator, as is revealed by an examination of his attitude to language.

From the outset, Bernard is preoccupied with language, his phrases being different to the "'single words'" of the others--"'you wander off; you slip away; you rise up higher, with words and words in phrases'" (7) says Susan--and he is particularly interested in the way in which language can unite the disparate identities of the six of them by providing connections between them:

"But when we sit together, close," said Bernard, "we melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory." (7)

Importantly, he understands that it is language that not only allows for the unseen connections between the six of them to surface but that also allows for the weaving of coherent meaning in the face of fragmentation:

"I must open the little trapdoor and let out these linked phrases in which I run together whatever happens, so that instead of

incoherence there is perceived a wandering thread, lightly joining one thing to another." (30)

This attitude that language can bring about coherence is confirmed by Neville's acknowledgement that when Bernard's stories "tail off ... I feel my own solitude" (31), yet the fact that they do tail off is also significant as this provides testimony to the difficulty attached to describing life. Bernard knows that "'I shall never succeed, even in talk, in making a perfect phrase'" (87-88) and that to describe life is to separate it out into artificial and isolated strands: "'I made notes for stories; drew portraits in the margin of my pocket-book and thus became still more separate'" (162).

By the time that he sums up at the end of the novel, Bernard acknowledges that his phrase-making constructs limits which do not allow for the rendering of the complexity of life:

"... like children we tell each other stories, and to decorate them we make up these ridiculous, flamboyant, beautiful phrases. How tired I am of stories, how tired I am of phrases that come down beautifully with all their feet on the ground! Also, how I distrust neat designs of life that are drawn upon half-sheets of note-paper. I begin to long for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement. I begin to seek some design more in accordance with those moments of humiliation and triumph that come now and then undeniably. Lying in a ditch on a stormy day, when it has been raining, then enormous clouds come marching over the sky, tattered clouds, wisps of cloud. What delights me then is the confusion, the height, the indifference and the fury. Great clouds always changing, and movement; something sulphurous and sinister, bowled up, helter-skelter; towering, trailing, broken off, lost,

and I forgotten, minute, in a ditch. Of story, of design, I do not see a trace then." (159)

Bernard's phrases have always tailed off and so he doubts the stories that he makes with them--"But what are stories? Toys I twist, bubbles I blow, one ring passing through another. And sometimes I begin to doubt if there are stories. What is my story?" (94). Phrases define, they describe, and they limit. Neville recognises that the truth the voices crave is not created through language:

"Yet these roaring waters," said Neville, "upon which we build our crazy platforms are more stable than the wild, the weak and inconsequent cries that we utter when, trying to speak, we rise; when we reason and jerk out these false sayings, 'I am this; I am that!' Speech is false." (90)

Louis substantiates this:

"It is Percival," said Louis, "sitting silent as he sat among the tickling grasses when the breeze parted the clouds and they formed again, who makes us aware that these attempts to say, 'I am this, I am that,' which we make, coming together, like separated parts of one body and soul, are false. Something has been left out from fear. Something has been altered, from vanity. We have tried to accentuate differences. From the desire to be separate we have laid stress upon our faults, and what is particular to us. But there is a chain whirling round, round, in a steel-blue circle beneath." (89-90)

As the whirling current of passions flows, "'the circle in our blood, broken so often, so sharply, for we are so different, closes in a ring'" (95), creates a "'globe whose walls are made of Percival'" (95), and, hence, forms an image of unity that they can hold onto for a moment. This experience appears to be undermined by the horror of the death of

Percival, yet is transformative at the moment that it occurs, and it is an image of form that emerges from the inchoate and opaque flow of life's processes, a flux that cannot be described completely by language.

It is in Bernard's final assertion that he will fling himself "unvanquished" (199) against death, a claim that concludes his summing up at the end of the novel that there is an indication of how far Bernard has moved from his initial interest in defining the world with phrases. It is while he sums up that he recognises that the precision, and order, and punctuality of day-to-day life are "a convenience, a lie" (171), and that underneath them are "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" (171). Similarly, he realises that the globe of life, that which appears to be strong and solid, is actually fragile, and yet unlimited in what it contains. The unlimited quality of experience means that the limits of language are inadequate for a complete rendering of 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. 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. Faces recur, faces and faces - they press their beauty to the walls of my bubble - Neville, Susan, Louis, Jinny, Rhoda and a thousand others. How impossible to order them rightly; to detach one separately, or to give the effect of the whole - again like music. What a symphony with its concord and its discord, and its

tunes on top and its complicated bass beneath, then grew up! Each played his own tune, fiddle, flute, trumpet, drum or whatever the instrument might be." (171)

The musical analogy suggests that the connections between varieties of individuals are secure because of the overall structure, like a symphony, in which they are all contained. The structure, in this case, is the globe of life, from which anything can be extracted, and yet, which provides the whole that is greater than any one part of it. Together, all the components make up a whole and, therefore, Bernard can say "... 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'" (185).

The Waves articulates more emphatically than Mrs Dalloway and To the Lighthouse a paradox that is inherent in life. While it is true that structuring, whether in terms of art, human relationships, social constructions, or language, is able to create form where there is usually chaos, and that the human effort to create form is a noble one, the novel asserts that within the greater processes of life the human is able to find meaning. This does not negate the importance of the visionary moment. It suggests, rather, that the self is located within a flow of life and that the experience of moments of being, in which the individual is raised out of the self, is not the only way in which meaning can be found.

As a child and in order to comfort Susan, Bernard creates a fantasy about a kingdom called Elvedon and a set of images that recurs in his language is that associated with this imaginary realm. Describing Elvedon to her, he explains that, although he has seen a sign pointing to it, "[n]o one has been there" (8). He imagines Susan and himself as "discoverers of an unknown land" (8), and he explains that, in order to

get there, they must "sink through the green air of the leaves" (7). The two images that recur in his mind after the imaginary flight to Elvedon are those of the gardeners who "sweep the lawn with giant brooms" (8) and the lady who "sits between the two long windows, writing" (8). In his fantastical rendering of this tale, he imagines that the gardeners are an enemy--"if the gardeners saw us they would shoot us" (8)--and that he and Susan must flee if they are to survive. The place to which they run has a visionary significance for Bernard and his description of their time spent sheltered in the woods conveys the experience of a moment of peace, liberation, and security:

"Now we are safe. Now we can stand upright again. Now we can stretch our arms in this high canopy, in this vast wood. I hear nothing. That is only the murmur of the waves in the air." (8)

In his summing up, "the old image - the gardeners sweeping, the lady writing - returned" (180). This time, however, the fear for the gardeners that he imagined and pretended to feel as a child is transposed into a tangible fear for another kind of enemy. He explains that, when he was a child, "the presence of an enemy had asserted itself; the need for opposition had stung me" (180), and that, in response to that fear, "I had jumped up and cried, 'Let's explore'" (180), thus bringing to an end the "horror of the situation" (180). However, as an old man, he has "the sense of what is unescapable in our lot; death; the knowledge of limitations; how life is more obdurate than one had thought it" (180). The shift in his attitude towards danger indicates that, with time, Bernard has realised that death cannot be escaped from, and that, faced with that enemy, there is no sheltering wood to which to flee where there is silence and freedom.

Despite this, Bernard is not defeated by his enemy. He understands that a visionary realm cannot provide permanent shelter from the fact of

time passing and the changes that that brings, but can only provide brief moments of stillness. Nevertheless, he understands that, while time does pass and all life is transitory, there exists a large arena, "a wider world" (182) than the inner human world, the movements of which are eternal and regenerative. This was hinted at when Bernard spoke of his son's birth as he reacted to the news of Percival's death, but is explicitly incorporated into his summing up. Using Louis' vision of "women carrying red pitchers to the Nile" (190), an image which asserts the long history of human life, he conveys his knowledge of a cycle that is greater than a single life and that provides meaning and a sense of permanence that contrasts with the fleeting nature of the individual existence. And so, he is finally able to understand that "in a moment, in a drawing-room, our life adjusts itself to the majestic march of day across the sky" (182). In spite of the fragility of the individual human life, each person exists as part of a continuum.

With this understanding, Bernard undergoes a fundamental change. As he reaches the conclusion of his summing up, he experiences the world around him a wasteland:

"The woods had vanished; the earth was a waste of shadow. No sound broke the silence of the wintry landscape. No cock crowed; no smoke rose; no train moved. A man without a self, I said. A heavy body leaning on a gate. A dead man." (191)

Nevertheless, it is not long before the regeneration in him and in his surroundings occurs:

"So the landscape returned to me; so I saw fields rolling in waves of colour beneath me, but now with this difference; I saw but was not seen. I walked unshadowed; I came unheralded." (192)

Rosenthal points out that "[w]hat Woolf is rendering here is the abrupt, mystical dying away of the old self which must precede any new growth"

and that "[t]he Bernard who emerges no longer needs the props of people and phrases on which he formerly depended" (165). Bernard's new voice praises solitude, and praises change, and finally expresses its rejection of phrases--"My book, stuffed with phrases, has dropped to the floor'" (198)--expressing, instead, a desire for silence. In silence the boundaries that ensure his isolation dissolve: "As silence falls I am dissolved utterly and become featureless and scarcely to be distinguished from another'" (149). Bernard's language noticeably alters too, indicating the degree to which he is beginning to merge with the natural processes of which he is a part, as it starts to incorporate the language of the interludes:

"The stars draw back and are extinguished. The bars deepen themselves between the waves. The film of mist thickens on the fields. A redness gathers on the roses, even on the pale rose that hangs by the bedroom window. A bird chirps. Cottagers light their early candles." (199)

This quotation, echoing the first interlude, describes dawn. While Bernard knows that this renewal does not mean a new beginning for him as he is approaching death--"What is dawn in the city to an elderly man...?" (199)--he understands that the life processes which inevitably and inexorably beat on bring about regeneration as well as decay. Time passing and the changes that it brings have been emphasised throughout by the descriptions of the crashing waves which beat remorselessly against the shore, and Woolf reminds us of this as the novel culminates--"*The waves broke on the shore*" (199). However, for Bernard there is an awareness of "eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again'" (199) and an acknowledgement of continuation despite individual mortality. At this point a wave rises in Bernard himself, further conflating the languages used to describe the human and

natural realms, and emphasising the degree to which people are part of life and its rhythms. With his new understanding, Bernard has become a man without a "shadow" and a man "without a self" (192), an Everyman, valiantly facing his enemy without fear. His need for "a howl; a cry" (198), his desire for "silence" (198), and the enigmatic ending of the novel all convey the sense that life is ultimately indescribable. What is affirmed, though, is that, in spite of his knowledge that death cannot be conquered, Bernard is able, in his flinging of himself against death, to experience the freedom that characterises the moment of vision. His heroic action occurs because of his knowledge and acceptance of his place within the natural world and, hence, of his own mortality.

CHAPTER FIVE

Between the Acts

Virginia Woolf's final novel has as its central focus a pageant which is constructed to convey the essence of the problem that Bernard, Lily Briscoe, and Mrs Hilbery all face, and that is how to render life through art. The problem that each of these artists faces is analogous to the difficulty attached to understanding and describing life itself, and the impulse to create art is like the impulse to create a moment of social communion as both are dictated by the desire to make of the moment something permanent, to make life stand still. Set against this are the facts of change and mortal brevity that are wound into the fabric of life. "Time Passes" in To the Lighthouse and the interludes in The Waves both powerfully convey the relentlessness of time passing and the inevitable fact of death. In Between the Acts, the horrifying backdrop of the impending war acts as a strong foil against which the fragility of human life is set.

The threat of war is rendered explicitly in this novel. Giles, for example, visualises Europe as a "'hedgehog' ... bristling with guns, poised with planes" (33), and the villagers talk of Germany and the Nazis during the course of the pageant. The cumulation of references to the possibility of military invasion, and the havoc that is likely to go with it, give a weight to the attempt on the part of Miss La Trobe to bring about a coherent vision of order. Despite its threat of explosive turmoil, the war is not the only source of terror however, and the fact of violence is also suggested implicitly in the novel by a series of

images and incidents which imitates the brutality of the European situation. This series suggests a brutality in nature to which the human being, as a natural entity, is constantly prone. A sight that Giles encounters of a snake choking on a toad images this violence:

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. A spasm made the ribs contract; blood oozed. 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 blood-stained and sticky. But it was action. Action relieved him. He strode to the Barn, with blood on his shoes.

(61-62)

The central image in this quotation is a grotesque one, and Giles' response, being one of violence and not compassion, suggests that the horror of war is not limited to the battle-field. His indifference is an example in miniature of the indifference with which individual suffering is greeted within the larger arena in which it is set.

An incident which substantiates the fact of brutality occurs when Isa reads the *Times* and, skimming through a report, finally settles on a part of it which catches her attention:

... as her father-in-law had dropped the *Times*, she took it and read: "A horse with a green tail..." which was fantastic. Next, "The guard at Whitehall" which was romantic and then, building word upon word she read: "The troopers told her the horse had a green tail; but she found it was just an ordinary horse. And they dragged her up to the barrack room where she was thrown upon a bed. Then one of the troopers removed part of her clothing, and she screamed and hit him about the face...."

That was real; so real that on the mahogany door panels she saw the Arch in Whitehall; through the Arch the barrack room; in the barrack room the bed, and on the bed the girl was screaming and hitting him about the face, when the door (for in fact it was a door) opened and in came Mrs Swithin carrying a hammer. (11-12) Lucy Swithin is carrying a hammer because, as she announces a few seconds later, she has been nailing on the Barn the placard for the pageant. Before she speaks, though, Bart growls a reprimand at her, and his use of the name "Cindy", a name he used for her in childhood, reminds her of his making her take a fish off a hook when they were children: "The blood had shocked her - 'Oh!' she had cried - for the gills were full of blood. And he had growled: 'Cindy'" (12). The narrative makes a link between the newspaper report and Lucy's recollection by focusing on the hammer, an object which implies brutality when seen in the context of the report, and moving to the thought processes of the person who is carrying it. The paper's report, the hammer, and the recollection of a fish caught on a hook all converge and stress the existence of violence and cruelty. The presence of barbarity is stressed when Isa hears "'The girl screamed and hit him about the face with a hammer'" (13) as she listens to the conversation that Bart and Lucy have about the weather.

The barbarity and cruelty that are a part of human life are redeemed, however, in Woolf's vision of the universe:

There was a fecklessness, a lack of symmetry and order in the clouds, as they thinned and thickened. Was it their own law, or no law, they obeyed? Some were wisps of white hair merely. One, high up, very distant, had hardened to golden alabaster; was made of immortal marble. Beyond that was blue, pure blue, black blue; blue that had never filtered down; that had escaped registration. It

never fell as sun, shadow, or rain upon the world, but disregarded the little coloured ball of earth entirely. No flower felt it; no field; no garden. (13)

In this passage, Woolf describes the universe as a vast arena which is indifferent to human and natural life. However, set against the descriptions which suggest this, such as that which conveys the "fecklessness" and "lack of symmetry" of the clouds, are words which offer the possibility of a permanence, and a still and eternal beauty beyond the chaos of the natural world. The images of "immortal marble" and "golden alabaster" are used to suggest this and, balanced against the descriptions of a natural disorder and the indifferent quality of the universe, they suggest a duality in Woolf's presentation of reality. This duality informs the novel and is given weight by an incident early in the novel when Bart and his Afghan hound are out walking in the grounds of Pointz Hall and stumble on a party of nurses and children:

The little boy had lagged and was grouting in the grass. Then the baby, Caro, thrust her fist out over the coverlet and the furry bear was jerked overboard. Amy had to stoop. George grubbed. The flower blazed between the angles of the roots. Membrane after membrane was torn. It blazed a soft yellow, a lambent light under a film of velvet; it filled the caverns behind the eyes with light. All that inner darkness became a hall, leaf smelling, earth smelling of yellow light. And the tree was beyond the flower; the grass, the flower and the tree were entire. Down on his knees grubbing he held the flower complete. Then there was a roar and a hot breath and a stream of coarse grey hair rushed between him and the flower. Up he leapt, toppling in his fright, and saw coming towards him a terrible peaked eyeless monster moving on legs, brandishing arms. (6)

Contained in this description are indications of not only the possibilities that exist for the human experience of a vision, but also the chaotic power of the external world. What the child experiences in the first part of this section is a moment of being, "entire" and "complete". Yet, as with all moments of epiphanic intensity, the experience ends and its completeness is shattered. The sight of what appears to him as a monster suggests the horror that each individual faces in a world which is hostile and arbitrarily violent. What the child responds to is only his grandfather with a paper over his head, but his experience of terror and fright is real and vividly rendered. The images of this section echo the images of the interludes in The Waves which describe nature as a cruel arena which is hostile to the individual human. In those interludes, the waves are described both as beasts and as warriors with assegais, and both images recur here. In the passage above, the "eyeless monster" is like a beast, and a military image is suggested in the double-meaning of the phrase "brandishing arms" that ends this section (Bart, interestingly, has a history in the military). The child is experiencing the interruption of a moment of stasis, and his world at that moment of fragmentation is one that is frighteningly aggressive. The episode serves as a miniature example of the way in which the human experience of permanence and order is necessarily undermined, yet it nevertheless affirms the possibility of such a visionary experience, one which puts the human in touch with a stillness and permanence that transcends the flux of the natural realm.

The duality in Woolf's presentation of reality is carried through to her evocation of nature as both cruel and magnificent. The natural cycles may be insistently indifferent to human life, yet nature itself can offer a charming spectacle:

See the flowers, how they ray their redness, whiteness, silverness and blue. And the trees with their many-tongued much syllabbling, 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. (75)

Nature often appears to be gracious and to express a benevolence and kindness that is directed at the human individual. In the novel, this is imaged when a shower of rain provides a vital relief from the torment of a moment of failed illusion in the pageant and seems to weep "for human pain unending" (112):

And then the shower fell, sudden, profuse.

No one had seen the cloud coming. There it was, black, swollen, on top of them. Down it poured like all the people in the world weeping. Tears, Tears. Tears.

"O that our human pain could here have ending!" Isa murmured. Looking up she received two great blots of rain full in her face. They trickled down her cheeks as if they were her own tears. But they were all people's tears, weeping for all people. Hands were raised. Here and there a parasol opened. The rain was sudden and universal. Then it stopped. From the grass rose a fresh earthy smell.

"That's done it," sighed Miss La Trobe, wiping away the drops on her cheeks. Nature once more had taken her part. (111-112)

While this passage acknowledges the fact of human pain, it portrays nature as a realm that is connected to human life and one that responds to human emotion. This may be fantastic, yet what is true is that each individual part of nature is the victim of the passing of time in the same way in which the individual human is. What the novel does stress,

however, is that the greater processes of nature recur, and in their recurrence they affirm that decay and death are followed by regeneration. For example, the swallows have always come to nest at the barn, since "[b]efore there was a channel, when the earth, upon which the Windsor chair was planted, was a riot of rhododendrons" (67). This has occurred in spite of the changes that have come with time passing. Nature therefore provides comforting evidence of recurrence, and its processes illustrate that contained within the present is both the past and a sense of future.

This idea is reiterated by the novel's setting. Pointz Hall is where the pageant is to take place and the descriptions of it emphasise the way in which history has determined what shape and form the house presently has. The factual and physical details that are used in the description of the house reveal the influence of the past--the pantry was a chapel before the Reformation, and the Barn reminds "most people of an age before their own" (62), to give only two of many examples. The characters themselves are aware of the past and of the continuity and connection between the past and the present. Mrs Swithin thinks of the ancient monsters "from whom presumably ... we descend" (4) and is aware that the swallows come every year from Africa "[a]s they had come, she supposed, when the Barn was a swamp" (64). Additionally, she "seem[s] to say", in conversation with William Dodge, the nursery is "'[t]he cradle of our race'" (44), and hence the source from where the past has, and the future will, come. A discussion among Isa, Bart and Lucy Swithin regarding the location of the house makes clear the existence of a continuum of history in which the present is set:

"Are we really," she said, turning round, "a hundred miles from the sea?"

"Thirty-five only," her father-in-law said, as if he had whipped a tape measure from his pocket and measured it exactly.

"It seems more," said Isa. "It seems from the terrace as if the land went on for ever and ever."

"Once there was no sea," said Mrs. Swithin. "No sea at all between us and the continent. I was reading that in a book this morning. There were rhododendrons in the Strand; and mammoths in Piccadilly." (17)

While Bart provides details of the exact location of the house as he describes its distance from the sea in terms of a scientific measurement, Lucy talks about the ancient state of Europe. She is aware of a time "when the entire continent, not then, she understood, divided by a channel, was all one" (4), of the undivided nature of Europe when it was occupied "by elephant-bodied, seal-necked, heaving, surging, slowly writhing, and, she supposed, barking monsters; the iguanodon, the mammoth, and the mastodon" (4). This suggests not only her ability to increase "the bounds of the moment by flights into past or future" (5), but also Woolf's intention to connect the past with the present. Lee points out that a succession of contrasts contributes to the sense that the novel's meaning is not limited to one time or one place:

Giles is tortured by the thought of Europe, "bristling with guns, poised with planes", while his son George can dwindle the radius of his own world to a flower blazing in the roots of a tree. Local gossip about Miss La Trobe's Russian blood and Mrs Manressa's Tasmanian birth stretch the radius to "foreign parts"; at the same time Mrs Sands the cook, who "had never in all her fifty years been over the hill, nor wanted to", contracts it. (Novels 204)

As the pageant opens, it is made clear that history has a moulding influence on the lives of the people who take part in the action. Some

of the audience stem from an ancient heritage--"[a]mong them ... were representatives of our most respected families - the Dyces of Denton; the Wickhams of Owlswick; and so on" (46)--and the narrative thus emphasises the manner in which the past informs, and expands the significance of, the present. Woolf emphasises the prevalence and effect of the past by mentioning ancestry, by dwelling on history, by creating the pageant of Miss La Trobe which attempts a survey of English history from Chaucer to the present, and by contrasting modern views, such as Giles' vision of modern Europe, "bristling with guns" (33), with Lucy Swithin's imaginings of historical England when there were "rhododendrons in the Strand" (17) and hence when no channel divided England from the continent. All of these details add up to convey the way in which both the house and the pageant encapsulate history. This, along with the three generations of family which live in the house, and the possibility of a new birth that the novel ends with, contributes to a sense that, beyond the mutability of the individual life, exist larger cycles which lead to regeneration and renewal.

The moulding of the present by the past is evidenced in the nature of the language that the characters of the novel speak. It is interesting to note that the characters speak a language filled with literary quotations, nursery rhymes, proverbs and tales that have been passed on through generations. The fact that many of these additions to their language are misquotations, and that often the characters can't remember more than one or two isolated lines of poetry--Mrs Manressa can't remember more than "'To be, or not to be, that is the question. Whether 'tis nobler...'", and all that Isa can supply is a few lines from Keats (33)--suggests something of the fragmented nature of thought. What seems clear, however, is that Woolf is attempting to describe the way in

which history, inherited language, folklore and literature filter into the present.

As with all of Woolf's novels, however, it is what is unsaid rather than overshadows the utterances of the characters. The novel opens on a summer's night "when familiar daylight shapes appear 'dim and unsubstantial'" (Harper 285). Silence and emptiness weave their presences into the book. It is significant, for example, that the silence of the pond, as well as its murky depths, is connected to the history of Pointz Hall. In the first section of the novel, prior to the start of the pageant, a scullery maid sits by the pond and watches the silent movements of the fish beneath "the thick plate of green water" (26). The narrative recalls at this point that it was in that pond that a drowning had taken place many years before:

It was in that deep centre, in that black heart, that the lady had drowned herself. Ten years since the pool had been dredged and a thigh bone recovered. Alas, it was a sheep's, not a lady's. And sheep have no ghosts, for sheep have no souls. But, the servants insisted, they must have a ghost; the ghost must be a lady's; who had drowned herself for love. So none of them would walk by the lily pool at night, only now when the sun shone and the gentry still sat at table. (26)

The story that the servants tell may be fictional, yet the darkness of the pond bears testimony to the opaque nature of history. This is true too regarding human character. The water in the pond has silted and has been lying for hundreds of years, creating a black and inchoate darkness from which the fish periodically emerge:

People are like the fish, silent and uncaught below the surface, in the speechless areas of the personality, but occasionally rising to the surface for bait. At the surface they must communicate; so

relationships are summed up by images of fishing, and Isa's bondage to the routine of domesticity, by her ringing up to order the fish.

In the whole structure of the book, language and speech seem to be patterned in ever-widening circles over the surface of silence. (Lee, Novels 207)

An incident that confirms this view occurs after lunch, immediately prior to the pageant, as the lunch guests take their coffee. Here, the narrative centres on what is left unsaid. Mrs Manressa and Giles both feel the thread that unites them--"visible, invisible, like those threads, now seen, now not, that unite trembling grass blades in autumn before the sun rises" (34)--a connection of which Bart is aware, and at which Isa experiences a twitch of jealousy about. These are all silent responses as is that of Giles when he thinks about William Dodge whom he thinks "[a] toady; a lickspittle; ... a fingerer of sensations" (37). He wants to describe Dodge more succinctly, but desists as he knows that the word which captures his essence is one that should not be spoken in public. This cogitation is purely mental, and, while his face betrays his aggression, Giles utters nothing. The silent connections between people are emphasised, however, by Isa's guess as to what the word is, and by William Dodge's later admission to Lucy Swithin that "I'm a half-man ... as Giles saw" (45).

To use Harper's vocabulary, the significance of these interactions lies between the areas of language and silence. The two pictures in the Pointz Hall dining-room make clear the distinctions between these two realms. One of the portraits, that of a male ancestor, is a talking point for diners, while the other, which Bart bought because "he liked that picture" (30), is of a woman and it "looked at nobody. The picture drew them down the paths of silence" (27). These two pictures suggest two different ways of encountering reality. Abel points out that "only

the portrait of the man depicts an ancestor" (116). This man is an image around which stories have been constructed--"I always feel," Lucy broke the silence, 'he's saying: "Paint my dog"' (30)--an image which inspires conversation, and around which historical stories revolve--"He had a name. He held the rein in his hand. He had said to the painter...." (21). When Candish pauses in the dining room and sees the picture of the woman, however, the manner in which it draws the eye into silence is stressed by the narrative's description of the room's reflective silence:

Empty, empty, empty; silent, silent, silent. The room was a shell, singing of what was before time was; a vase stood in the heart of the house, alabaster, smooth, cold, holding the still, distilled essence of emptiness, silence. (22)

The picture of the unknown woman offers no anecdotes or facts, unlike the picture of the man which is a "talk producer" (22), but rather the haunting yet beautiful sound of silence. It captures a "distilled essence of emptiness" (22) and, rather than providing facts around which specific stories can be told, it offers a vision of eternity. The build up of the words "silent" and "empty" and "still" suggest that this portrait leads the eye away from the flux of daily life towards a quiet and unified stillness that characterises the moment of being and which contrasts with the flux to which human beings are prone, and so the two pictures together provide two different ways of seeing, just as the life visions of Bart and Lucy provide two different and complementary means of understanding the world: "What she saw he didn't; what he saw she didn't" (15). The silence of the picture of the woman contrasts with the short, truncated cries that follow on from this description as the hall door opens and the sounds of human conversation break the quiet: "Their voices impetuously, impatiently, protestingly came across the

hall saying: 'The train's late'; saying: 'Keep it hot'; saying: 'We won't, no Candish, we won't wait.'" (22). Through this contrast, the narrative implies the fragmentation of speech and of human conversation. Conversation shatters silence and, the novel suggests, is mainly repetition--Isa has heard the same speculation about the weather on the day of the pageant for seven years now, for example.

Just as language is presented as being fragmentary in this novel, so too is life, and the frequency of the appearance of the phrase "orts, scraps and fragments", which comes from Troilus and Cressida, suggests Woolf's desire to portray this. And so, while the impulse to create a visionary permanence is what inspires Miss La Trobe's artistic endeavour, she deliberately constructs her pageant as a fragmentary entity. This is to suggest that, as Woolf posited in "Modern Fiction" (The Common Reader 189), human life is not coherently describable but, rather, is made up of "myriad impressions" (The Common Reader 189). The shifting nature of reality is mimicked by the pageant with its scraps of dialogue and the array of story fragments around which it is constructed. As well as this, however, the pageant is also interrupted by incidents which are not planned, such as the sound of the cows, erratic performers who sometimes forget their lines or fail to sustain the parts that they play, or the noise of a machine which buzzes "[c]huff, chuff, chuff" (48), and these elements all contribute to the sense of the impossibility of constructing fixed representations of life. The pageant is, therefore, a testimony to the uncontainable and indescribable essence of life's meaning. Appropriately, the notion of the ineffable is incorporated in the novel's title. Nevertheless, within the pageant there are moments of still vision, and these, as short lived as they are, make a permanence where there is normally chaos, an order where there is usually mere randomness.

Rosenthal points out that the pageant bears testimony to "the organizing power of art ... in ... that everybody in the novel is concerned with the pageant, either as an actor, member of the production staff or, equally importantly, member of the audience" (Rosenthal 191) and in that the pageant attracts every person in the village to it. It does, however, also bear testimony to the difficulties attached to Miss La Trobe's artistic struggle, which Rosenthal contrasts with those of the other artist figures in Woolf's novels, such as Lily, the painter, or Bernard, the phrase-maker:

... her struggle is even more precarious than theirs, for she works not with the relative security of canvas or page but the vagaries of actors and audience. If the book and painting are concrete embodiments of the artist's completed vision, Miss La Trobe's pageant has no existence outside the moment of its presentation, and she has no way of judging its success outside of its effect on the audience. (Rosenthal 190)

Indeed, whenever her belief in her endeavour fails, she curses the audience. Yet what links them all, audience and actors alike, is the illusion that they have entered, and hence, the importance of the pageant lies in its testimony to the "synthesising powers of illusion" (Rosenthal 192) and to the manner in which order can be achieved in a disordered world due to the power of art.

The language of the pageant is similar to the language that the characters of the novel speak. It too is filled with reminders of the past, a variety of language registers that depend on variables such as time setting and occasion, and a set of allusions that creates a sense of the vastness of the historical and literary traditions that inform the constructions of modern language and thought. It does, however, also suggest the complexities attached to human communication. Human

interaction depends partly on the faces that people put on when they meet, and yet suddenly, with the production of the pageant, the stability of that given is overturned by the spectacle of familiar faces taking on new appearances and names. Several critics have dealt with the comedy attached to figures like Budge, the publican, who plays a policeman in the pageant. There is no doubt that his name suits his role more than it does his real job. However, putting the humour aside, it is interesting to witness the taking on of roles that goes with the taking on of names. Eliza Cooper becomes Elizabeth I and attempts, and sometimes succeeds, to create the sense of an august and regal character, yet the audience is keenly aware that this is the tobacconist of the village adopting a role. This is not to say that the spectators remain fixed in their interpretations of the world around them. While they do recognise the familiar guises of the players, they also delight in and are taken up with the spectacle of the pageant. In fact, moments of it are so successful that the audience applauds loudly and gets taken up by the combination of humour, bawdy, and splendour that makes up some of the scenes. Nevertheless, as the Reverend Streatfield suggests in his diffident attempts at interpretation, the message that Miss La Trobe has conveyed is that "[w]e act different parts; but are the same" (119). If the village tobacconist plays Queen Elizabeth, or Mr Hardcastle plays a Viking, there is a suggestion that what underlies the various parts that people play, whether it is their day-to-day role or their part in a spectacle like this, are connections that mean that "[e]ach is part of a whole" (119) and that together all people are players in the pageant that is life. Indeed, "by mounting the soapbox and standing on the spot where previously stood the ... figure of Queen Elizabeth I ... the minister identifies himself as part of the unfolding drama" (Cuddy-Keane 277).

Miss La Trobe takes to its logical conclusion the idea that people play roles in a human drama by ordering that mirrors be brought on to stage at the end of the pageant, a direction that incorporates the audience as part of the spectacle, and hence suggests that what is true for the players is also true for their spectators. The mirrors emphasise that the spectators collectively form the most recent chapter of the history of England that the pageant attempts to trace. The spectators are not comfortable with what they see, however:

So that was her little game! To show us up, as we are, here and how. All shifted, preened, minced; hands were raised, legs shifted. Even Bart, even Lucy, turned away. All evaded or shaded themselves - save Mrs. Manressa who, facing herself in the glass, used it as a glass; had out her mirror; powdered her nose; and moved one curl, disturbed by the breeze, to its place. (115)

The whole of the audience may not understand its connection with the players of the pageant, although Mrs Swithin indicates that she does when she says "'I'd no notion we looked so nice'" (51), yet Miss La Trobe unites spectators and players for one afternoon, and the unity is achieved through the spectacle of the pageant. Hers is a vision that is, therefore, successful, albeit intermittent. The brevity of it is a frustration for her, yet it is an inevitability that she has prepared for, as is demonstrated by the words that echo from the gramophone as the audience leaves: "*Dispersed are we, the gramophone triumphed, yet lamented, Dispersed are we....*" (123). It is ironical that the spectators should "[u]nawittingly ... constitute the final act of the pageant as they leave" (Rosenthal 197), once more placing themselves in the midst of a drama that reflects, and becomes part of, their own. Yet, the fact of inevitable dispersal that is incorporated into the gramophone noises emphasises that Miss La Trobe's vision incorporates

the idea that moments of unity are fleeting. Bart sits listening to a tune during an interval in the pageant, the words of the song he hears revealing an awareness of transience and the fact of the inevitability of death in a world where happiness and youth and life are fragile and brief:

For this day and this dance and this merry, merry May
 Will be over (he tapped his finger on his knee)
 With the cutting of the clover this retreating and advancing - the
 swifts seemed to have shot beyond their orbits -
 Will be over, over, over,
 And the ice will dart its splinter, and the winter,
 O the winter, will fill the grate with ashes,
 And there'll be no glow, no glow on the log. (73-74)

As Bart listens, he watches Lucy, and concludes that she is probably thinking "God is peace. God is Love" (73) and he understands that the difference between them is caused because "she belonged to the unifiers; he to the separatists" (73). These two have diverse understandings of the world. They disagree on almost everything, and yet, it is Lucy's difference that allows for the articulation of the possibilities of visionary moments. As the pageant ends, she makes her way to the fish pond and gazes at the water. The passage which contains her thoughts is worth quoting in full:

Lucy still gazed at the lily pool. "All gone," she murmured, "under the leaves." Scared by shadows passing, the fish had withdrawn. She gazed at the water. Perfunctorily she caressed her cross. But her eyes went water searching, looking for fish. The lilies were shutting; the red lily, the white lily, each on its plate of leaf. Above, the air rushed; beneath was water. She stood between two fluidities, caressing her cross. Faith required

hours of kneeling in the early morning. Often the delight of the roaming eye seduced her - a sunbeam, a shadow. Now the jagged leaf at the corner suggested, by its contours, Europe. There were other leaves. She fluttered her eye over the surface, naming leaves India, Africa, America. Islands of security, glossy and thick.

"Bart..." She spoke to him. She had meant to ask him about the dragon-fly - couldn't the blue thread settle, if we destroyed it here, then there? But he had gone into the house.

Then something moved in the water; her favourite fantail. The golden orfe followed. Then she had a glimpse of silver - the great carp himself, who came to the surface so very seldom. They slid on, in and out between the stalks, silver; pink; gold; splashed; streaked; pied.

"Ourselves," she murmured. And retrieving some glint of faith from the grey waters, hopefully, without much help from reason, she followed the fish; the speckled, streaked, and blotched; seeing in that vision beauty, power, and glory in ourselves.

Fish had faith, she reasoned. They trust us because we've never caught 'em. But her brother would reply: "That's greed." "Their beauty!" she protested. "Sex," he would say. "Who makes sex susceptible to beauty?" she would argue. He shrugged who? Why? Silenced, she returned to her private vision; of beauty which is goodness; the sea on which we float. Mostly impervious, but surely every boat sometimes leaks?

He would carry the torch of reason till it went out in the darkness of the cave. For herself, every morning, kneeling, she protected her vision. Every night she opened the window and looked at leaves against the sky. Then slept. Then the random ribbons of birds' voices woke her. (126-127)

The novel leaves no doubt about Lucy's eccentricity, and frequently provides evidence of the clash between her faith and her brother's reason, a conflict which can have no resolution, and out of which Lucy often emerges as having been somewhat ridiculed. Yet, again and again, it is made clear that her faith allows her to see beauty and harmony and patterns in the world. Fox points out that "all levels and all major themes in Between the Acts are linked in one place or another to the microcosmic lily pond" (472), and that the pond forms the innermost circle of the rings that radiate "outward to include society and the world at large" (473). The fact that Lucy sees the shapes of continents in the leaves on the pond implies the link between this pool and the greater universe. Hence, the glimpses of beauty and unity that she detects as the fish dart to the surface of the dark water, only to disappear again, can be linked to the occasional shimmers of meaning that are visible in a world so fragmented and opaque in meaning, fragments which allow the patterns of human vision to emerge. She herself makes this connection--"'Ourselves'", she says, as she looks at the fish--and her apprehension of the beauty of the fish ties in with the manner in which she perceives the pageant to be an exhibition and reflection of human beauty. The scenes of human history in the pageant are of particular interest to her as she is the one character of the novel who articulates the patterns that connect the present with the past, and understands that the present is a reformulation and continuation of the past. During the pageant her preoccupations with history emerge once more as she looks at the swallows and recognises that their journey that day is a repeat of many past journeys:

"They come every year," said Mrs. Swithin, ignoring the fact that she spoke to the empty air. "From Africa." As they had come, she supposed, when the Barn was a swamp. (64)

"Swallows," said Lucy, holding her cup, looking at the birds.

Excited by the company they were flitting from rafter to rafter.

Across Africa, across France they had come to nest here. Year after year they came. Before there was a channel, when the earth, upon which the Windsor chair was planted, was a riot of

rhododendrons, and humming birds quivered at the mouths of scarlet trumpets, as she had read that morning in her Outline of History, they had come.... (67)

When Mrs Manressa asks her if the play was old or new, Lucy answers appropriately, if "somewhat enigmatically" (Kelley 232). She merely points to the birds as if to say that the play, like the performance of the birds, is neither old nor new, but a repetition of a pattern. This is not to say that, because of her awareness of larger patterns, she has no sense of individual human brevity. Earlier in the novel, as she looks at the view of the countryside surrounding Pointz Hall, she comments on the double-edged effect of the beauty:

"That's what makes a view so sad," said Mrs Swithin, lowering herself into the deckchair 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 not." (32)

Nevertheless, it is Lucy who, like Miss La Trobe, recognises the connections between people, and between the past and the present, connections which allow for unity and which make room for human vision. In amongst the rather negative responses to the pageant expressed by members of the audience is Lucy's articulation of her response. Kelley points out that, congratulating Miss La Trobe, Lucy says "'[w]hat a small part I've had to play'" (95), and hence implies a knowledge of the way in which this pageant has united both audience and actors in a spectacle in which

they are all players. Importantly, she goes on to say "you've made me feel I could have played ... Cleopatra!" (95), a comment which makes clear her understanding that "[b]y joining in the play, either as actors or audience, the characters in Between the Acts unconsciously reaffirm their unity with all other people and times" (Kelley 232).

It is interesting that the description of Miss La Trobe's artistic activity that follows on from Lucy's compliment is one which employs the images of creations rising from the darkness of a container and momentarily being seen:

"You've twitched the invisible strings," was what the old lady meant; and revealed - of all people - Cleopatra! Glory possessed her. Ah, but she was not merely a twitcher of individual strings; she was one who seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a recreated world. Her moment was on her - her glory. (95)

This description is like those of the fish that rise to the surface of the pond and show glimpses of their beauty. As a relief from fragmentation comes occasional harmony, and it is exactly this that occurs at the end of the pageant as the music plays for the last time before the play ends and the Reverend addresses the audience. With the onset of the music, all people at the pageant suddenly comprehend and are united in their understanding:

Like quicksilver sliding, filings magnetized, the distracted united. The tune began; the first note meant a second; the second a third. Then down beneath a force was born in opposition; then another. On different levels they diverged. On different levels ourselves went forward; flower gathering some on the surface; others descending to wrestle with the meaning; but all comprehending; all enlisted. The whole population of the mind's immeasurable

profundity came flocking; from the unprotected, the unskinned; and dawn rose; and azure; from chaos and cacophony measure; but not the melody of surface sound alone controlled it; but also the warring battle-plumed warriors straining asunder: To part? No. Compelled from the ends of the horizon; recalled from the edge of appalling crevasses; they crashed; solved, united. And some relaxed their fingers; and others uncrossed their legs. (117)

The language of this section sets up "chaos" and "cacophony" against the notions of unity which the artistic creation of Miss La Trobe has allowed for. Just as Isa attempts to understand truth through poetry, so too does Miss La Trobe launch her ideas through art and hence create a lasting moment in the midst of the passing of time, and in the face of human brevity. What the two artistic mediums of poetry and drama have in common is human effort, and the novel leaves us with the understanding that that is a necessity for the achievement of a visionary moment, not the least because of the fleeting nature of the vision, the attempts at which, as Miss La Trobe demonstrates, are never ending. Indeed, judging from her knowledge that there will always be more for her to create, it is the working of the creative process that the novel aims to emphasise, and not the impossibilities attached to the notion of permanence:

"I should group them," she murmured, "here." It would be midnight; there would be two figures, half concealed by a rock. The curtain would rise. What would the first words be? The words escaped her. (130)

Significantly, the last scene of the novel has Isa and Giles sitting in silence, and ends with a narrative description--"Then the curtain rose. They spoke." (136)--which affirms that between the acts of the stage drama exists a human drama which continues in spite of the faltering of

the artistic vision. The words "[t]hey spoke" affirm the existence of human communication, and the continuing ability that people have to make connections despite the fragmentary nature of life.

Miss La Trobe's visions, by linking together the past, present, and future, attest to a permanence that is generated by time's continuity. They acknowledge that, while attempts to make the moment stand still are ultimately defeated by progression and change, the patterns of time passing themselves create a permanence because of their eternal recurrence. This paradox is articulated by Bernard as he sums up at the end of The Waves, and is partially explored in Mrs Dalloway and To the Lighthouse. In Between the Acts, however, it is given its fullest expression as it is incorporated into the central vision of the novel. Appropriately, therefore, Between the Acts ends with the possibility of the birth of a child, and its final scene is set in a night which is "night before roads were made, or houses" (136), one which links this moment with pre-history. This gesture towards the future combined with a re-enactment of a distant past places the novel's final moment in a historical continuum, one which entails that, while visions are fleeting and the individual does not for long escape mortality, existence continues and within it the possibility of meaning.

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