



S. E. CULVER

PH

105
705
THS

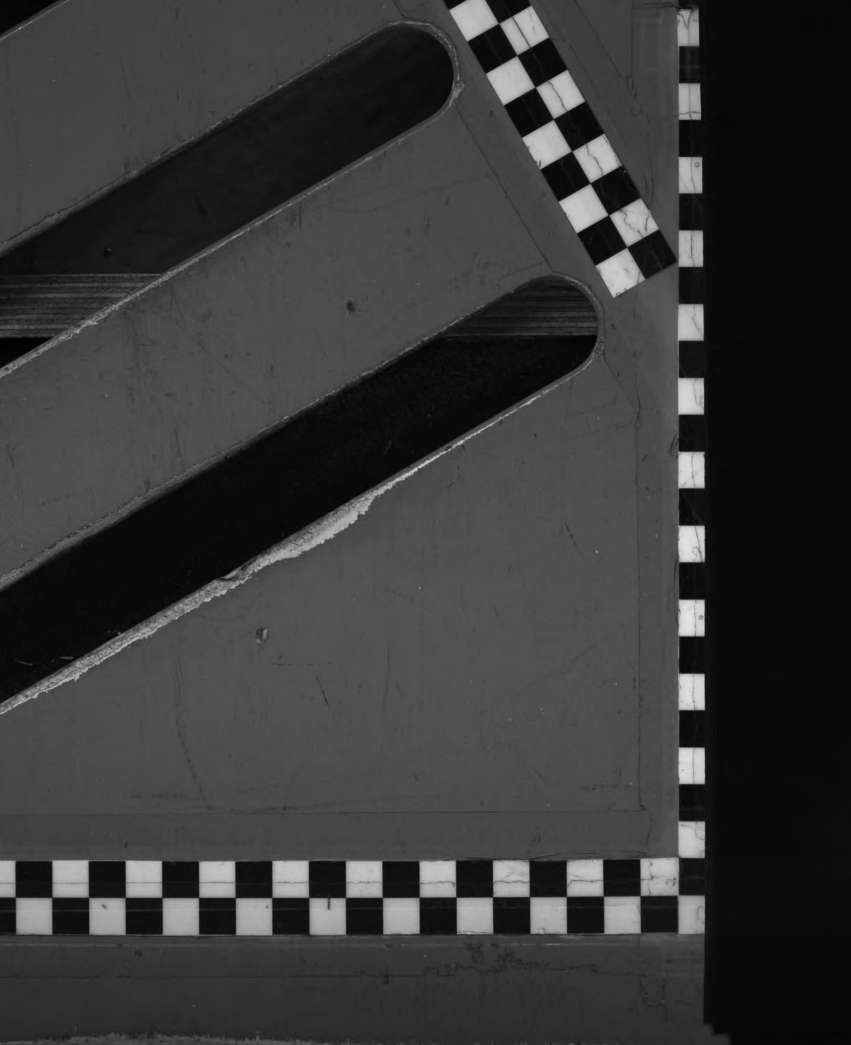


PH. D. I

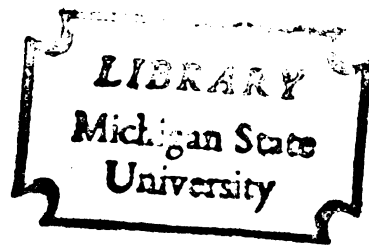
105
705
THS



PH. D. 11







This is to certify that the

thesis entitled

Nature and Human Nature in the Major Novels
of Virginia Woolf

presented by

Sara Elizabeth Culver

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in English

William A. Johnson

Major professor

Date October 30, 1980



OVERDUE FINES:

25¢ per day per item

RETURNING LIBRARY MATERIALS:

Place in book return to remove
charge from circulation records

C 266

~~JUN 28 1995~~
~~T 2630 013 11.8643575~~

~~266~~

APR 22 '86 110

JUL 30 '86
174

MAY 31 '86

4 00 A 080

NATURE AND HUMAN NATURE
IN THE MAJOR NOVELS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

By

Sara Elizabeth Culver

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

1980

ABSTRACT

NATURE AND HUMAN NATURE IN THE MAJOR NOVELS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

By

Sara Elizabeth Culver

The dissertation is a three-part study of the five major novels of Virginia Woolf: The Voyage Out 1915, Jacob's Room 1922, Mrs. Dalloway 1925, To The Lighthouse 1927, and The Waves 1931. The novels are studied not so much as works of art in their own right, than as they reveal the gradual maturation and development of their author. One of the assumptions on which this work rests is that a critic can know something about an author's state of mind at the time a work was being created by a careful examination of that work; that is, that the metaphors an author uses are not merely arbitrary choices, but a revelation of the artist's deepest self.

The first part deals with the way Woolf's nature imagery changes over the years from The Voyage Out to The Waves. The evolution of "Woolf's nature" is apparent in the way her metaphors for the natural world change from rather harsh, bleak ones in her first novel to warm

and lively ones in her second and continue to expand in her later novels to reveal a profound and sensitive perception of the human relationship to the natural world.

The second section of the study concerns Woolf's changing relationship to her characters. The author of The Voyage Out sketched characters with whom she could rarely identify. The characters are not depicted with any especial sympathy, and sometimes with antipathy. They seem alienated from each other and from the world around them. To some extent, the same is true of the characters in Jacob's Room. In Mrs. Dalloway, however, Woolf starts to empathize more deeply with her characters, and to portray human beings who are sensitive to each other, and aware of what is happening inside them. In To The Lighthouse, she moves past the boundaries of her self in the portrait of her parents. In The Waves, she merges completely with her characters.

The third part of the study deals briefly with the question of whether or not Virginia Woolf had "a philosophy of life." The conclusion is that she had not, because her most cherished values were conflicting ones; and that her ethos changed little over the years, except in the way she felt about it.

The conclusion of the study is that the popular image of Virginia Woolf as a "neurasthenic invalid" who was heavily insulated from the "real world" by her sex, her

class, and her recurring illness needs to be revised. She was in fact, a tough, courageous woman whose indomitable will to face reality unflinchingly and without illusion was both her salvation and her downfall.

Copyright by
Sara Elizabeth Culver
1980

For my daughter,
Elizabeth Aza

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Since I would have been unable to complete this work without the cooperation and forbearance of my immediate family, I wish to thank my mother, Melvina Culver, and my daughter, Elizabeth; the former for her financial support and the latter for her moral support (which was interrupted only by occasional fits of exasperation with her mother's absence). Both frequently sacrificed their time and energy to give me space in which to work.

Also, I wish to thank those people whose help ranged from encouragement and inspiration to help with typing and proof-reading. My aunt, Dorothy Culver, generously donated her time and energy to type a first draft and offer cogent suggestions as to its content. My former teacher and present friend, Beulah Monaghan, very kindly helped me with the proof-reading. More important, however, has been her continuing belief that I had something worthwhile to say and the ability to say it well. To Herbert Greenberg, in whose seminar I first became re-acquainted with Woolf, and with whom I have frequently discussed Woolf's vision of reality, I owe a great deal of the inspiration for this work. Marilyn Atlas' contributions to the completion of this dissertation have ranged from moral support to critical

commentary and from feminist inspiration to help in locating a typist. I wish to thank the members of my committee, Richard Benvenuto, Russell Nye, and Linda Wagner for donating their time to this project. To my major professor, William Johnsen, whose support and encouragement never flagged as he gallantly read his way through manuscripts (complete with misspellings and cryptic erasures) as obscure as "news from the Delphic Oracle" (his phrasing), I owe a great deal of gratitude.

Preface

I had hoped, in this study, to lay emphasis on the strength and vitality of Virginia Woolf's character, and perhaps to help revise the popular image of her as "neurasthentic."

Even those critics who are basically sympathetic and friendly to Virginia Woolf have tended to see her as secluded and remote from the concerns of the rest of humanity, or so delicate and frail and lacking in backbone that she cannot possibly be a good example of human behavior. I believe her to be a person quite different from the one that has come down to us: "The Invalid Lady of Bloomsbury" (coined by E. M. Forster). Rather than lay emphasis upon the fact that she had to muster enormous psychic courage and energy to overcome her difficulties, to live what was in fact an exciting, interesting, enormously creative life, her critics have too often chosen to regard her perspective on life as not merely that belonging to an (occasional) invalid, but invalid.

The adverse criticism Woolf has received was spearheaded in the thirties by a group of malcontent journalists--Wyndham Lewis in particular--who considered the "Bloomsbury group" to be a gathering of precious and

affected aesthetes, or in Lewis' own ill-chosen words, "ill-mannered and pretentious dilettanti." Virginia Woolf apparently came to be considered the most precious, affected, and irrelevant (if not the most ill-mannered!) of this group, just possibly because of her sex. While the ludicrousness of Lewis' charge is apparent to anyone who knows how Woolf worked--"dilettante" is simply astounding--nevertheless it was swallowed raw and squirming by a wide readership. Partly, no doubt, because Wyndham Lewis is easier to read than Virginia Woolf. Someone once said, the bigger the lie, the more effective it is, and this seems to be the case with Woolf. The myth is still with us, the myth that says Woolf is "irrelevant" for anyone outside her own elite and privileged group...that her vision of reality is divorced from the experience of any normal person, that it is interesting artistically, but that it has no valid claim to an interpretation of any wider reality.

Woolf enjoys world-wide popularity; she has been translated into a great number of languages--including Hindi and Chinese--and it seems odd that this would be so if she were "irrelevant." Paradoxically, it may be that she has more to say to those whose lives have been interrupted by war, or by some other upheaval of their countries, than to those people whose lives have secure, comfortable, and fairly well-assured, that is, the reasonably well-to-do middle class. She has been accused

of having led too comfortable, too insulated and too insular an existence to have anything important to say to those who have had to deal with the "real world." For those who so accuse her, I can only remind them that she had undergone childhood bereavement, sexual molestation, successive mental and physical breakdowns, incarceration, bombardment (World Wars 1 and 2) and, finally, the prospect of being imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp. That she has been regarded as an aesthete concerned only with the subtlest shadings of meaning--in light of the cold facts--must be due to her profound respect for her art and not due to the fact that she was protected from all violent shocks. For she was not. Quite the reverse.

Her artistic position, that the only thing we can be certain of is the moment, the here and now, and her humanistic position, that the most important aspect of human life is human love and human relationships, is also the position taken by another well-known novelist today, Jerzy Kosinski. No one has yet, to my knowledge, accused the author of The Painted Bird of having led a sheltered existence. The position arrived at by both authors--one through internal chaos and the other through external chaos--is remarkably similar.

It is a shame that the study of Woolf's work, and the kind of critical consideration accorded her has been balked by the myth that she is too precious and irrelevant

to be worthy of serious consideration...that she makes too great a demand on her readers for too little return.

Certainly it cannot be denied that her work, especially The Waves, makes a great demand on the reader's attention. However, Woolf makes no demand on the reader that she does not repay many, many times over in an enrichment of his vision, of his delight in seeing the world through her very special perspective.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
------------------------	---

PART I: NATURE

Chapter

1. <u>THE VOYAGE OUT</u>	23
2. <u>JACOB'S ROOM</u>	37
3. <u>MRS. DALLOWAY</u>	50
4. <u>TO THE LIGHTHOUSE</u>	59
5. <u>THE WAVES</u>	74

PART II: CHARACTER

6. <u>THE VOYAGE OUT</u>	88
7. <u>JACOB'S ROOM</u>	107
8. <u>MRS. DALLOWAY</u>	131
9. <u>TO THE LIGHTHOUSE</u>	170
10. <u>THE WAVES</u>	197

PART III: ETHOS

11. DID VIRGINIA WOOLF HAVE A "PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE?"	224
12. <u>THE VOYAGE OUT</u>	230
13. <u>JACOB'S ROOM</u>	237
14. <u>MRS. DALLOWAY</u>	243
15. <u>TO THE LIGHTHOUSE</u>	250
16. <u>THE WAVES</u>	259

CONCLUSION	265
----------------------	-----

BIBLIOGRAPHY	171
ENDNOTES	174

INTRODUCTION

Virginia Woolf--from having been a lonely, almost misanthropic young woman at the start of her career--grew to become a much more tolerant and accepting person in her later years. Although she remained always rather shy and aloof, in time she came to regard her fellow-humans with a benevolent, rather than a sardonic, eye. The sometimes bitter, almost paranoid, quality that is evident in The Voyage Out recedes before a much more humane and balanced view of the world. Over the course of perhaps twenty years, Woolf's characters come closer to nature, closer to each other, and closer to their creator, for she gradually becomes more at peace with human beings and more at peace with herself. There was no good reason why this should have been so.

Woolf triumphed magnificently over conditions which should have exacerbated all of her morbid tendencies. After the worst of her mental breakdowns (which spanned almost two years) she woke from that internal chaos to find her country plunged into the more general madness of world war.

Although Woolf would certainly want the influences of her husband's love and care for her to be recorded as having

helped her to understanding, as well as the kindness and encouragement of such friends as Clive Bell, E. M. Forster, and Lytton Strachey, nevertheless even these cannot explain her resilience and her astounding capacity for enjoying life, even under the sword of Damocles. She found the strength to create and the courage to feel joy despite the constant threat of mental breakdown.

Virginia Woolf's novels are witness to her ability to open herself to experience, to let herself be vulnerable to life in spite of the terrible wounds it had dealt her. I have used the biographical material to show how very far she had to come...to show that her journey was not an easy, nor a pre-ordained one, but one that could have stopped short anywhere along the way, in a madhouse, in sentimentality, rather than emotional honesty, or in a bitter and recriminating personality.

If we lose, for whatever reason, our ability to love the present, we are condemned to love what is forever lost to us. Woolf had more reason than most to believe that happiness does not last, but she did not hesitate to reach out for it when it came. Like Mrs. Ramsey in To The Lighthouse, she had the courage "to grasp what she could not hold."* She was that rare human being who looks upon the world without illusion and yet without terror. She could penetrate the veil of life's seeming solidity and design,

*An excerpt from a conversation with Herbert Greenberg.

straight through to the infinite depths beyond our ephemeral moment and yet not be paralyzed with fright or despair.

At the outset of her artistic career, Woolf had a chilling vision of the universe and a rather alienated position in regard to her fellow creatures. It is somewhat off the mark to ascribe that alienation to simple snobbishness--which, incredibly, has sometimes been done. She was unique even in childhood, set apart by an almost over-active imagination and an intuitive grasp of human tragedy. Unhappily, these traits were coupled with an inability to function comfortably with people. Her awkwardness and her propensity for getting herself into odd scrapes earned her the childhood nickname of "Billy-goat," and this stuck with her even into adulthood. She was from the outset a shy and unusual person.

When her mother died, Virginia was thirteen, and the shock was naturally severe; in fact, it precipitated her first mental breakdown. However, in Moments of Being, a recently published book of autobiographical sketches, she writes that even worse than her mother's death was the ritual of Victorian mourning (terribly overdone by her guilt-ridden father), and the years of "stupid suffering" imposed by him in following that ritual. Moreover, her adolescence was even worse than most girls would have

suffered under the circumstances due to the fact that her half-brother, George, an obtuse and insensitive philistine, took charge of his half-sisters' lives. Under his reign, Virginia and her elder sister, Vanessa, suffered a good deal of bullying in the process of being introduced to what George considered "good society." Vanessa nearly died of boredom, and Virginia went through agonies of embarrassment because of her shyness. In addition to his other shortcomings, George was given to making incestuous advances. This might not have been so traumatic as it was, had Virginia found him at all admirable or attractive. The depth of her cold rage at being so used is apparent in her descriptions of George in her reminiscences.

Even before her mother died, however, there is ample evidence to support the theory that Virginia did not receive enough of the nurturance and affirmation she needed to feel secure and comfortable with herself and her gift. Under the circumstances, her mother's death would have been agony enough, but during the era that followed, she lost first her half-sister Stella, who had tried to take her mother's place, and her idolized elder brother, Thoby. Finally, her father died very slowly and painfully of cancer.

Thus, brutally, was the truth forced upon her that human destiny is not in human hands, and that the utmost one can do is not delude oneself about the matter. Looking

back on her youth, she wrote of her feelings at the time of Thoby's death:

....at fifteen to have that protection removed,... to see cracks and gashes in that fabric, to be cut by them, to see beyond them--was that good? Did it give one an experience that even if it was painful, yet meant that the gods (as I used to phrase it) were taking one seriously....I would see....two great grindstones and myself between them. I would typify a contest between myself and "them" --some invisible giant. I would reason, or fancy, that if life were thus made to rear and kick, it was at any rate, the real thing....So I came to think of life as something of extreme reality... this, of course, increased my feelings of my own importance. Not in relation to human beings: in relation to the forces which had respected me sufficiently to make me feel what was real.¹

While she was young, in spite of her disclaimer, this knowledge tended to make her feel rather bitterly superior; when she was older, it manifested itself as an utter lack of interest in plot. For the same reason she was not interested in character as destiny, but rather in character as perceptor of reality. A question that always interested her was this: how much reality can this personality endure or reveal? Sensitivity was for her the most valuable human trait, and, highly as she values intelligence, she does not admire the emotionally dead savant.

The largeness and beauty of each character's inner space is dictated by that individual's capacity to interpret reality. So Rachel, in The Voyage Out, finds the world larger and more interesting as she herself matures.

She was conscious of emotions and powers which she had never suspected in herself, and of a depth in the world hitherto unknown.²

The more we know of ourselves, the richer nature becomes for us; we look out upon the universe only as far as we see into ourselves.

Before I start to trace Woolf's development, I will discuss briefly some of the more recent criticism which relates her life to her work. In following Woolf's development, I have concerned myself with three major areas: in Part I her relationship to nature; in Part II her relationship to her characters; and in Part III her relationship to the world. Implicit in the discussion of nature is her relationship to time because it is in her use of natural imagery that she reveals her concern at its passing.

Reflected in the narrator's perceptions is the expanding consciousness of the implied author; she sees more beauty, depth, and richness in the world with each succeeding novel. Her journey is one from alienation to reconciliation, from an embittered loneliness to a serene solitude. When the five novels are read in sequence, it is strikingly apparent that Woolf's treatment of nature changes abruptly from paranoid dislike to rhapsodic celebration; less abruptly, her characters become sympathetic and then empathetic, and finally, her perception of the world changes from paranoia to awe.

The underlying premise of the study of her natural imagery is that human beings tend to project onto the natural or non-human world those feelings which either are blocked in their expression towards other human beings, or inspired by them, or both. An example of this can be found in Swann's Way when the young Proust, in his famous passage on the Hawthorne hedge, recounts expressing sentiments towards the flowering trees which would have been more properly addressed to his mother. Another very explicit example of this is found in Mrs. Dalloway. The narrator takes time out to comment on the scenery as Peter Walsh drowzes beside the nurse in one of London's parks, and digresses elaborately upon the manner in which trees and shrubs, seen by a solitary traveler from a distance, seem to take on, not only human form, but also qualities of humanity: benignity, generosity, kindness; or, in Woolf's words,

....this figure, made of sky and branches as it is, had risen from the sea....as a shape might be sucked up out of the waves to shower down from her magnificent hands compassion, comprehension, absolution.³

In The Voyage Out, Woolf's first novel and seven years in the making, there is no sense of nature bestowing "compassion, comprehension, or absolution." There, her inner landscape, where she must go in order to find her fictional world, seems greatly at variance with her external landscape.

Certainly one gathers from her letters that Virginia Stephen took a great deal of pleasure and comfort from the natural beauty around her; she especially enjoyed going back to Cornwall, where she had spent such happy summers as a child, but this is not reflected in her first novel.

The subconscious forms its own landscape, a landscape likely to surface only in dreams, fantasies, or, if one is a writer, in literary creations. That landscape which is subconscious is largely oneself, or reflects one's feelings about the world. A desert one crosses in a dream is a formidable barrier in oneself; a mountain on the distant horizon may be an eminence one dares only dream of attaining; an ocean holds one's own deepest being. In The Voyage Out, the beauty of the ocean is politely acknowledged, but its vastness is what one remembers; it can swallow The Euphrosyne without a trace.

When I speak of "nature" I am referring to everything which is not part of the human consciousness, or, roughly speaking, to the physical world. Since the philosophers of science have not decided to their complete satisfaction the precise difference between "mind" and "brain," I will leave my definition at that. Thoreau, musing upon the relationship of his own body to the granite ribs of the mountain upon which he stood, wrote that there was something in nature that was not "bound to be kind to man" and that

he "feared to meet bodies....rather than spirits." Our flesh, if we believe what science tells us, is composed from the dust of stars and will be stars again. Our substance is eternal; our thoughts are not.

In Woolf's first two novels, The Voyage Out and Jacob's Room, nature and human consciousness are fairly well separated; it is not hard to draw lines of demarcation between the world of human concerns and everything which lies outside that realm. However, as Woolf matures, both as a person and an artist, these two worlds, the natural and apparently objective, and the conscious, subjective world, tend to merge and overlap and blend into each other in a way that makes it difficult to talk about each one separately. In each succeeding novel, the distance between them diminishes.

This gradual integration of the human and natural worlds is evidence of Woolf's reconciliation with both. The natural world is no longer feared as "the enemy," and the human beings in it are no longer "the unenlightened masses."

Woolf's fundamental outlook--so far as a system of beliefs or values goes--does not seem to have changed in its skeleton form over the years from The Voyage Out to The Waves. For example, she remained an atheist. She never subscribed to any form of organized religion (she

found such beliefs both amusing and contemptible). She was, in her overall view, somewhat of a pessimist. And yet, she was not a nihilist; for her, the joys of creation are more worth cultivating than the joys of destruction. Her vision is a profoundly humanitarian one. She never gave serious consideration to Nietzschean optimism; not only was it silly and distasteful to her, but the tyrant or dictator is as much at the mercy of chance as the poet. While she regarded human beings and their creations as ephemeral, she felt that a humane philosophy was the only one that made sense, for it encourages the development of intelligence and sensitivity, without which human beings lack dignity. Nevertheless, she was aware that she had no rational foundation for her humanism.

Since she believed there was really no consciousness in the universe besides human consciousness, she could not (rationally) believe in the existence of a past outside human memory. In "A Sketch of the Past" however, she reflects on the vividness of some of her earliest memories and speculates on the reason for their overwhelming force.

Those moments--in the nursery, on the road to the beach--can still be more real than the present moment. This I have just tested. For I got up and crossed the garden. Percy was digging the asparagus bed; Louis was shaking a mat in front of the bedroom door, but I was seeing them through the sight I saw here--the nursery and the road to the beach. At times I can go back to St. Ives more completely than I can this morning. I can

reach a state where I seem to be watching things happen as if I were there. That is, I suppose, that my memory supplies what I had forgotten, so that it seems as if it were happening independently, though I am really making it happen. In certain favorable moods, memories--what one has forgotten--come to the top. Now if this is so, is it not possible--I often wonder--that things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds; are in fact still in existence? And if so, will it not be possible, in time, that some device will be invented by which we can tap them?⁴

Laying aside for a moment Woolf's astounding powers of imagination, it seems that she wishes to establish some objective measure of reality outside the human realm.

While she supposes that she is the one responsible for these memories, she wonders if perhaps they do exist--somewhere--outside herself. Unless one posits a god, what memory is there besides human memory? And what happens to our past if there is no record of it? What can it possibly matter, then, what we do? Whatever we do must be done in reference to human memory--and human memory is lamentably short.

There are other problems too. Woolf, unlike most of us, could not blind herself to the implications of fate's complete indifference.

I am under the impression of the moment...which is shot through with the accident I saw this morning--a woman crying, oh, oh, oh, faintly pinned against the railings with a motor car on top of her. All day I have heard that voice...A great sense of the brutality and wildness of the world remains with me--there was this woman in brown walking along the pavement--suddenly a red film car turns a

somersault, lands on top of her and one hears this
oh, oh, oh.⁵

That she could assert humane values, human dignity, was not the effect of a shallow optimism; hers was not the sleepy contentment of an insulated and feeble imagination, but an ecstasy born of agonizing knowledge that our notion of "destiny" is a palliative for disguising the unpleasant reality.

The concept of atheism is not difficult to embrace--for the mind--but the emotional response at finding oneself aboard a rudderless ship in dangerous waters can be terror.

Woolf progressed from the point where she saw human beings as lost and insignificant, floundering in the shoreless ocean of the infinite universe, to a point where she could see them as bold explorers, rejoicing in the voyage itself, knowing that their discoveries, their joy and exhilaration in the journey, are all that matter, that there is no land in sight, that the only fixed stars in the firmament are birth and death, and that they can face this last, secure in the knowledge that they have not been either deluded by a mirage or panicked by the discovery that there is no shore.

Virginia Woolf, although she is primarily discussed as a writer whose main contribution was a new literary style, left us a legacy even more valuable: her courage.

The criticism which seems most relevant to the concerns of my dissertation is the psychological or biographical kind. There has been a great deal of interest in Woolf's psychological make-up and psychology has been the basis for much of the recently published criticism about her. This was spurred no doubt by the publication of Leonard Woolf's autobiography wherein he discusses his wife's mental illness and her personality at some lengths, and by Quentin Bell's biography of his aunt.

I have selected three critics who seem to me to have been representative of the kind of studies being done on Woolf. Phyllis Rose, especially, has already gained a wide audience, and Roger Poole is notable for his unorthodox position vis-a-vis Leonard Woolf. All three (as well as myself) are interested in the effect of her illness upon her personality and the extent to which it influenced her work.

The studies I have found most interesting are Jean Love's Virginia Woolf, Leonard Poole's The Unknown Virginia Woolf, and Phyllis Rose's biography, Women of Letters. This last book came out in 1978, when I had been working on my dissertation for two years. As I scanned the book, my first reaction was that Rose had written and published my dissertation. Closer examination proved this to be untrue.

While I think that Rose's study is interesting and valuable, I feel that she accepts too readily the idea that

Woolf was "sheltered," or even "snobbish" (the reason she gives for Woolf's disliking James Joyce). And although it is necessary to examine Woolf's work from a feminist perspective, that is not--as Rose seems to imply--its greatest value. It is not the political aspect of her work that "...is the key to revising the image of her as an isolated and somewhat precious technician."⁶

She is both sympathetic and generous in estimate of Virginia Woolf, her criticism interesting and enlightening, and she is an excellent writer and will surely reach a wide audience. It is for this reason that I am all the more distressed by her concluding paragraph, in which she states that Virginia Woolf was "terrified of life."

Love's study is based on a careful perusal of the letters of Julia and Leslie Stephen, both before and after their marriage. About half the book is devoted to an explanation of their temperaments and personalities, and the way they affected each other. Since they were both great letter-writers, Love has been able to discover a great deal about their marriage and the upbringing of their children. Apparently even Quentin Bell had not been able to read all of his grandparents' correspondence prior to writing Virginia's biography.

Love is very thorough, and on the matter of the factors contributing to Virginia's later emotional disturbances,

quite sound. However, I disagree with her on the issue of George and Gerald Duckworth's caresses. (She seems to feel that Woolf exaggerated their importance or even liked them.) It is true that Virginia may have felt some ambivalence about them; but that does not alter the fact that they were molestations, and a violation of her right to the privacy and integrity of her body. Nor, as I point out in the chapter on "Mrs. Dalloway," do I believe that her shyness in sexual matters was "natural." What bothers me most about Love's study is that she apparently feels not only that Virginia failed to develop or mature in certain emotional ways, but that this immaturity extended to Woolf's analytic or rational intellectual powers. For example, she cites a passage from one of Virginia's letters to her sisters --written on Christmas day from Cornwall, 1909--as evidence that Virginia, at the age of twenty-seven, believed that Cornwall and London were literally two different worlds, each with its own separate sky. This is the quotation.

....it suddenly struck me how absurd it was to stay in London with Cornwall going on all the time.⁷

Also, in the unpublished version of The Voyage Out Love discovered a passage in which Rachel Vinrace refers to "... a world other than the immediate world of space and time, a better and more spiritual world of peace and sanity."⁸ Since Love does not quote the full passage, it is difficult to know exactly how she was able to construe this meaning

from it. The noteworthy thing, I should think, is that Virginia cut the passage from the version she wanted published. I point out that the author, especially at this time in her life, may have yearned for a transcendent world of beauty, harmony, and order, but that it was precisely because she didn't believe in such a world that she was so frustrated and upset. While Love says that Woolf's "naive cosmology is implicit in some of her novels,"⁹ she does not offer any other support for her belief. I would like to point out that evidence for a belief in a transcendent world of peace, order, beauty, goodness, etc., is rather noticeably lacking in Woolf's work. Her whole vision of art and life is based not only on an intellectual belief that our world is the only one we have, but on a profound emotional grasp of this rather disturbing vision.

There is not much doubt that her periods of insanity gave her a perspective that is not available to everyone, but that she saw the world as she did through a veil of confusion, especially such an obvious one as Love describes, when she was not insane, seems palpably false. If there is more evidence for such a viewpoint, I would like to see it. I am not convinced by what she has offered thus far.

Poole's work has probably been the most provocative because, while Quentin Bell regards his uncle as a hero, and, as Rose puts it, "....a martyr to his wife's illness"

Poole charges him with being--albeit unwittingly--the major source of his wife's difficulties. He does not question Leonard's devotion to Virginia, but charges him with being too strongly convinced of the rightness of his own opinion (that his wife was mad) to listen to her version of her mental state.

Poole's main criticism of Quentin Bell's use of the term "mad" to describe his aunt is that it is an "insulting" and "degrading" word to use; he objects to the word "insane" for the same reasons. He doesn't mind using the word "confused" or the phrase "mental breakdown." It seems that Poole is expecting (in retrospect) the impossible of Leonard Woolf or of anyone who was trying to be of help to Virginia at the time. The idea that people could be treated by discussing their condition with them--especially when they were incoherent--was absolutely unheard of. Poole makes much of the notion that Virginia was unable to tell Leonard about George, but Quentin Bell writes (of Virginia's frigidity)

Vanessa, Leonard and, I think, Virginia herself
were inclined to blame George Duckworth.¹⁰

Apparently all three family members had discussed the effect of George's nocturnal pawings on Virginia's responsiveness or lack thereof.

He does, I think, misinterpret the reasons for Virginia's not having children, and for her having a bedroom separate

from her husband. He makes it all Leonard's responsibility, and seems to interpret Virginia's letters to her husband during her incarceration at Twickenham as evidence that she desired a sexual relationship with him. This, in light of the fact that Poole discourses extensively on her frigidity and unwillingness to engage in intercourse, does not seem logical. Roger Poole is very sympathetic to Virginia, and his interpretation is rather touching because one senses that he has fallen in love with his subject (is perhaps jealous of Leonard?), and feels that he would have succeeded in making her happy. He is quite determined to see her frustration as mostly Leonard's fault. His comparison of Clarissa to Virginia is very different from mine.

She is left lying in her narrow bed, with her virginity wrapped round her like a sheet, awake in the darkness, waiting for Leonard-Richard to come back from one of his committee meetings.¹¹

It is true enough that she longed for the full expression of her sensual self, but it is also equally true that she would not have responded positively to any expression of affection that asked her to give herself sexually. There was one passage in Poole's work that offended me.

....perhaps Virginia knew that Leonard could never see what it was she wanted of him, and considered that, loving as he was, it was all her own fault, as she should never have married him. (Another cigarette. Let's get on with the next review--essay--novel--draft. Time must be filled in somehow, and writing is the best way to fill it. Those interminable reading lists: the Greeks,

the Elizabethans, the eighteenth century, the modern novel, history, psychology, biography. For her reading was morphia.¹²

This passage smells very much like "All she needs is a good lay." The last sentence is particularly offensive. One wonders why it is that no one refers to unmarried male authors as being possibly "unfulfilled" or suggests that a large artistic output or wide range of intellectual interests is a sign of sexual frustration--in the case of a man. Certainly there have been male authors who regretted their childlessness. John Stewart Mill is said to have remarked that he would exchange his entire body of work for the privilege of being able to hold a grandchild on his knee.

To continue, I would like to mention a monograph by Miyeko Kamiya entitled, "Virginia Woolf: An Outline of a Study on her Personality, Illness and Work," which appeared in 1965. This tantalizing paper promised an excellent piece of work which is either still in progress or has--unhappily--been abandoned, for I can find nothing else by the author on that subject. In it she describes Woolf's mental illness as a combination of manic-depressive and schizophrenia, and she relates Woolf's work to her illness, contending not that she had a narrow and cloistered vision of reality, but that she had been privileged to witness an extension of reality, or, in Kamiya's words,

In the passionate anguish behind her presentation of Septimus' suffering and suicide we sense her

indignation at how people of the world, including psychiatrists, could go on in life unconcerned and self-complacent, ignoring the deep and tragic realities of the human mind that lie hidden to their shallow vision. And Virginia Woolf could not but be poignantly aware of these realities; it was at this price that she was able to create what she did create.¹³

She too mentions Woolf's courage.

If the human mind is that which is "faced with his world and even with himself"...we must call Virginia's mind a courageous one that faced the strange facts of her inner world with wonder and without self-deception, in solitude and suffering; that tried the utmost it could do to understand these facts and to express them into works of art.¹⁴

I find the evidence for Woolf's courage in the fact that she was able to face the depths of the universe without and the vastness of the night within unsupported by any illusions of divine guidance or superior purpose. This would have been quite an achievement for anyone--especially at that period of history--but she had to live with the knowledge that she was dependent upon a rather frail constitution for her sanity, and that alone would have been sufficient temptation for most people to abandon rationalism in favor of mysticism.

Not only was her vision a courageous one, her attempt to capture her vision carried with it some risk. When she drew on her memory and imagination too for the materials of Rachel's delirium, Septimus' madness, or even the more unpleasant insights she ascribes to Bernard, she is leaning

over a well of pain and sorrow and even terror wherein she risks being mesmerized...or even drowned.

Quentin Bell's assessment of the danger Woolf incurred in writing the scenes of Rachel's delirium in The Voyage Out may be correct; at any rate, his speculation is provocative.

In the final chapters of The Voyage Out she had been playing with fire. She had succeeded in bringing some of the devils who dwelt within her mind hugely and gruesomely from the depths, and she had gone too far for comfort. That novel and the effort of giving it to the world had taken her over the edge of sanity.¹⁵

She knew she had a unique experience to offer the world, and she was going to present it, in spite of the risk. The revelation of the self is one of the most difficult things a writer can do. Serious art demands the kind of adherence to real experience that means exposing the unique and personal in oneself, and that is dangerous enough for an ordinary person, let alone one like the author of The Voyage Out. How much easier to hide behind some conventional persona, a mask whose relationship to oneself one can deny, than to honestly reveal oneself. How much courage it must take when that self is possibly so unique as to be called "insane"?

In Jacob's Room she was trying for something completely new. Breaking with tradition takes a certain daring. However, it was not only in the art of the novel that her courage showed; it was also in her continued refusal to

ascribe the horrors of war and her own madness to some kind of "divine purpose." After what she had been through, it would have been understandable if she had retreated into some safely conventional position--vis-a-vis both life and art--rather than take any further risks.

That she returned, in Mrs. Dalloway, to the theme of madness--and tried to reproduce certain aspects of it--was certainly courageous, especially if Quentin Bell's assessment of the situation is correct: that writing about her madness in The Voyage Out helped bring on her worst breakdown. The fact that she was willing to delve into those horrible memories--which she admits in A Writer's Diary was a strain--and risk losing herself in them points to a love for her art so passionate that she was willing to risk everything for it.

Part I: Nature

Chapter 1

The Voyage Out

If The Voyage Out (1915) is less explicit than Heart of Darkness (1900) in defining nature as "vengeful,"¹ Virginia Woolf seems to agree with Joseph Conrad that nature is an "implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention."² The immensity of the landscapes against which the characters are sketched, their feelings of oppression and uneasiness before that vastness, their sense that the purely generative forces in human beings are essentially a-human, in-different to human values, and finally, the futile efforts of humanity against disease, convey a final impression of a vast, brooding and malevolent world. Human beings in Woolf's South American landscape are completely alienated from the natural world around them. "On and on it went in the distance, the senseless and cruel churning of the water,"³ Helen Ambrose, when the party is in the jungle, muses about the fragility of human beings.

How small the little figures looked wandering through the trees! She became acutely conscious of the little limbs, the thin veins, the delicate flesh of men and women, which breaks so easily and lets the life escape compared with these great trees and deep waters. A

falling branch, a foot that slips, and the earth has crushed or the water drowned them.⁴

In spite of its tropical setting, The Voyage Out takes place in a bleak atmosphere. Rarely does the reader enjoy a sense of the lushness or richness of nature; instead, the references to "infinite sun-dried earth, earth pointed in pinnacles,"⁵ "the stiff and hostile plants of the south,"⁶ and to "trees and undergrowth which seemed to be strangling each other...in a multitudinous wrestle,"⁷ all suggest an uninviting topography. There are few descriptions that show delight in natural beauty, either on the part of the narrator or her characters.

Mrs. Ambrose's artistic fantasy of the land to where she is traveling seems more alluring than the reality she will confront. Here, she is creating the South American jungle in needlepoint.

She chose a thread from the vari-coloured tangle that lay in her lap, and sewed red into the bark of a tree, or yellow into the river torrent. She was working at a great design of a tropical river running through a tropical forest, where spotted deer would eventually browse upon masses of fruit, bananas, oranges, and giant pomegranates, while a troop of naked natives whirled darts into the air.⁸

Once actually out in the jungle, her reaction is different from the one she anticipated. "...She thought the country very beautiful, but also sultry and alarming."⁹ Moreover, she is not the only one who finds the jungle more oppressive than stimulating.

The sun was going down, and the water was dark and crimson. The river had widened again, and they were passing a little island set like a dark wedge in the middle of the stream. Two great birds with red lights on them stood there on stilt-like legs, and the beach of the island was unmarked, save by the skeleton print of the bird's feet. The branches of the trees on the bank looked more twisted and lurid than ever, and the green of the leaves was lurid and splashed with gold. Then Hirst began to talk, leaning over the bow.

'It makes one awfully queer, don't you find?' he complained. 'These trees get on one's nerves--it's all so crazy. God's undoubtedly mad, What sane person could have conceived a wilderness like this, and peopled it with apes and alligators? I should go mad if I lived here--raving mad.'¹⁰

The beauty of the scenery doesn't seem to be felt (if at all) by the characters or by the narrator. Certainly the description of the jungle sunset quoted above comes from the mind of an omniscient narrator, and she seems to share St. John Hirst's point of view. "Dark and crimson" suggests blood, and "skeleton," "twisted," "angular," and "lurid" are all adjectives appropriate to a house of horrors.

Rachel, too, while the party is still at sea, dreams of the beauty of the tropical jungle.

Visions of a great river, now blue, now yellow in the tropical sun and crossed by bright birds, now white in the moon, now deep in shade with moving trees and canoes sliding out from the tangled banks, beset her.¹¹

She is perhaps more depressed by the dank reality of the jungle than any of the others. The tropical jungle, the river, that seem to their imaginations to hold so much romance and to promise such fulfillment of their need for adventure, turns out to be sadly disappointing.

The split between their imaginative picture of nature and their author's imaginative picture of nature is complete. Woolf, whether or not she meant to, subtly mocks their romantic vision.

The reader fluctuates between a sense of claustrophobia (in the jungle) and a sense of utter unimportance (on the mountaintops). This scene, for example, suggests the tension one experiences when confronted with the inescapable evidence of finitude.

One after another they came out on the flat space on top and stood overcome with wonder. Before them they beheld an immense space--grey sands running into forest merging in mountains, and mountains washed by air,--the infinite distances of South America. A river ran across the plain, as flat as the land, and appearing quite as stationary. The effect of so much space was at first rather chilling. They felt themselves very small and for some time no one said anything. Then Evelyn exclaimed 'Splendid!' She took hold of the hand next her; it chanced to be Miss Alan's hand.¹²

There is something insincere about Evelyn's enthusiasm since she reaches out blindly for a human hand as she speaks, not even caring whose it is. Clarissa Dalloway, on a similar occasion, expresses clearly and bluntly her sentiments about scenery: "Honestly, though...I don't like views. They're too inhuman..."¹³

The scenery that greets the voyagers when they finally disembark on the shores of South America is bleak and inhospitable, and the garden surrounding their house is uninviting.

Bushes waved their branches across the paths, and the blades of grass, with spaces of earth between them, could be counted. In the circular piece of ground in front of the verandah were two cracked vases, from which red flowers drooped, with a stone fountain between them, now parched in the sun.... A few trees shaded it, and round bushes with wax-like flowers mobbed their heads together in a row.¹⁴

The sunlight in The Voyage Out is never life-giving sun; it is either oppressively hot or depressingly revealing.

The afternoon was very hot, so hot that the breaking of the waves on the shore sounded like the repeated sigh of some exhausted creature, and even on the terrace under an awning the bricks were hot, and the air danced perpetually over the short dry grass. The red flowers in the stone basins were drooping with the heat, and the white blossoms which had been so smooth and thick only a few weeks ago were now dry, and their edges curled and yellow. Only the stiff and hostile plants of the south, whose fleshy leaves seemed to be grown upon spines, still remained standing upright and defied the power of the sun to beat them down. It was too hot to talk, and it was not easy to find any book that would withstand the power of the sun.¹⁵

The sunlight betrays all the ugliness, the harshness of the landscape, rather than enhancing it.

The day increased in heat as they drove up the hill. The road passed through the town, where men seemed to be beating brass and crying 'Water,' where the passage was blocked by mules and cleared by whips and curses, where the women walked barefoot, their heads balancing baskets, and cripples hastily displayed mutilated members; it issued among steep green fields, not so green but that the earth showed through. Great trees now shaded all but the centre of the road, and a mountain stream, so shallow and so swift that it plaited itself into strands as it ran, raced along the edge. Higher they went.... next they turned along a lane scattered with stones, where Mr. Pepper raised his stick and silently indicated a shrub, bearing among sparse leaves a voluminous purple blossoms; and at a rickety canter the last stage of the way was accomplished.¹⁶

While the ugliest part of the passage describes the human beings, nevertheless the natural scenery isn't very attractive either. It isn't so much life-giving as challenging; rather than being full of life and movement, it is somber and still. The metaphor of a mountain stream "plaiting itself into strands" isn't one that suggests the fluidity of water, but rather qualities of dryness and stringiness, like hair or hemp. All through The Voyage Out, natural scenes and landscapes are presented as still, ominously still. There are few images that suggest lightness, movement, change, such as those that pervade later works. In this passage, for example, the only things that move are those we expect to move: gardeners and peacocks. The hills are not "running" nor the flowers "burning"; the descriptions, although unusually beautiful for The Voyage Out, are fairly conventional.

Great tracts of earth lay not beneath the autumn sun, and the whole of England, from the bald moors to the Cornish rocks was lit up from dawn to sunset, and showed in stretches of yellow, green, and purple. Under that illumination even the roofs of the great towns glittered. In thousands of small gardens, millions of dark-red flowers were blooming, until the ladies who had tended them so carefully came down the paths with their scissors, snipped through their juicy stalks, and laid them upon cold stone ledges in the village church....Long-tailed birds clattered and screamed, and crossed from wood to wood, with golden eyes in their plumage.¹⁷

There is life and movement here, but much less than is evident in her later prose, where nearly all the scenery is in

motion. As Woolf approached middle age, "time" rather than "nature" became her foe. The fear that time is slipping away pervades all her later work. In her youth, she looks rather enviously upon the distant horizon and sees only that it will outlast her.

The time of Elizabeth was only distant from the present time by a moment of space compared with the ages which had passed since the water had run between those banks, and the green thickets swarmed there, and the small trees grown to huge wrinkled trees in solitude. Changing only with the change of the sun and the clouds, the waving green mass had stood there century after century, and the water had run between its banks ceaselessly, sometimes washing away earth and sometimes the branches of trees, while in other parts of the world one town had risen upon the ruins of another town, and the men in the towns had become more and more articulate and unlike each other.¹⁸

Her depictions of the Portuguese shoreline, and also the horizon of South America, are quite conventional "still life" landscapes. There is only a suggestion of lightness in the notion of houses "nesting like sea-birds" and the description of the mountains "rising" is too hackneyed a cliché to inspire any emotional or esthetic response. Even the ocean, whose waves will come to embody the essence, the pulse of universal life, is here merely quiescent, its calm: the absence of life, rather than its cradle.

The water was very calm; rocking up and down at the base of the cliff, and so clear that one could see the red of the stones at the bottom of it. So it had been at the birth of the world and so it had remained ever since. Probably no human being had ever broken that water with boat or with body. Obeying some impulse, she determined to mar that eternity of peace, and threw the largest pebble she could find. It struck and the ripples spread out and out.¹⁹

That vignette suggests both Rachel's defiance and her impotence.

The sea, of course, can swallow them without a trace, and the earth resists the efforts of the most determined aggressors to civilize it; witness the fate of the English colony in South America (this is, of course, English history according to Virginia Woolf, and no doubt quite imaginary).

From the interior came Indians with subtle poisons, naked bodies, and painted idols; from the sea came vengeful Spaniards and rapacious Portuguese; exposed to all these enemies (though the climate proved wonderfully kind and the earth abundant) the English dwindled away and all but disappeared. Somewhere about the middle of the seventeenth century a single sloop watched its season and slipped out at night, bearing with it all that was left of the great British colony, a few men, a few women, and perhaps a dozen dusky children. English history then denies all knowledge of the place.²⁰

A mound of stones at the top of a mountain is the occasion for a disagreement among the picknickers as to whether it is a cairn or the ruin of a watch-tower, so little power have human monuments against the erosion of time.

In The Voyage Out, Woolf sketches her characters against immense, inhuman backdrops, not only against the bottomless caverns of time, but, more tangibly, they appear as tiny silhouettes against the mountains, the sea, the night. At the beginning of chapter seven she contrasts their tiny ship, the Euphrosyne, with the immensity of the ocean and suggests the common interest that should bind humanity together.

From a distance the Euphrosyne looked very small.... At night....the little ship shrunk to a few beads of light out among the dark waves, and one high in air upon the mast-head seemed something mysterious and impressive....She became a ship passing in the night....an emblem of the loneliness of human life, an occasion for queer confidences and sudden appeals for sympathy.²¹

Her human beings are uncomfortably and self-consciously puny little things, pathetically lost in a universe too vast for them. The storm scene at the beginning of chapter twenty-seven which shows the humans as passive, frightened spectators huddling in their flimsy shelter is a striking example of the narrator's perception of the human relationship to nature.

The only way Rachel seems able to deal with the immensity of the world is to avert her eyes from it. The following scene is comparable to one in To The Lighthouse, when Nancy turns from the vastness of the ocean to become the god of a tide-pool in the rocks. The difference, however, as we shall see later, is that in To The Lighthouse the human beings loom larger in the foreground; those in The Voyage Out often appear miniscule. Here, Rachel's visual leap from the mountain range to an insect on a blade of grass is an emotional retreat from macrocosm to microcosm.

She sat beside him looking at the mountains too. When it became painful to look any longer, the great size of the view seeming to enlarge her eyes beyond their natural limit, she looked at the ground; it pleased her to scrutinize this inch of the soil of South America so minutely that she noticed every grain of earth and made

it into a world where she was endowed with supreme power. She bent a blade of grass, and set an insect on it, and thought how strange it was that she should have bent that tassel rather than any other of the million tassels.²²

It is worth noting that each time the characters in The Voyage Out face a particularly empty stretch of horizon or forbidding landscape, they come closer together. More accurately, they attempt to come closer together. They seem to be reaching for each other as each would grasp at a floating plank in a rolling ocean.

It is when Rachel and Terence are alone in the jungle that they become engaged. The jungle itself, that parody of Eden ('Beware of snakes!'), is extremely unpleasant, in spite of its flowering verdure and butterflies. It is stifflingly close: "the air came at them in languid puffs of scent," and the couple manage to lose themselves in it.

The atmosphere is both oppressive and ominous.

As they passed into the depths of the forest the light grew dimmer, and the noises of the ordinary world were replaced by those creaking and sighing sounds that suggest to the traveler in a forest that he is walking at the bottom of the sea. The path narrowed and turned; it was hedged in by dense creepers which knotted tree to tree, and burst here and there into star-shaped crimson blossoms. The sighing and creaking up above were broken every now and then by the jarring cry of some startled animal.²³

The strongest reason for their union would seem to be their shared sense of a profound and frightening loneliness, made more acute by their austere and inhospitable surroundings.

Hewet, in this passage, feels himself helpless to direct the course of events.

He felt as if he were waiting, as if he were stationary among things that passed over him and around him, voices, people's bodies, birds.... He looked at her sometimes as if she must know that they were waiting together, and being drawn on together, without being able to offer any resistance. Again he read from his book:

Whoever you are holding me now in your hand,
Without one thing all will be useless.

A bird gave a wild laugh, a monkey chuckled a malicious question, and, as fire fades in the hot sunshine, his words flickered and went out.²⁴

The passage Hewet is reading suggests a reasoned love, love directed by intellect or will, and the implication of the sentence following it is that here, reason and will are helpless to direct the course of events.

Terence and Rachel are drawn together mostly by a shared sense of loneliness, and Terence, at least, is supposedly influenced by sexual passion. Woolf doesn't dwell on that aspect of their relationship; she is content to say "He was overcome with the desire to hold her in his arms."²⁵ Perhaps this was due to her distrust and dislike of male sexual passion in general, and she herself finds Terence a likable, if vague, character. Certainly Woolf had extraordinarily complex feelings about the role of sexual desire in human relationships; while she was able to see such male-female unions as the one between her parents, or Vanessa's, or Stella's, as essentially healthful and good, and while

she herself lamented for many years her childlessness, nevertheless she was mistrustful of the mere biological urge for sex, especially on the part of the male. What seemed to her particularly repugnant was the male desire for domination and possessiveness.

As late as The Waves, when she has made her peace with nature, she still has Bernard remark on the "blind stupidity" of nature that dictates a life devoted to reproduction. At any rate, the idea that male sexual desire would be more the result of cultural conditioning than biological inheritance seems to be a development of more recent psychology, and it seems safe to say that Woolf would regard male desire as a product of physiology.

Nature, in its aspect of lust, has been the reason Rachel's life has been a half-life; since she has been unable to explore her world freely, her development has been severely stunted, and she rages against this crippling of her growth.

'So that's why I can't walk alone!
By this new light she saw her life for the first
time a creeping hedged-in thing, driven cautiously
between high walls, here turned aside, there
plunged in darkness, made dull and crippled for-
ever--her life that was the only chance she had--
the short season between two silences.²⁶

When Rachel meets with loveless desire in the form of Richard Dalloway, the nightmare she suffers after that encounter reveals that although her conscious self recoiled in horror at being apprehended only as a physical object

by another human being. Helen's explanation is unsatisfactory both to Rachel and to the reader.

'It's the most natural thing in the world. Men will want to kiss you, just as they'll want to marry you. The pity is to get things out of proportion. It's like noticing the noises people make when they eat, or men spitting; or, in short, any small thing that gets on one's nerves.'²⁷

Yet to Rachel it is not a "small thing" to be treated as a commodity; to have her personality and intelligence denigrated or patronized while her body is desired is horrible because it utterly negates her humanity. Her reaction is to consider male sexuality in itself as bestial; the "barbarian" men who in her fantasies invade the ship stop to "snuffle" at her door. That nightmare pursues her even in her final delirium; the womb, which should be a center of joy and generation, has become a dungeon where one encounters gibbering lust and demented tormentors. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that at some profound level, Rachel is unable to distinguish between sexuality that is selfish and loveless, and sexuality that is combined with love and caring. While Terence may not be an ideal mate, nor marriage the "answer" for Rachel at this time in her life, nevertheless his desire for her is quite obviously based upon his total conception of her as an individual. She, apparently, is threatened by the imminence of the sexual relationship and perhaps this saps her will to live when the illness strikes.

The cause of her sickness is never specifically ascribed either to the trip or to Ambrose's supposed carelessness in the preparation of food. There is some speculation, but no accusation. Rachel's family and friends do not feel responsible for her death; as far as they are concerned, it is nature's casual whim that destroys her, and since nature is portrayed as overwhelmingly powerful in this story, the reader is inclined to agree with them.

At the time Rachel falls ill, Terence reflects,

Helen's good sense seemed to have much in common with the good sense of nature, which avenged rashness by a headache, and, like nature's good sense, might be depended on.²⁸

Without dwelling on Woolf's tendency to irony, it seems that her point might be that nature has no sense at all, and that it is reckless anthropomorphism to ascribe kindly feelings to the cosmos.

Chapter 2

Jacob's Room

Jacob's Room is a much brighter novel than The Voyage Out; a sense of peace and serenity pervades the story in spite of the fact that the protagonist, like Rachel before him, meets an early death. In her first novel, Woolf portrayed human beings who were out of touch with each other and with nature, lost in an overwhelming, large, and awesome universe. In Jacob's Room, human beings are a more potent force than in the first novel.

In the first paragraph, we are introduced to a consciousness Woolf names "Betty Flanders"; we see the world through that consciousness and draw a sense of power from the mere fact that when Mrs. Flanders' eyes fill with tears,

The entire bay quivered; the lighthouse wobbled; and she had the illusion that the mast of Mr. Conner's little yacht was bending like a wax candle in the sun.¹

Also,

Tears made all the dahlias in her garden undulate in red waves and slashed the glass house in her eyes, and spangled the kitchen with bright knives.²

When Woolf describes the storm in Jacob's Room, she employs terms similar to the ones she used in The Voyage Out, but there the resemblance ends. The storm in Jacob's

Room, for all its wildness of wind, is less terrifying than the one in The Voyage Out, for the purely impersonal force is perceived as animate, rather than inanimate; it is personified as a wild beast. In Jacob's Room, the wind "raged and gave a sudden wrench at the cheap fastenings."³ To continue down the page,

...the wind was tearing across the coast, hurling itself at the hills, and leaping, in sudden gusts, on top of its own back....How the lights seemed to wink and quiver in its fury....And rolling the dark waves before it, it raced over the Atlantic, jerking the stars above the ships this way and that.⁴

Not only is the storm described in different terms, but the behavior of the humans is markedly different. Instead of huddling, awestruck, at the window to watch the progress of the storm, the two women hover protectively over the sleeping children like birds spreading their wings over nestlings in a downpour. The storm only heightens the sense of coziness in the little house. In this warm snugger "the two women murmured over the spirit lamp, plotting the eternal conspiracy of hush and clean bottles while the wind raged."⁵

A great many of the metaphors in Jacob's Room suggest animals or humans. As the rain starts to fall in earnest,

The lodging-house seemed full of gurgling and rushing; the cistern overflowed; water bubbling and squeaking and running along the pipes and streaming down the windows.⁶

When Mrs. Flanders is viewing the Scarborough harbour by night,

The lights of Scarborough flashed, as if a woman wearing a diamond necklace turned her head this way and that.⁷

On the sailing trip to the Scilly Isles, Timmy and Jacob are drawn against a seascape domesticated by the use of homely metaphors.

By six o'clock a breeze blew in off an icefield; and by seven the water was more purple than blue; and by half-past seven there was a patch of rough gold-beater's skin round the Scilly Isles, and Durant's face as he sat steering, was of the colour of a red laquer box polished for generations. By nine all the fire and confusion had gone out of the sky, leaving wedges of apple-green and pale yellow; and by ten the lanterns on the boat were making twisted colours on the waves, elongated or squat, as the waves humped or stretched themselves. The beam from the lighthouse strode rapidly across the water. Infinite millions of miles away powdered stars twinkled; but the water slapped the boat, and crashed, with regular and appalling solemnity, against the rocks.⁸

Jacob's Room is not only different from The Voyage Out in its treatment of nature as purely diverting and beautiful; in this sense it differs also from the novels that follow. Here, she places nature side by side with humanity rather than distantly behind it or overwhelmingly above it. Instead of scanning the distant and forbidding horizon, she focuses on the brightness of petals, the color glowing on a butterfly's wing. The emphasis is always on beauty, on the feast of color nature spreads for the eye.

There is a sense here of the sea sharing with Betty Flanders her apprehension of the storm; there is also an unforgettable sense of life, almost sentient life, in the landscape.

The wind was rising. The waves showed that uneasiness, like something alive, restive, expecting the whip, of waves before a storm. The fishing-boats were leaning to the water's brim. A pale yellow

light shot across the purple sea; and shut. The lighthouse was lit. 'Come along,' said Betty Flanders. The sun blazed in their faces and glided the great blackberries trembling out from the hedge.⁹

The descriptions of nature start to quicken, brighten, and breathe, in a way that they did not in The Voyage Out; nature is loved and appreciated in a way it is not in her first story. There, the descriptions of scenery rarely contain anything really lively or beautiful. Occasionally there was a glimpse of movement, but for the most part the scenery was a series of "still lifes." In Jacob's Room, we see not only much lovelier scenery, but also more original descriptions. The atmosphere is light and gay, rather than heavy or brooding. There is much more life and movement in her imagery. There is not, however, the sense of flux, of time racing away, that will come in To The Lighthouse. There is only a quickening, a liveliness that conveys the author's exquisite pleasure in nature without the almost frightening sense of evanescence that runs through her later works. Time is referred to, but gently.

The flamingo hours fluttered softly through the sky. But regularly they dipped their wings in pitch black.¹⁰

The description of the meadow at evening before the dinner-party is lovely, and full of soft movement; the scene is rendered with great sensitivity and love, but is not otherwise unconventional. The author does not yet see it slipping away even as she watches. It is as if, for a time, the

artist was able to relax and enjoy the beauty before her with joy, and without apprehension....the fanatic fire which begins to burn in To The Lighthouse and leaps up in The Waves has not yet started to blow, to consume her. Nature is a source of reassurance and comfort, more so than in any other book of Woolf's. After the ordeal of Sunday dinner with his don, Jacob escapes with his friend into the May afternoon, probably one of the loveliest in all English literature.

...he draws into him at every step as he walks by the river such steady certainty, such reassurance from all sides, the trees bowing, the grey spires soft in the blue, voices blowing and seeming suspended in the air, the spring air of May, the elastic air with its particles--chestnut bloom, pollen, whatever it is that gives the May air its potency, blurring the trees, gumming the buds, daubing the green, and the river runs past, not at flood, not swiftly, but cloying the oar that dips in it and drops white drops from the blade, swimming green and deep over the bowed rushes, as if lavishly caressing them.¹¹

From having been a vast, malevolent womb spewing forth catastrophe and destruction, nature has become a sustenance and delight.

This passage, after The Voyage Out, is almost startling in its change of outlook.

Blame it or praise it, there is no denying the wild horse in us. To gallop intemperately; fall on the sand tired out; to feel the earth spin; to have--positively--a rush of friendship for stones and grasses, as if humanity were over, and as for men and women, let them go hang--there is no getting over the fact that this desire seizes us pretty often.¹²

Compared with, "I don't like views; they're too inhuman," it sounds as if the author had come round to the opposite

point of view. Certainly the war must have had a profound effect on her estimate of the destructive capacities of the human race.

There is even a suggestion of the pathetic fallacy in the juxtaposition of this winter landscape with Jacob's reverie as he muses on his lover's faithlessness.

...the furze bushes were black, and now and then a black shiver crossed the snow as the wind drove flurries of frozen particles before it.¹³

At this time in her life, if the author of Jacob's Room saw nature as "other," it was obviously an "other" that she could appreciate and accept. She no longer felt it to be alien, opposed to her. This reconciliation with "otherness" could very well be due to her husband's nurturance; he was the first male in her life who gave, rather than demanded, attention, affection, care. After knowing him, she could draw a distinction between males and patriarchal culture; one did not necessarily follow from the other.

While in The Voyage Out, Woolf's characters failed to enjoy natural beauty and the narrator seemed to share their point of view, now, in Jacob's Room, the characters once again are frequently too preoccupied or insensitive to pay attention to their surroundings, but Woolf no longer sympathizes with that attitude. She finds them boorish or unappreciative: "The stars bore me." When Jacob and Timmy seem to be ignoring the beauty around them on their voyage Woolf writes,

Why the right way to open a tin of beef, with Shakespeare on board, under conditions of such splendour, should have turned them to sulky schoolboys, none can tell.¹⁴

She seems amused, but also to be gently chiding their petulance. When Mrs. Flanders sits on the hill over Scarborough harbour, she seems too preoccupied to notice her surroundings.

The entire gamut of the view's changes should have been known to her; the winter aspect, spring, summer and autumn; how storms came up from the swamp; how the moors shuddered and brightened as the clouds went over; she should have noted the red spot where the villas were building; and the diamond flash of little glass houses in the sun. Or, if details like these escaped her, she might have let her fancy play upon the gold tint of the sea at sunset, and thought how it lapped in coins of gold upon the shingle, little pleasure boats shoved out into it; the black arm of the pier hoarded it up. The whole city was pink and gold-domed; mist-wreathed; resonant; strident. Tulips burnt in the sun.¹⁵

Woolf seems to imply that Mrs. Flanders was lacking in sensitivity; if she is not judging her, she is at least noting that her character was not taking advantage of the solace proffered her.

An exception to this are Fanny Elmer's reflections the day after she falls in love with Jacob. Her mood seems incongruous with awakening passion. It has been suggested that Woolf did not quite know how to portray that facet of human experience and here, one suspects, she is giving us, instead of passion for a human being, an awakening of passion for the world.

The body after long illness is languid, passive, receptive of sweetness, but too weak to contain it. The tears well and fall as the dog barks in

the hollow, and the children skim after hoops,
the country darkens and brightens. Beyond a
veil it seems. Ah, but draw the veil thicker
lest I faint with sweetness, Fanny Elmer sighed.¹⁶

This passage describes very well the sensations of someone recovering from a period of invalidism; Woolf must have experienced it very powerfully more than once. It does not, however, convey a sense of what the world seems like to someone falling in love with another human being. It is out of place in the novel, but it is a clue to Woolf's love affair with the world. The ecstatic pleasure in natural beauty is doubtless due to having been so long deprived of the ability to take delight in ordinary things. Her illness, her long struggle with darkness, seems to have left her permanently and passionately in love with daylight.

Her terrible descent into madness and her subsequent re-emergence into sanity may also be a reason why she no longer envies the inanimate, unconscious universe its longevity. Life without consciousness has no value for her; henceforth, she will evaluate human experience only in human terms. The characters in Jacob's Room do not measure their stature against the universe, but against the skylines of Scarborough, Cambridge, London. She does not dwell on the universe without its human spectators.

Jacob's visit to Greece would have been an ideal occasion for Woolf to make some comment on the distant views... how they outlast the beholder, etc., but she doesn't. Instead, we get this: "...the Parthenon appears...likely to

outlast the entire world."

...the Parthenon is separate from all that; and if you begin to consider how it had stood out all night, for centuries, you begin to connect the blaze (at midday the glare is dazzling and the frieze almost invisible) with the idea that perhaps it is beauty alone that is immortal.¹⁷

Whereas in The Voyage Out, Woolf found human constructions and dwellings rather inadequate (the house looked like a "gazebo"; the hotel seemed inadequate protection against the storm), she celebrates human creation in Jacob's Room, whether it is civilization or merely its effects: "The grey church spires received them; the hoary city, old, sinful, and majestic." Her comparison of St. Paul's cathedral with a snail's shell implies that she saw the activity of architecture quite as "natural" to man as the activity of any creature making a home for itself.

....if there is such a thing as a shell secreted by man to fit man himself here we find it, on the banks of the Thames, where the great streets join and St. Paul's Cathedral, like the volute on the top of the snail shell, finishes it off.¹⁹

Altogether, one has the impression that Woolf found human constructions stronger, more beautiful, and more adequate shelter than she did when she was younger.

Fanny Elmer hears a thrush singing and it does not seem to her a "wild laugh" nor a "senseless cry"; she is projecting, of course, as did Terence and Rachel when they listened to bird-song, but the song is heard as empathetic, rather than antipathetic. Moreover, it is illuminating

that Woolf balances the sound of the humming wheels with the rushing wind.

Now, among the trees, it was the thrush trilling out into the warm air a flutter of jubilation, but fear seemed to spur him, Fanny thought; as if he were anxious with such joy at his heart...as if he were watched as he sang, and pressed by tumult to sing. There! Restless, he flew to the next tree. She heard his song more faintly. Beyond it was the humming of the wheels and the wind rushing.²⁰

The projection of a very human fear onto the bird seems a Woolfian sense of the evanescence of joy, the danger inherent in experiencing joy...but one which, nevertheless, she is going to let herself experience.

In chapter 11, Woolf takes us on another of her time-journeys, but not back to the dawn of creation. She takes us back to the Roman camp. (True, there was human history in England before the coming of the Romans, but English civilization as we know it started when they sailed up the Thames, and civilization has a special significance for Woolf in this story.) In fact, the moors, habited by human ghosts, seem only a backdrop for human history.

Did the bones stir, or the rusty swords? Was Mrs. Flanders' two-penny-half-penny brooch forever part of the rich accumulation? And if all the ghosts flocked thick and rubbed shoulders with Mrs. Flanders in a circle, would she not have seemed perfectly in her place, a live English matron, growing stout? The clock struck the quarter. The frail waves of sound broke among the still gorse and hawthorne twigs as the church clock divided time into quarters. Motionless and broad-backed the moors received the statement 'It is fifteen minutes past the hour,' but made no answer unless a bramble stirred.

Yet even in this light the legends on the tombstones could be read, brief voices saying, 'I am Berta Ruck,' 'I am Tom Gage.' And they say which day of the year they died, and the New Testament says something for them, very proud, very emphatic or consoling.

The moors accept all that, too.²¹

The human element is most important here. The moors accept human ghosts, memories, voices....their indifference is not stressed. Woolf goes on,

Often, even at night, the church seems full of people...It is a ship with all its crew aboard. The timbers strain to hold the dead and the living....Their tongues join together in syllabing the sharp-cut words, which forever slice asunder time and the broad-backed moors.²²

That "ship with all its crew aboard" strains because figuratively as well as literally, the dead weigh more than the living....all civilization is carried in that metaphor. In The Voyage Out, Woolf saw only the fragility of the individual life and disregarded the strange human power to speak from beyond the grave. But now, what a difference from Forster! Here, says Woolf, we do make a difference, if only to each other. And, if we are the only consciousness in the universe, what else can matter, after all? Human tongues "slice asunder time and the broad-backed moors," humans and human concerns have shouldered their way to the forefront; they are no longer puny, frightened ants scurrying on the hill of the cosmos.

For Woolf, as for many others, the supreme achievement of civilization is the university, which has (ideally) as

its only purpose the nurturance of culture and intellect.

In The Voyage Out, the jungle night completely nullified the human beings lost in it; in Jacob's Room Woolf considers the effect of Cambridge upon the night.

They say the sky is the same everywhere. Travelers, the shipwrecked, exiles, and the dying draw comfort from the thought, and no doubt if you are of a mystical tendency, consolation, and even explanation, shower down from the unbroken surface. But above Cambridge--anyhow above the roof of King's College Chapel--there is a difference. Out at sea a great city will cast a brightness into the night. Is it fanciful to suppose the sky, washed into the crevices of King's College Chapel, lighter, thinner, more sparkling than the sky elsewhere? Does Cambridge burn not only into the night, but into the day?²³

The phrase "if you are of a mystical tendency" gently dismisses any need to see more into nature than is there already. It is, and it is lovely, and that is enough. To Woolf, its beauty is consolation and solace to human grief. At the end, she contrasts its glory and serenity with the organized stupidity and busy ignorance that is war and war-mongering. Immediately after we are shown the heads of state signing papers to mobilize the country, she gives us a sunset.

'Such a sunset,' wrote Mrs. Flanders in her letter to Archer at Singapore. 'One couldn't make up one's mind to come indoors,' she wrote. 'It seemed wicked to waste even a moment.'²⁴

First of all, one must note that Mrs. Flanders seems to have increased in wisdom over the years. Secondly, the message implicit throughout the book and explicit here, is that it is folly to ignore the beauty around us. As Jacob disappears into the "firey rose" of the sunset over the Serpentine, he

is probably on his way to set his affairs in order before he goes off to war. Had he chosen instead to ignore the call of "patriotic duty," he might have lived to see more of them.

Chapter 3

Mrs. Dalloway

In The Voyage Out, there seemed to be not only a sharp division between nature and humanity, but both worlds were unpleasant; the human world appeared sterile and the natural world appeared ominous. In Jacob's Room, the natural world was depicted as bright and glowing with sunshine and color, but the line of demarcation between nature and human consciousness remained, with the human world remaining superficial.

✓ In Mrs. Dalloway, nature and human consciousness are interwoven in a way that they had not been in The Voyage Out and Jacob's Room. Clarissa speaks of "that leaf-encumbered forest, the soul," and this is the first instance of the author using an image from nature as a metaphor for human consciousness. Nature is no longer something observed from without, either as a supra-human and desolate backdrop, or as a cozy and sustaining garden, but as an integral and subjective part of the individual human mind. There is no longer a sharp division between the internal and external worlds.

And the leaves being connected by millions of fibers with his own body, there on seat, fanned it up and down; when the branch stretched, he, too, made that statement.¹

And here:

His body was macerated until only the nerve fibers were left. It was spread like a veil upon a rock... the earth thrilled beneath him, red flowers grew through his flesh; their still leaves rustled by his head.²

One of the most arresting differences is this use of natural imagery to describe not only her characters' fleeting moods and impressions, but her characters themselves in a non-derogatory manner. As I note The Voyage Out, the characters were compared again and again to animals, but never in any but a bitter or disparaging way. In Mrs. Dalloway, they become green fields, birds perched on boughs, water-lilies, filaments of spider-web.

....her look....rose....as a bird touches a branch and rises and flutters away.³

She was like a bird sheltering under the thin hollow of a leaf, who blinks at the sun when the leaf moves; starts at the crack of a dry twig.⁴

....she was....drowsy and heavy, like a field of clover in the sunshine this hot June day, with the bees going round and about and the yellow butterflies.⁵

....she had become very serious like a hyacinth sheathed in glossy green, with buds, just tinted, a hyacinth which had had no sun.⁶

....for the shock of Lady Bruxton asking Richard to lunch without her made the moment in which she stood shiver, as a plant on the river-bed feels of the shock of a passing oar and shivers: so she rocked: so she shivered.⁷

And they went further and further from her, being attached to her by a thin thread...which would stretch and stretch...as a single spider's web is blotted with rain-drops, and, burdened, sags down.⁸

There is a paradox here, for while human beings intermingle with nature in this novel because of Woolf's choice of similes, they are more responsive to their inner landscapes than to their surroundings (in fact, this novel is the first in which Woolf's characters have inner landscapes).

At mid-day, on Clarissa's drawing-room couch, Peter Walsh suddenly feels,

....his own grief, which rose like a moon looked at from a terrace, ghastly beautiful with light from the sunken day.⁹

When Peter Walsh, overcome, starts to cry,

....Clarissa had...taken his hand...kissed him, actually had felt his face on hers before she could down the brandishing of silver-flashing plumes like pampas grass in a tropic gale in her breast.¹⁰

Richard Dalloway, in the midst of London's noon-time traffic, can slip away:

The speed of the morning traffic slackened, and single carts rattled carelessly down half-empty streets. In Norfolk, of which Richard Dalloway was half thinking, a soft warm wind blew back the petals; confused the waters; ruffled the flowering grasses. Haymakers, who had pitched beneath hedges to sleep away the morning toil, parted curtains of green blades; moved trembling globes of cow parsley to see the sky; the blue, the steadfast, the blazing summer sky.¹¹

The internal, subjective world is the only one that matters; sunshine cannot penetrate the night of the soul.

She began to go slowly upstairs...as if she had left a party...and stood alone, a single figure against the appalling night or rather, to be accurate, against the stare of this matter-of-fact June morning; soft with the glow of rose petals for some.¹²

Clarissa, behind closed lids, watches flowers unfold, or feels seas parting in the depths of her soul.

....moments like this are buds on the tree of life, flowers of darkness they are, she thought (as if some lovely rose had blossomed for her eyes only).¹³

....an exquisite suspense, such as might stay a diver before plunging while the sea darkens and brightens beneath him, and the waves which threaten to break, but only gently split their surface, roll and conceal and encrust as they just turn over the weeds with pearl.¹⁴

Septimus notes that "under certain atmospheric conditions" the human voice can "quicken trees into life." The green folds of Clarissa's dress, as she gathers and sews them, become waves that, rising and falling, soothe her senses and carry her away from the agitated shores of human contact.

One of the most striking instances of the personification of nature (and a very dramatic example of the ability of the human mind to project onto nature feelings which have their origin in human relationships) is Peter Walsh's dream.

She seemed...like one of those spectral presences which rise in twilight in woods made of sky and branches. The solitary traveller, haunter of lanes, plants, looking up, suddenly sees the giant figure at the end of the ride. By conviction an atheist perhaps, he is taken by surprise with moments of extraordinary exaltation. Nothing exists outside us except a state of mind, he thinks; a desire for solace, for relief, for something outside these miserable pigmies, these feeble, these ugly, these craven men and women. But if he can conceive of her, then in some sort she exists, he thinks, and advancing down the path with his eyes upon sky and branches he rapidly endows them with womanhood; sees with amazement how grave they become; how majestically, as the breeze stirs them, they dispense with a dark

flutter of the leaves charity, comprehension, absolution, and then flinging themselves aloft, confound the piety of their aspect with a wild carouse. 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 merges in one thing; and this figure, made of sky and branches as it is, had risen from the troubled sea...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;rather let me walk straight on 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.¹⁵

Not only is this dreamer-traveller Peter Walsh, it is also Virginia Woolf. There is reason to believe that she very much wanted and needed "compassion, charity, comprehension and absolution" from her mother. Leonard Woolf in Beginning Again, writes that his wife, in the depths of her madness, apparently felt herself guilty of some sin. Since her mother died when Virginia was just starting adolescence, Virginia had almost certainly felt some jealousy and rivalry with her mother prior to the time of her death. In addition, she may not have had enough of her mother's attention and love to reassure her. It is easy to suppose that she was somewhat overshadowed by her more robust, outgoing elder brother and sister (Thoby and Vanessa) and by the youngest, Adrian, whom she later described as her mother's favorite. Add to this the fact that she also had two elder half-brothers and a half-sister as well as a father who was almost

an egomaniac in his demands for her mother's attention, and it is not hard to imagine that Virginia got lost in the family shuffle, or that she was able to command enough attention to nourish her. Assuming that her mother was scrupulously fair in parceling out her affection, the fact remains that one of Virginia's perception and sensibility no doubt required much more love and reassurance than most children need.

Leonard's care for Virginia was maternal; while she always sought love and nurturance from women (Violet Dickenson, her sisters, Stella and Vanessa) she was able to accept it from Leonard, and this assuaged her need to a great extent, yet she was always, half-playfully, half-seriously, asking for reassurances and demonstrations of affection from her female friends, and from Vanessa. But the person who provided most of the affection and support she so badly needed was her husband, and it was a healing balm for her madness.

Another aspect of Woolf's changing relationship to the natural world is her growing concern--one almost writes obsession--with time. And for Clarissa, as for Woolf, time becomes the implacable enemy. In Mrs. Dalloway, time is leaden, heavy, inconsiderate...its summons "irrevocable." The tolling of the hour at regular intervals throughout the book brings us again and again to an awareness that time is slipping away, even as the characters attempt to arrest its flow, or turn it back.

Clarissa, wisely, wants to savour the life left to her.

She was not old yet. She had just broken into her fifty-second year. Months and months of it were still untouched. June, July, August! Each remained almost whole, and, as if to catch the falling drop, Clarissa...plunged into the very heart of the moment, transfixed it, there--the moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all the other mornings.¹⁶

She alternates between an almost ecstatic awareness of life, of beauty around her, and a chilling despair. When she discovers that her husband has been invited to Lady Bruton's for lunch, and that she is not, she is jealous, not of his being with another woman, but of those people young enough to look forward to a whole life-time of social gatherings.

....she feared time itself, and read on Lady Bruton's face, as if it had been a dial cut in impassive stone, the dwindling of life; how year by year her share was sliced; how little the margin that remained was capable any longer of stretching, of absorbing, as in youthful years, the colours, salts, tones, of existence...¹⁷

Clarissa has denied part of her "nature"; she has denied her sexual being. She has been a wife and a mother without really feeling sexual pleasure in it. She yearns for a capacity to embrace and enjoy the sensuousness of physical beauty, and to some extent she does, but it seems to be more tantalizing than fulfilling.

There were roses; there were irises. Ah yes--so she breathed in the earthy garden sweet smell...among the irises and roses and nodding tufts of lilac with her eyes half closed, snuffing in, after the street uproar, the delicious scent, the exquisite coolness

....how fresh like frilled linen clean from a laundry laid in wicker trays the roses looked; and dark and prim the red carnations, holding their heads up; and all the sweet peas spreading in their bowls, tinged violet, snow white, pale--as if it were evening and girls in muslin frocks came out to pick sweet peas and roses after the superb summer's day, with its almost blue-black sky, its delphiniums, its carnations, its arum lilies was over; and it was the moment between six and seven when every flower--roses, carnations, irises, lilac--glows; white, violet, red, deep orange; every flower seems to burn by itself, softly, purely in the misty beds; and how she loved the moths spinning in and out, over the cherry pie, over the evening primroses!¹⁸

The longing to be satisfied by this beauty is here partly a longing for youth, "girls in muslin frocks," and partly a longing for her own passing beauty; her attitude before the flowers is sensuousness that won't let itself be sensual. She is aware of the need for physical solace; hence her responsiveness to beauty, but she has isolated herself from her own body in that she will not let herself feel sexual pleasure.

The first line from a mock-dirge in "Cymbeline," "Fear no more the heat 'o the sun" which runs all day through Clarissa's head, suggests not only that her joy in life is not dead, but merely sleeping, but also that she no longer needs to fear the fierceness and possessiveness of sexual love and its power to ensnare the individual life in its meshes of lust, fertility, breeding...the toils that confine and finally strangle the free human spirit. That fear of losing herself has kept her from giving herself to her husband in any real sense; always emotionally

virginal, she prefers to sleep alone after her illness. But she regrets her isolation. As she goes up the stair to her room, she reflects that this "matter-of-fact June morning" is "soft with the glow of rose petals for some" but that she herself feels "suddenly shrivelled, aged, breastless."¹⁹ She is compared by the author to a nun, as she enters her attic room where "There was an emptiness about the heart of life." This is an acknowledgement that she is not, in her inmost retreat, able to feel that beauty and liveliness which she tries to capture or create around her. "Narrower and narrower would be her bed."²⁰ This image of death, coming hard on the heels of the nun, makes explicit her fear that she will die without having fully experienced life.

Chapter 4

To The Lighthouse

Once again, in To The Lighthouse, Woolf sets her characters' brief lives against the chaos and flux of the natural universe, but unlike the author of The Voyage Out, she perceives that their importance lies in their perception and understanding, in their consciousness and courage. The characters compare their lives to that nature which will "out-last Shakespeare," but although they are even more aware of their ephemerality measured against the span of the natural world, they do not love it less, but more. Instead of the "broodingness" of The Voyage Out, there is, in To The Lighthouse, a quicksilver quality in the descriptions of scenery. There is a sense of great delight taken in its beauty, and not only delight, but ecstasy, in spite of its indifference to our fate.

The alienation Woolf felt in her youth, alienation both from nature and from human beings, had been alleviated by the time she came to write Jacob's Room, and the landscape of her imagination had started to flower. In Mrs. Dalloway, nature and human consciousness are interwoven. In To The Lighthouse, Woolf shows nature as an austere and noble backdrop for

human drama, but there is again a yearning for recognition, some sign from nature that it acknowledges our presence, if not our importance. But though her characters are moved to awe by the vastness of their world, they do not love it less. Here, Mrs. Ramsay surveys the view "that her husband loved."

...but here, the houses falling away on both sides,
 ...the whole bay spread before the....For the
 great plateful of blud water was before her; the
 hoary Lighthouse, distant, austere, in the midst;
 and on the right, as far as the eye could see,
 fading and falling, in soft low pleats, the green
 sand dunes with the wild flowing grasses on them,
 which always seemed to be running¹ away into some
 moon country, uninhabited of men.

Mrs. Ramsay and the author are sharing a common emotion here; they notice the same things. Mrs. Ramsay is as concerned with the passage of time as is Virginia Woolf, and as delighted with the beauty of the earth. The love they feel for it is apparent in the sense of urgency conveyed by the use of gerunds for adjectives: "falling," "fading," "flowing," "running"...to most observers the landscape is motionless; we do not notice the earth as it stretches and groans in its sleep. Our short lives are set at such a rapid pace that we cannot perceive the hills slowly shrug their shoulders and settle, with a sigh too deep for human ears to hear, into the sea.

In the first section of the novel, indeed, there is no ambivalence expressed towards nature; it is celebrated and loved, and the author reaches out to the world she sees

fleeting, sliding away from under her.

As Woolf approached middle-age, she felt her world rushing away. "And death--as I always feel--hurrying near. 43: how many more books?"² This is taken from A Writer's Diary; it is dated Tuesday, December 7th, 1925...almost midway through To The Lighthouse. From her point of view, the earth is spinning more rapidly...the days and nights slip by more quickly than ever before, the seasons circle relentlessly, relentlessly closing in...and always there is the sense that life is slipping away, that time is eroding our precarious foothold on life.

There is always the sense of change; flowers are referred to as "burning," or as "red-hot pokers." Even still scenes, like this dawn, "....a faint green quickens, like a turning leaf, in the hollow of the wave,"³ or this night, "....in the light of harvest moons...which mellows the energy of labour...smooths the stubble, and brings the wave lapping blue to the shore,"⁴ contain movement. In Woolf's eyes, the phenomena of nature seem to surge and fall, to take fire and become ashes.

Woolf attempts to capture the moment in all its fluidity, as it fixes itself upon or invades a consciousness. Her prose works as a clear rippling of thought over a moment to magnify it, to bring out its color, as a crystal stream brings out the clarity and color of the pebbles sparkling beneath its water. In contrast to her early scenes, which seem fixed

and unchanging, these especially are fluid, becoming; she attempts to capture motion itself.

An exception to this would be the passage describing the dinner party that starts on page 157.

Just now...she had reached security; she hovered like a hawk suspended; like a flag floated in an element of joy...it arose, she thought, looking at them all...from husband and children and friends; all of which rising in this profound stillness...seemed now for no special reason to stay there like a smoke, like a fume rising upwards, holding them safe together. It partook...of eternity...there is a coherence in things, a stability...something is immune from change, and shines out...in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby.⁵

The entire passage (which is central to Mrs. Ramsay's experience of the dinner party) continues on to page 161 and ends with the same phrase, "she hung suspended." The impression rendered by the passage can be described in one of Woolf's descriptions of Mrs. Ramsay's "internal landscapes."

....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 all lit up hanging, trembling.⁶

This is the first passage where the imagery (from Mrs. Ramsay's point of view) suggests stillness. This conveys almost subliminally to the reader a sense that for Mrs. Ramsay the moment stands "out of time."

Even this moment, however, has not reached stasis, just stillness. The words, "hovered," "balancing," "trembling," imply that the moment is not caught, but hovering poised in mid-air, and ready to slide down the sky in a flash.

In Mrs. Dalloway one is struck by the sensations Septimus has of feeling himself to be mingled physically with natural phenomena (the flowers grow through him, the heat makes him feel as if he were macerated on a rock). Now both Lily Briscoe and William Bankes feel the scene before them as well as see it.

....the pulse of colour flooded the bay with blue, and the heart expanded with it and the body swam, only the next instant to be checked and chilled by the prickly blackness on the ruffled waves. Then, up behind the great black rock, almost every evening spurted irregularly, so that one had to watch for it and it was a delight when it came, a fountain of white water; and then while one waited for that, one watched, on the pale semicircular beach, wave after wave shedding again⁷ and again smoothly, a film of mother of pearl.

A plate of fruit on her dinner table seems to Mrs. Ramsay to be

....possessed of great size and depth, was like a world in which one could take one's staff and climb hills...and go down into valleys, and to her pleasure (for it brought them into sympathy momentarily) she saw that Augustus too feasted his eyes on the same plate of fruit, plunged in, broke off a bloom there, a tassel here, and returned, after feasting, to his hive.⁸

This sensuousness of sight, the ability to be transported to another level of consciousness by the ecstasy of seeing something beautiful, is not shared by all the characters in To The Lighthouse, but is reserved to those with whom Woolf shared important perceptions. They, like Septimus before them, are transported by natural beauty, but unlike Septimus, who had only a nightmare version of humanity, they

are better defended; they have a more complete and generous vision of humanity; i.e., Mrs. Ramsay perceives Augustus as a furry bee gathering beauty as nectar and storing it as honey, in his heart; and they are therefore able to let themselves be open and vulnerable to the world around them without incurring serious danger.

The second part of the novel, "Time Passes," seems a long sleep, and the figures in it, the shadows of a dream. From Mr. Carmichael's extinguishing his candle to Lily Briscoe's awakening bolt upright in bed, we hear no voice but the faceless narrator's, and see nothing but in a mirror, dimly.

In "Time Passes," we sense some of the disappointment in nature returning; we hear an echo from The Voyage Out that nature isn't all it ought to be, that it should provide comprehensible answers to human questions. The narrator of the "Time Passes" section is chronicling the development of young Virginia Stephen's own feelings towards the world over a period which lasted about ten years, an era that started with her mother's death, then her half-sister's, and finally her brother's.

As she retraces her tragic past, Woolf is recalled to her earlier feelings toward nature, but she is aware of them and in control of them. She wishes the reader to share in her sense of bitterness and anger and succeeds in conveying this sense by her use of irony. In The Voyage Out,

the author's somewhat morbid fear of nature was implicit in her choice of metaphor and simile; here it is explicit. The completely impersonal forces are personified as casual, disinterested busy-bodies who "bend over the bed,"⁹ have "feather-light fingers,"¹⁰ who "...look....fold their garments....and disappear."¹¹ There is sadness, of course, as well as irony.

....the little airs mounted the staircase and nosed around bedroom doors. But here, surely, they must cease. Whatever else may perish and disappear, what lies here is steadfast. Here one might say to those sliding lights, those fumbling airs that breathe and bend over the₁₂ bed itself, here you can neither touch nor destroy.

Night, darkness, the wind and the seasons, garbed by her imagination with human form and inhuman purpose, transform the Ramsays and their surroundings--quietly, relentlessly.

Once one has begun to comprehend that the never-ending round of the seasons brings not only maturity and the fruition of our pleasures, but also aging and death, they are no longer seen as completely welcome in their changing cycles.

But what after all is one night? A short space, especially when the darkness dies so soon, and so soon a bird sings, a cock crows, or a faint green quickens, like a turning leaf, in the hollow of the wave. Night, however, succeeds to night. The winter holds a pack of them in store and deals them₁₃ equally, evenly, with indefatigable fingers.

"Winter" here holds all the cards, as patient and cruel as Death at his chessboard in Bergman's "Seventh Seal." When the end of life has been perceived, sharply and vividly, spring can be a bitter mockery of human mortality, and the

cycle of the seasons becomes a grisly dance of death!

Our lives are played out to the rhythm of the seasons; our moods find an allegory in the tranquillity of a summer dawn or in the rage of autumn storms, but the parallel is a hollow mockery of our need to find an observer of the human predicament. When Mrs. Ramsay dies, the narrator writes,

....should any sleeper fancying that he might find on the beach an answer to his doubts, a sharer of his solitude, throw off his bedclothes and go down by himself to walk on the sand, no image with semblance of serving and divind promptitude comes readily to hand bringing the night to order and making the world reflect the compass of the soul. The hand dwindles in his hand; the voice bellows in his ear. Almost it would appear that it is useless in that confusion to ask the night those questions as to what, and why, and wherefore, which tempt the sleeper from his bed to seek an answer.¹⁴

When she writes of "divine goodness" first seeming to be moved by human penitence and toil, then changing its mind, her "alas" sounds rather bitterly sarcastic.

It seemed now as if, touched by human penitence and all its toil, divine goodness had parted the curtain and displayed behind it, single, distinct, the hare erect; the wave falling; the boat rocking, which, did we deserve them, should be ours always. But alas, divine goodness, twitching the cord, draws the curtain; it does not please him; he covers his treasures in a drench of hail, and so breaks them, so confuses them that it seems impossible that their calm should ever return....for our penitence deserves a glimpse only, our toil respite only.¹⁵

She has taken Christian rhetoric and made it sound very shabby, indeed. She grants that "the mystic, and visionary" can find some answer that warms them, but adds, "they could not say what it was."

When Prue Ramsay is married and life seems to be taking on an aspect of reason and order and happiness, then nature seems to reflect this.

....softened and acquiescent, the spring with her bees humming and gnats dancing threw her cloak about her, veiled her eyes, averted her head, and among passing shadows and flights of small rain seemed to have taken upon her a knowledge of the sorrows of mankind.¹⁶

With the advent of the war, however, and the death of Andrew Ramsay, things fall apart, nothing makes sense, and the universe seems to be "battling and tumbling, in brute confusion and wanton lust aimlessly by itself."¹⁷ And the peace of the spring and daylight seem only senseless, as if flowers blossoming no longer reflected any feelings of happiness or celebration, but were the evidence only of nature's blind urge to reproduce itself. The winds sift dust through the Ramsays' home, spread weeds in their garden, and sow flowers that Woolf describes as "standing there, looking before them, looking up, yet beholding nothing, eyeless, and so terrible."¹⁸ The "eyelessness" of the flowers is an acknowledgement that nature has no faculties to perceive usand that seems "terrible." The descriptions of the wind, the night, the marauding briars and weeds all combine to give the impression that the unfeeling world is waiting to swallow us up into oblivion.

While Woolf has nearly always treated the notion that nature is beneficent with some degree of mockery, as she does here:

....the white earth itself seemed to declare (but if questioned at once to withdraw) that¹⁹ good triumphs, happiness prevails, order rules.

She becomes even more biting in this passage:

At that season those who had gone down to pace the beach and ask of the sea and sky what message they reported or what vision they affirmed had to consider among the usual tokens of divine bounty--the sunset on the sea, the pallor of dawn, the moon rising... something out of harmony with this jocundity and this serenity. There was the silent apparition of an ashen-coloured ship for instance, come, gone; there was a purplish stain as if something had boiled and bled, invisibly, beneath. This intrusion into a scene calculated to stir the most sublime reflections and lead to the most comfortable conclusions stayed their pacing. It was difficult blandly to overlook them; to abolish their significance in the landscape; to continue, as one walked by the sea, to marvel how beauty outside mirrored beauty within. Did nature supplement what man advanced? Did she complete what he began? With equal complacence²⁰ she saw his misery, his meanness, and his torture.

The mockery, the sarcasm are an indication of the bitterness she felt in her youth, and feels again when she must plunge into her past to create her story. Here, there are indications that she felt nature to have an intelligence. "With equal complacence she saw..." In some of her other writings Woolf had suggested that nature is not only indifferent, but cruelly indifferent. In her essay, "On Being Ill," she has this to say about the natural world:

Divinely beautiful it is also divinely heartless.... If we were all laid prone, stiff, still the sky²¹ would be experimenting with its blues and its golds.

In the same essay, she continues:

It is only the recumbent who know what, after all, Nature is at no pains to conceal--that she in the end will conquer; heat will leave the world; stiff with frost we shall cease to drag ourselves about

the fields; ice will lie thick upon factory and engine; the sun will go out.

Nature is a "heartless experimenter," a "conqueror" who is "at no pains to conceal" the fact. While the references to nature in the first and third sections stress its beauty, or its mere indifference, the references to it in the second section suggest she may have been battling, in her youth, an almost paranoid perception of human isolation, of human solitude caught in a struggle with forces which, in the words of Henry David Thoreau, "are not bound to be kind to man." And yet, it seems that the anger here is not directed so much at nature so much as at those human beings whose complacent anthropocentrism has painted a picture of the universe with man and his concerns at the center, and all observable phenomena as corresponding to the workings of a beneficent providence. The night does not reflect "the compass of the soul"....we can but reflect a little of the night. In "Time Passes," Woolf says of nature that her beauty is not truth, whatever else it may be.

In the third section of the novel, "The Lighthouse," Lily has her vision, and Woolf has a reconciliation with the shades of her mother and father.

This landscape, seen through Lily's eyes, is the first one since The Voyage Out where the motion is suspended, and time seems to be holding its breath.

All was silence. Nobody seemed yet to be stirring in the house. She looked at it there sleeping in the early sunlight with its windows green and blue with the reflected leaves. The faint thought she was thinking of Mrs. Ramsay seemed in consonance with this quiet house; this smoke; this fine early morning air. Faint and unreal, it was amazingly pure and exciting.²³

Unlike the scenery in The Voyage Out, these "still lifes" are lovely. Looking towards the lighthouse, Lily sees, "The sea without a stain on it....The sea stretched like silk across the bay."²⁴ Whereas before, solid things like hills and trees and rocks occasionally seemed fluid as water, now, Lily,

....looked at the bay beneath her, making hillocks of the blue bars of the waves, and stony fields of the purpler spaces... So fine was the morning except for a streak of wind here and there that the sea and the sky looked all one fabric, as if sails were stuck high up in the sky, or the clouds had dropped down into the sea. A steamer far out at sea had drawn in the air a great scroll of smoke which stayed there curving and circling decoratively, as if the air were a fine gauze which held things and kept them softly in its mesh, only gently swaying them this way and that.²⁵

The past and the present are caught in this soft morning air and slide, almost imperceptibly, one into the other. Lily, working on a problem in her painting, recalls a happy hour spent with Mrs. Ramsay, one that stayed with her and affected her "almost like a work of art." Lily recalls having,

....rammed a little hole in the sand and covered it up, by way of burying the perfection of the moment. It was like a drop of silver in which one dipped and illumined the darkness of the past.²⁶

This peaceful hush gives Lily the opportunity to slip out of time and re-enter a place where she could feel the peace she had felt when Mrs. Ramsay sat silent beside her, looking out to sea.

....Lily, painting steadily, felt as if a door had opened, and one went in a high cathedral-like place, very dark, very solemn. Shouts came from a world far away. Steamers vanished in stalks of smoke on the horizon.²⁷

For Lily, the little boat sailing towards the lighthouse with the Ramsays on board seems gradually to evaporate on the horizon until all that is left is her idea of them. For their part, the Ramsays (Cam and James) come to disbelieve in the shore. Woolf moves the reader from the shore to the boat and back again, repeatedly; the center of "reality" fluctuates between Lily's perspective and the Ramsays'. For Lily, the sea is "so soft that the sails and clouds seemed set in its blue," and for Cam,

The sea was more important now than the shore. Waves were all around them, tossing and sinking, with a log wallowing down one wave, a gull riding on another.²⁸

In The Voyage Out, there was a discrepancy between what the characters hoped or imagined nature to be, and what their author believed nature to be. Here, in "The Lighthouse," Woolf asserts the primacy of the subjective imagination. She points out the mutability of "reality"; how it changes not only from one individual to another, and from moment to moment, but also how there can be two versions of that reality simultaneously.

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 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 Lighthouse was true, too.²⁹

Moreover, the perceptor, in the act of perceiving, not only understands some truth, but makes it real....if she can communicate it, as Lily struggles here, first to perceive, and then to make real, her vision.

What was the problem then? She must try to get hold of something that evaded her. It evaded her when she thought of Mrs. Ramsay; it evaded her now when she thought of her picture. Phrases came. Visions came. Beautiful pictures. Beautiful phrases. But what she wished to get hold of was that jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made anything....It was a miserable machine, an inefficient machine, she thought, the human apparatus for painting or feeling; it always broke down at the critical moment; heroically, one must force it on... There was the hedge, sure enough. But one got nothing by soliciting urgently. One only got a glare in the eye from looking at the line in the wall, or from rhinking--she wore a grey hat.³⁰

The last sentence here reveals that the author believes that reality cannot be known apart from its discoverer, or known by accepting others' ideas. This struggle of Lily's to hold on to her "shock" (as Woolf terms such insights) differs subtly from the struggle she had ten years earlier on the Ramsays' lawn. Then, it seemed that others' versions of reality intimidated her, stood between her and her vision,

...demons set on her who often brought her to the verge of tears and made this passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child. Such she often felt herself--struggling against

terrific odds to maintain her courage; to say: 'But this is what I see; this is what I see,' and so to clasp some miserable remnant of her vision to her breast, which a thousand forces did their best to pluck away from her.³¹

After ten years have passed, Lily seems to feel that she has the right to her reality, to her interpretation of it:

"Mother and child then--objects of universal veneration--might be reduced...to a purple shadow without irreverence."³²

For the artist, this is a triumph. However exhausting it may be to wrestle one's unique conception of nature onto the canvas, or the printed page, at least one is not hindered by doubts that one has the right to.

The artistic relationship to reality, as well as the human relationship to nature, has become that of participant rather than observer.

Chapter 5

The Waves

Whereas in The Voyage Out Woolf saw the a-human element represented by our flesh with something like horror, by the time she writes The Waves she has come to regard it with awe, as she does all of the natural world. The organic relationship of humanity to the natural world has become a theme for celebration. Her most conspicuous motifs are the rising tide, the pulse of the sea, and the turning of day. To human loves and hates the earth is indifferent, she believes, and if there is any purpose to the whirling of the stars we shall never know it...yet our heart-beat is the heart-beat of the ocean; we are borne, singing, on the invisible swell and strength of its pulse within us.

In To The Lighthouse, the chaos and flux of nature were perceived as inimicable to human concerns. In the first section, "The Window," Mrs. Ramsay and the rest look out upon the night from the candle-lit serenity of their dinner party and feel as if the outer world were but a "...reflection in which things wavered and vanished, waterily." They feel as if they have "...a common cause against all that fluidity out there."¹ In "Time Passes," the brutality

of chaos and nature's unconcern for us are perceived as frightening. In the third section, as we move back to the world of human concerns, it becomes more pliable, more supple to human imagination; it changes from moment to moment as the observer changes. In To The Lighthouse, the natural world is perceived as interesting only insofar as human beings observe it or are influenced by it or reflect upon it.

Whereas always before, the relationship between the human consciousness and the natural world had the intermediary of a narrator, someone whose point of view could be compared with the characters' point of view, in The Waves, any attempt at establishing an "objective" point has been dismissed. True, a narrator speaks in each of the prologues, but this narrator is speaking of a landscape unvisited by any of the speakers in the "play-poem" and whose relationship to their lives is strictly symbolic. Since we never see or hear anything but that which the speaker chooses to tell us about, we are at his mercy. He (or she) tells us he is at school, on a train bound for home, at a dinner party, and we must take his word for it. The result is that we have an uncanny suspicion that the rooms and landscapes may exist only in our story-teller's head. We suspect that the earth he walks upon is not as solid as ours. Thus, paradoxically, while the physical world meshes so completely with the human story, and seems more than ever to dominate human life, to

determine its limits, yet it seems a dream spun by a consciousness drifting through eternal night.

On September 25, 1929, as she is conceiving what will become The Waves, Woolf records in her diary: "Who thinks it? And am I outside the thinker?"²

Nature, in The Waves, is nature only as envisioned by human beings...of course, there is no other way of seeing itbut Woolf, by dispensing with some "objective" narrator, has revealed the essential subjectivity of the human vision.

In The Waves there is still an enormous sense of flux, but instead of labeling it chaos, the narrator suspends judgment about the natural world; she does not assign it a value in human terms, but rather tries to convey a sense of something perceived that is really beyond our ken, a reality beyond human understanding.

Before, a landscape that seemed either grimly foreboding or serenely indifferent was one that could be scanned with the eye; now the horizon has receded to the outermost reaches of human imagination. Bernard says,

I reflect now that the earth is only a pebble flicked off accidentally from the face of the sun and that there is no life anywhere in the abysses of space.³

He is at times aware of the vastness of the universe.

....the light of the stars falling, as it falls now, on my hand after traveling for millions upon millions of years--I could get a cold shock from that for a moment--not more, my imagination is too feeble.⁴

Not only is there a sense of having broken through the barriers of human space, but also of human values. The passage cited

below is taken from the prologue to the third section of
The Waves.

In the garden the birds that had sung erratically and spasmodically in the dawn on that tree, on that bush, now sang....in chorus, as if conscious of companionship....Also they sang emulously in the clear morning air, swerving high over the elm tree...escaping, pursuing....And then tiring of pursuit and flight,lovelilythey came descending, delicately declining...sat silent, their bright eyes glancing.⁵

To continue:

Now glancing this side, that side, they looked deeper, beneath the flowers, down the dark avenues into the unlit world where the leaf rots and the flower has fallen. Then one of them, beautifully darting, accurately alighting, spiked the soft, monstrous body of the defenceless worm, pecked it again and yet again, and left it to fester. Down there among the roots where the flowers decayed, gusts of dead smells were wafted; drops formed on the bloated sides of swollen things. The skin of rotten fruit broke, and matter oozed too thick to run. Yellow excretions were exuded by slugs and now and again an amorphous body with a head at either end swayed from side to side. The gold-eyed birds darting in between the leaves observed the purulence, that wetness, quizically. Now and then they plunged the tips of their beaks savagely into the sticky mixture.⁶

The birds are beautiful, quick, bright, lovely and utterly inhuman in their choice of food. Their beauty is what delights us; we tend to ignore what delights them. Woolf, by bringing it vividly to our attention, emphasizes their strangeness for us. They have a place in the world which we can appreciate only intellectually, and not emotionally.

Another entry, this one dated 26th January, 1930 reads,

The interludes are very difficult, yet I think essential; so as to bridge and also to give a background--the sea; insensitive nature.⁷

By "insensitive," she almost certainly means "insensitive to human concerns."

In spite of this sense of "otherness" there is an interweaving of the human and natural world in the use of man-made things as similes for natural things. No human being crosses the seascape of the prologues, but a boot is stuck in the sand, and the wreck of a shallop litters the shore, and once the waves are described as driving in and back with the "muscularity of an engine." Trees on the ridge of a hill-top are likened to the clipped mane of a horse. In each of the prologues to the chapters the extensive descriptions of the natural world contain similes and metaphors of human beings, human activity, human creation.

In the opening prologue that describes the dawn, "...the sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it," and "...the wave....drew out again, sighing like a sleeper." The dawn is compared to a woman raising a lamp higher and higher in the sky; this image is continued over several of the sections. In the third:

The girl who had shaken her head and made all the jewels, the topaz, the aquamarine, the water-coloured jewels with sparks of fire in them dance, now bared her brows and with wide-opened eyes drove a straight pathway over the waves.⁸

In section five,

The sun....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.⁹

Birds are compared to "skaters rollicking arm-in-arm,"
flowers are compared to bells:

....a bud here and there shook out flowers, green
veined and quivering, as if the effort of opening
had set them rocking, and pealing a faint carillon
as they beat their frail clappers against their
white walls.¹⁰

The waves are compared to: "...turbaned warriors...with
poisoned assegais who, whirling their arms on high, advance
upon the feeding flocks, the white sheep."¹¹

This way of seeing, of comparing birds to skaters, or
waves to turbaned warriors, is not sentimental anthropomor-
phism, for there is no attempt to show purpose by the ways
things are described. There is no hint that non-human things
are concerned with human goals. Her similes are an acknow-
ledgement that we can't perceive nature except in human terms.
We draw analogies between our inner and outer realities. The
great thing is not to fall into the trap of believing in our
symbols, of mistaking the abstraction for the reality. While
we can only see the processes of the natural world in human
terms, we can still have the largeness of vision to perceive
that nature's aims may not coincide with human aims.

In The Voyage Out, the author seemed to make her compari-
sons in a clever, cutting, and rather conventional manner
(Rachel is compared to a puppy who drags underwear into the
hall; another women is "an impertinent but jolly little
pig"); her intent seemed to be to define and limit the way
in which the reader saw her characters. Now, the similes are

used as a way of expanding the reader's perceptions about a character; they supply the function that intuition plays when we meet someone. The rational mind supplies one kind of information, and the novelist can give us that in conversation, description of person, unfolding action. But only a poet can give us revelation.

Each of the characters has his or her own motif, his or her own image that expresses the essence of that character's being. For Susan, it is a cat. Her green eyes, her jealousy, her maternity, her single-mindedness, all are feline; she moves with "the stealthy yet assured movements....of a wild beast."¹² And in one memorable passage, she methodically buries what disgusts her.

Louis envisions himself as a tree whose roots go deep down into past civilizations. In his imagination, he surfaces at the dawn of civilization on the banks of the Nile, a statue whose lidless eyes watch veiled women carry water from the river. He has absorbed and understood human history; he feels that it is his duty to add something to that treasure of intellectual history, to "forge a ring of poetry like clear steel." But his other motif is the chained elephant, "the great brute...who stamps and stamps." He has tremendous intellectual power; he was "the best scholar in the school." But he is under a compulsion to clear his family name; he cannot forget his father's financial disgrace.

Rhoda's metaphor is water: in foam, fountains, pools; she is "...the nymph of the fountain always wet." From the moment we meet her, rocking her white petals on waves in her basin until she drowns herself and becomes foam indeed, she has no discreet shape for her personality; unstable as water, she does not trust the supporting walls of her own identity to contain her. She says of herself,

I have no face....Alone, I often fall down into nothingness. I must push my foot stealthily lest I should fall off the edge of the world into nothingness. I have to bang my hand against some hard door to call myself back to the body.¹³

Rhoda says of herself,

I am the foam that sweeps and fills the uttermost rims of the rocks with whiteness...¹⁴

The characters both become what they see and reveal themselves by what they see. The dividing line between the internal and external worlds has faded, become almost insubstantial. Indeed, in this novel the characters seem not to have skins, but rather permeable membranes.

....our senses have widened. Membranes, webs of nerve that lay white and limp, have filled and spread themselves and float round us like filaments, making the air tangible and catching in them far-away sounds unheard before.¹⁵

While this image is rather different from the one of a permeable membrane (and really doesn't bear thinking about too closely!) it does suggest the kind of intermingling with their surroundings that is typical of the characters.

In previous novels, much of the characters' thought would be abstract, but now Woolf impales every thought, every emotion on some concrete natural image.

'How strange,' said Bernard, 'the willow tree looks seen together. I was Byron, and the tree was Byron's tree, lachrymose, down-showering, lamenting. Now that we look at the tree together, it has a combed look, each branch distinct.'¹⁶

Bernard, stripped of his illusions by Neville, thinks,

'Like a long wave, like a roll of heavy waters, he went over me....dragging me open, laying bare the pebbles on the shore of my soul.'¹⁷

Jinny, feeling herself at home in "society" thinks to herself,

'I now begin to unfurl....as a fern....'¹⁸

For Jinny, the symbol is flame. Her colors are crimson and gold. Bernard says of her: "She flashed her fire over the tree....She was....febrile....Darting, angular....she came....So little flames zigzag over the cracks in the dry earth."¹⁹ And Jinny, reflecting upon her love affairs, says of herself:

....smoke and flame have wrapped us about; after a furious conflagration....we have sunk to ashes, leaving no relics, no unburnt bones, no wisps of hair to be kept in lockets such as your intimacies leave behind them.'²⁰

Also, her passion seems sterile; it is a kind of love which consumes but does not create.

Bernard's symbol is the spider web. Transitory, ephemeral, exquisite and impossible to capture or make permanent, it represents both his gift and his concern: conversation

and communion with people. Also, when there is a fly caught in it, he is beset by indecision: "Shall I free the fly? Shall I let the fly be eaten?"²¹

Two images that run through Neville's thoughts are the apple tree that he was gazing at when he heard that a man had been found dead, and naked boys squirting each other with hoses.

More important, however, is the fact that the boundaries between human beings and the world in which they find themselves have all but disappeared.

In To The Lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay thinks,

It was odd...how if one was alone, one leant to inanimate things; trees, stream, 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.²²

While there is a strong sense of a relationship with nature expressed in that passage, nevertheless there is also a sense of distance, a disbelief in the "oneness" felt. In The Waves, Louis says,

I hold a stalk in my hand. I am the stalk. My roots go down to the depths of the world, through earth....I am all fibre. All tremors shake me, and the weight of the earth is pressed to my ribs.... my eyes are green leaves, unseeing.²³

This is more than allegory; it is partly a declaration of the oneness of our flesh with earth, partly it is an acknowledgment that on some level, we do become what we see. Susan thinks to herself,

....I am the field, I am the barn, I am the trees
I am not a woman, but the light that falls on
 this gate, on this ground. I am the seasons....
 January, May, November; the mud, the mist, the
 dawn.²⁴

This is a celebration of human oneness with nature; it is also a kind of wondering acknowledgement of that uncoercible element within us. Nature, that seemed so pliant and supple to human imagination and human reason in To The Light-house, has become more recalcitrant in The Waves. The characters feel the forces in their lives to be givens.

Sometimes these forces that rule them are perceived as external, as when Rhoda feels herself an unwilling passenger in or "on" life.

With intermittent shocks, sudden as the springs of a tiger, life emerges heaving its dark crest from the sea. It is to this we are attached; it is to this we are bound, as bodies to wild horses.²⁵

And Neville, as his train draws into the station, feels a similar emotion:

I will sit still one moment before I emerge into that chaos, that tumult....The huge uproar is in my ears. It sounds and resounds....like the surge of a sea. We are cast down on the platform with our handbags. We are whirled asunder. My sense of self almost perishes; my contempt. I become drawn in, tossed down, thrown sky-high.²⁶

At other times these forces are perceived as internal; each of the characters seems highly aware of his or her own "nature." They are very aware of their limitations. When they gather to say farewell to Percival, they are only in their early twenties, but they have a strong intimation of what life will be like for them.

Susan, although she loves Bernard, the story-teller, knows:

The only sayings I understand are cries of love, hate, rage, and pain.²⁷

And Bernard, who might have been a novelist, is aware that he

....cannot bear the pressure of solitude. When I cannot see words curling like rings of smoke round me I am in darkness--I am nothing.²⁸

In the case of Bernard, and also of Louis, there is a strong sense that they have been limited by force of circumstance from becoming all that they might have been. Louis might have been a poet, but that he is under a compulsion to redeem his family's good name, and poetry demands more than one's spare time. Bernard, in his old age, is haunted by

....those old half-articulate ghosts who....turn over in their sleep, who utter confused cries, who put out their phantom fingers and clutch at me as I try to escape--shadows of people one might have been.²⁹

In The Waves she tries to show us human beings as part of physical nature. They are trapped by their limits.... urged on by the power of their blood...finite and yet able somehow to escape the limits of their skins by their imaginations.

Everywhere, too, nature is in motion; none of her images are static or "fixed"; everything is running, flowing, flowering, quivering with life. In addition, there are, from time to time, quite explicit remarks about the relationship of the individual consciousness to the world. Bernard's

state of mind when he visits Rome is a case in point.

'Here I am shedding one of my life-skins, and all they will say is, 'Bernard is spending ten days in Rome.'....observe how the dots and dashes are beginning, as I walk, to run themselves into continuous lines, how things are losing the bald, the separate identity that they had as I walked up those steps. The great red pot is now a reddish streak in a wave of yellowish green. The world is beginning to move past me like the banks of a hedge when the train starts, like the waves of the sea when a steamer moves.³⁰

When Bernard has a premonition of his death--his eternity--things become suddenly still for him. When he shakes this off and resumes the rhythm of life, the world seems to be in motion once more.

Not only is there a quickening sense of movement, but the very substance of the natural world had changed. The imaginative eye of the artist probes the surfaces of things and finds them mutable. Air is dissolved into atoms, brick into dust, and the outlines of grass and trees melt and run like water under the blazing sun.

Through atoms of grey-blue air the sun struck at English fields and lit up marshes and pools, a white gull on a stake, the slow sail of shadows over blunt-headed woods and young corn and flowing hayfields. It beat on the orchard wall, and every pit and grain of the brick was silver pointed, purple, fiery as if soft to touch, as if touched it must melt into hot-baked grains of dust. The currants hung against the wall in ripples and cascades of polished red....and all the blades of the grass were run together in one fluent green blaze. The trees' shadow was sunk to a dark pool at the root. Light descending in floods dissolved the separate foliation into one green mound.³¹

The perception behind this imaginative vision is that permanence is an illusion, an attempt to grasp the moment as it slips by. The reality is that we have no solid earth to stand on; it changes even as we attempt to examine and understand it. Our perceptions are hopelessly outdistanced unless we can make a leap of the imagination to accompany the flux of matter as it races past us.

Part II: Character

Chapter 6

The Voyage Out

In her first novel, Woolf presents the reader with a landscape that is uninviting at best, and frequently menacing or ominous. The temperature rises like a fever, the heat withers away all freshness and beauty, and the ugliness of the world is revealed in the bleak glare of a tropical sun. This world is inhabited by human beings at least as unlovely as their surroundings. From the rude little street urchins who mock the Ambroses as they leave London (whose streets are thronged with "bigoted workers" and the poor who are "rightly malignant") to the cripples displaying "mutilated members" in the streets of the South American town where the voyagers disembark, the characters who people the background of The Voyage Out are an unattractive lot.

At the start of her career, the author had felt herself pitted against an obtuse mass of inhumanity. She felt superior to the insensitive and unimaginative creatures who were sunk in their mindless stupidity and unaware of the terror and absurdity of the human predicament.

Lytton Strachey wrote to Virginia Stephen from a resort where he was spending a short holiday, and described the guests to her.

Besides the golfers there are some of the higher clergy--bishops and wardens--and two lawyers at the chancery bar. Of course these are all golfers as well....Their conversation is quite amazing, and when I consider that there must be numbers of persons more stupid still, I begin to see the human race en noir, Oh God! Oh God! The slowness of them, the pomp, and the fatuity! They're certainly at their best when they argue, which they did last night on the subject of cruelty and sport.-- 'I console myself with the thought that animals themselves are very cruel--of course not stags, no--but look at a weasel!' I shrieked with laughter, and it was quite unnecessary to control myself, because they notice nothing. Good heavens, how happy they must be!¹

While that is, of course, Strachey and not Woolf, nevertheless one supposes that he expected a sympathetic reaction to his letter, based on his knowledge of his friend and her character. He wrote the letter in 1909. Virginia Stephen was working on The Voyage Out, and her opinion of the general run of humanity does not seem to have been a very lofty one.

At one point in the novel, during a sermon, Rachel Vinrace contemplates the woman next to her:

....looking at her carefully she came to the conclusion that the hospital nurse was only slavishly acquiescent, and that the look of satisfaction was produced by no splendid conception of God within her. How, indeed, could she conceive anything far outside her own experience, a woman with a commonplace face like hers, a little round red face, upon which trivial duties and trivial spites had drawn lines, whose weak blue eyes saw without intensity or individuality, whose features were blurred,

insensitive, and callous? She was adoring something shallow and smug, clinging to it, so the obstinate mouth witnessed, with the assiduity of a limpit; nothing would tear her from the demure belief in her own virtue and the virtues of her religion. She was a limpit, with the sensitive side of her stuck to a rock, forever dead to the rush of fresh and beautiful things past her.²

Laying aside for a moment the whole question of assessing someone's character by a perusal of her physiognomy, there seems to be a certain lack of generosity in Rachel's summing-up. Perhaps one could plausibly argue that it is only Rachel speaking, and not Woolf. However, Woolf has sketched Rachel from parts of her own character, and one suspects that Woolf is doing some editorializing here. This is not, by any means, an isolated instance. Even Hewet, that determined optimist, has a little moue of distaste when he contemplates his fellow-humans.

'They are not satisfactory; they are ignoble,' he thought,He glanced at them all, stooping and swaying and gesticulating round the table-cloth. Amiable and modest, lovable even in their contentment and desire to be kind, how mediocre they all were, and capable of what insipid cruelty to one another! There was Mrs. Thornbury, sweet but trivial in her maternal egoism; Mrs. Eliot, perpetually complaining of her lot; her husband a mere pea in a pod; and Susan--she had no self and counted neither one way nor the other; Vennins was as honest and brutal as a school-boy; poor old Thornbury merely trod his round like a horse in a mill; and the less one examined into Evelyn's character the better, he suspected. Yet these were the people with money, and to them rather than to others was given the management of the world. Put among them some one more vital, who cared for life or for beauty, and what an agony, what a waste. Would they inflict on him if he tried to share with them and not to scourge!

'There's Hirst,' he concluded, coming to the figure of his friend; with his usual little frown of concentration upon his forehead he was peeling the skin off a banana. 'And he's as ugly as sin.' For the ugliness of St. John Hirst, and the limitations that went with it, he made the rest in some way responsible. It was their fault he had to live alone.³

Although Hewet seems to be trying to see the picnickers as objectively as possible, his abstractions: "amiable," "modest," and "lovable" are not tied to any concrete image, as are the derogatory phrases which follow immediately after, and so effectively cancel any benign impression the first ones might have made on the reader. His thought, "...he's as ugly as sin" suggests that Hewet may be harbouring (unknown to himself) some rather hostile feelings towards his outspoken friend. The narrator seems aware of his projection: "...he made the rest in some way responsible." It is possible that Hewet (who defends Hirst loyally to Rachel, but with a trace of malice) does not like to admit having negative feelings towards a friend.

Both the narrator and her characters frequently make cutting comparisons with animals; they deride human beings in general, either humorously or bitterly, depending on their mood. The passengers of large ocean-liners cannot decide whether the cargo of the Euphrosyne is alive, or even human.

The insect-like figures of Dalloways, Ambroses, and Vinraces were also derided, both from the extreme smallness of their persons and the doubt, which only strong glasses could dispel, as to whether they were really live creatures or only lumps on the rigging. Mr. Pepper with all his

learning had been mistaken for a cormorant, and then, as unjustly, transformed into a cow.⁴

Closer proximity doesn't mean a more tolerant outlook. Mr. Ambrose is chased out of his room "...like an errant hen"; the well-fed hotel guest "...has the appearance of crocodiles so fully gorged by their last meal that the future of the world gives them no anxiety whatever.⁵ Helen and Rachel, eavesdropping outside the hotel window, hear: "...an uneven humming sound like that which arises from a flock of sheep pent within hurdles at dusk."⁶ St. John Hirst remarks (after the mail has been distributed) that the guests' silence "...reminded him of the silence in the lion-house when each beast holds a lump of raw meat in its paws."⁷ An obese but stylishly-dressed little woman makes Helen think of "...an impertinent but jolly little pig."⁸ Susan Warrington's sleep "with its profoundly peaceful sighs and hesitations... resembles that of a cow standing up to its knees all night through in the long grass."⁹ When the guests at the ball hear the music and assemble they are described "like the rats who followed the piper."¹⁰ Helen says of Rachel (when the latter asks her a personal question) "It's like having a puppy in the house having you with one--a puppy that brings one's under-clothes down into the hall."¹¹ It is Helen, also, who makes one of the most searing remarks.

....she had always found that the ordinary person had so little emotion in his own life that the scent of it in the lives of others was like the scent of blood in the nostrils of a bloodhound.¹²

This unlovely image recurs (no pun intended) in Mrs. Dalloway when Septimus Smith is visited by Dr. Holmes:

"Human nature, in short, was on him--the repulsive brute, with the blood-red nostrils. Holmes was on him."¹³

Septimus' vision is supposed to be distorted; that is the terror of his madness: his warped and incomplete vision of humanity. Although the characters in The Voyage Out try (as Hewet tried) to be reasonably humane in their assessments of people, all too often their sentiments in that direction ring hollow; the really vivid images are quite memorably uncomplementary. Helen is supposed to be the wisest and most perceptive person in the novel, and even she is shadowed by this grim spectre of a remorselessly callous world. As she finishes her tirade, Helen

...looked about her as if she had called up a legion of human beings, all hostile and all disagreeable, who encircle the table, with mouths gaping for blood, and made it appear a little island of neutral country in the midst of the enemy's country.¹⁴

Certainly the only ones in the story who have any semblance of humanity seem to be (with the exception of the nurse who tends Rachel during her illness) the little group of tourists who move between the villa and the hotel.

The South American tribe that the travelers encounter on their trip downriver are presented as practically inhuman.

Peaceful, and even beautiful at first, the sight of the women, who had given up looking at them, made them feel very cold and melancholy. 'Well,' Terence sighed at length, 'it makes us seem very insignificant, doesn't it?' Rachel agreed. So it would go on forever and ever, she said, those women sitting under the trees, the trees and the river.¹⁵

The gaze that follows them about the village seems less beautiful than repulsive, however:

As they sauntered about, the stare followed them, passing over their legs, their bodies, their heads, curiously, not without hostility, like the crawl of a winter fly.¹⁶

The characters in the novel usually seem more repulsive in proportion to their distance from the main characters in the story. A notable exception to this is Dr. Rodriguez. The author seems to be relieving herself of an understandable antipathy towards the medical profession. Rachel's illness parallels that of Thoby Stephen's in that in neither case did the doctor understand the seriousness of the situation. Thoby Stephen was being treated for malaria while he was dying of typhoid fever. In TVO, Terence questions the doctor about Rachel's condition:

'There is no reason for anxiety, I tell you- none,' Rodriguez replied in his execrable French, smiling uneasily, and making little movements all the time as if to get away...His [Hewet's] confidence in the man vanished as he looked at him and saw his insignificance, his dirty appearance, his shiftiness, and his unintelligent, hairy face.¹⁷

Not all the animosity is reserved for the background characters; St. John Hirst, while the author respects his intelligence and fundamentally likes him, nonetheless is

made to say some outrageously boorish things- usually to or about women.

'Women interest me,' said Hewet...
 'They're so stupid,' said Hirst...
 'I suppose they are stupid?' Hewet wondered.
 'There can't be two opinions about that, I imagine,'
 said Hirst...
 'unless you're in love',¹⁸

When he holds a brief conversation with Rachel at the ball, he manages to reduce her to tears within the space of perhaps five minutes. They are discussing literature.

'About Gibbon,' he continued. 'D'you think you'll be able to appreciate him? He's the test, of course. It's awfully difficult to tell about women,' he continued, 'how much, I mean, is due to lack of training, and how much is native incapacity...'
 ...Hirst's eye wandered about the room...With the best will in the world he was conscious that they were not getting on well together.¹⁹

Lytton Strachey, from whose character Hirst is drawn, was certainly misogynist in his outlook; he probably liked and respected Virginia Stephen because she did not dissolve in tears when challenged, but gave as good as she got. However, her treatment of Hirst makes it quite plain that her attitude towards that kind of contemptuous treatment from the male sex was not forgiving.

Here is Hewet philosophizing with Hirst:

'The truth of it is that one is never alone, and one is never in company....You can't see my bubble; I can't see yours....and supposing my bubble could run into someone else's bubble-'
 'And they both burst?' put in Hirst.
 'Then- then- then-' pondered Hewet....'it would be an e-nor-mous world, he said, stretching his arms to their full width, as though even so they could hardly clasp the billowy universe.
 'I don't think you altogether as foolish as I used to, Hewet,' said Hirst. 'You don't know what you mean but you try to say it.'²⁰

Earlier in the passage, Hirst remarks that he envies Hewet his capacity for not thinking. He doesn't put himself out to be charming to anyone. His compulsively contemptuous remarks on Hewet's speculations don't seem to discourage the recipient, but it is not surprising that Terence is ripe for a more sympathetic audience.

Woolf sympathizes with Rachel's and Terence's need for closeness, for love, for communication. Unfortunately, they are limited in their access to sympathetic listeners. Their engagement seems to be a deeper entanglement than the one they feel ready for. The strongest reason for the engagement seems to be their shared sense of a profound and frightening loneliness, made more acute by their austere and inhospitable surroundings. Their behavior here seems worth examining. As they walk into the forest, he asks her if she is frightened.

'No,' she answered. 'I like it.' She repeated 'I like it,' and was walking fast, and holding herself more erect than usual....
'You like being with me?' Terence asked.
'Yes, with you,' she replied.²¹

He says that they are happy together; Rachel responds, "Very happy." Then he says, "We love each other," and Rachel echoes, "We love each other." They walk still more rapidly, come to a halt, clasp each other for a moment and then sit down, their faces "very pale and quiet."

'We love each other,' Terence repeated, searching into her face.... 'Terrible- terrible,' she murmured after another pause, but in saying

this she was thinking as much of the persistent churning of the water as of her own feeling... she observed that the tears were running down Terence's cheeks.²²

In the whole canon of English literature, I doubt if one could find a young couple's confession of mutual love transpiring in a more funereal atmosphere. They return from their excursion utterly exhausted, as if emotionally burdened. There seems to have been no sense of release, no sense of joy. The emotional atmosphere is as sluggish and oppressive as the humidity. The jungle has been both a catalyst and a metaphor.

Woolf rarely shows us the happy side of their relationship; she tells us they are delighted with each other and happiest in each others' company, then shows them bickering.

In solitude they could express those beautiful but too vast desires which were so oddly uncomfortable to the ears of other men and women—desires for a world, such as their own world which contained two people seemed to them to be, where people knew each other intimately and thus judged each other by what was good, and never quarrelled, because that was a waste of time.²³

However, this idyllic relationship is never shown. Woolf seems to be saying exactly the sort of things about the couple that they might say of themselves...at least to their casual acquaintances. At first one suspects Woolf of elaborate irony, because when Terence and Rachel interact, there is a lot of discord and uncertainty expressed about their engagement. Woolf's rhetoric about

their happiness is not rooted in any exchange that shows their happiness in each other. It seems that the author wants her characters to live happily ever after, but they are quite determined to be themselves, and they are not really suited for marriage. Here, Terence is meditating, and Rachel playing the piano.

There she was, swaying enthusiastically over her music, quite forgetful of him,- but he liked that quality in her. At last, having written down a series of little sentences, with notes of interrogation attached to them, he observed aloud, 'Women- under the heading Women I've written: 'Not really vainer than men. Lack of self-confidence at the base of most serious faults. Dislike of own sex traditional, or founded on fact? Every woman not so much a rake at heart as an optimist, because they don't think. What do you say, Rachel? Rachel said nothing. Up and up the steep spiral of a very late Beethoven sonata she climbed.²⁴

Once more he interrupts her; once more she ignores him, then:

'No, Terence, it's no good; here am I, the best musician in South America, not to speak of Europe and Asia, and I can't play a note because of you in the room interrupting me every second.' 'You don't seem to realise that that's what I've been aiming at for the last half-hour...I've no objection to nice, simple tunes- indeed I find them helpful to literary composition, but that kind of thing is merely like an unfortunate old dog going round on its hind legs in the rain.'²⁵

Doubtless it was in reference to such passages that Clive Bell wrote (after Virginia requested his opinion) that

...to draw such sharp & marked contrasts between the subtle, sensitive, tactful, gracious, delicately perceptive, & perspicacious women, & the obtuse, vulgar, blind, florid, rude,

tactless, emphatic, indelicate, vain, tyrannical, stupid men, is not only rather absurd, but rather bad art, I think.²⁶

Her reply was that,

...for various psychological reasons which seem to me very interesting, a man, in the present state of the world, is not a very good judge of his sex.²⁷

At any rate, perhaps we could believe of Terence that he liked the "impersonality" and only disliked Beethoven sonatas if Woolf had not added, near the end of the chapter, some lines that confirm Terence's distaste for Rachel's independence.

Terence...was looking at her keenly and with dissatisfaction. She seemed to be able to cut herself adrift from him, and to pass away to unknown places where she had no need of him. The thought roused his jealousy. 'I sometimes think you're not in love with me and never will be....I don't satisfy you in the way you satisfy me...There's something I can't get hold of in you.'²⁷

Terence's insistence that Rachel tell him about the details of her life at home helps her to believe that her life is interesting and worth hearing about, even when she protests that all she has done is feed rabbits for twenty-three years. It is true that he draws her out and is attentive to the extent that his attention engages her interest in him; when her interests move outward (or inward) he is not pleased. His love for her is more of a dependency than a genuine caring which leaves the beloved some space in which to breath, some room (of her own) in which

to grow. He is threatened by her absorption in her music because it takes her away from him, and Rachel's first love is her music. Terence seems both more dependent and more heedful of company than is compatible with a life committed to artistic endeavour. At one point he says,

'I want to write a novel about Silence,' he said; 'the things people don't say. But the difficulty is immense.' He sighed. 'However, you don't care,' he continued. He looked at her almost severely, 'Nobody cares. Never mind. It's the only thing worth doing.' Whether or not he found the contemplation of the art of fiction so satisfying as to drive all other wishes from his mind, he looked to Rachel as if he had forgotten her presence.²⁸

While this passage suggests that under the right circumstances he might develop into a strong, creative individual, his behavior while Rachel is practising indicates that his need for love and attention overshadows all his other needs. Instead of chattering away incessantly about what he intended to write, he might have gone into the other room and written it while she practiced. However, that is apparently not as appealing to him as the attempt to realize his metaphor of human personalities as bubbles which might merge upon contact and dissolve individuality in an ideal union.

Rachel, in spite of her greater youth and immaturity, has some doubts as to the feasibility of this solution. Not that it isn't attractive to her. She, however, is usually the first to point out the difficulties of achieving an ideal relationship. "We bring out the worst in each

other- we should live separate."²⁹ Rachel's perception is that absorption in each other will not be enough.

...she wanted many more things than the love of one human being- the sea, the sky. She turned again and looked at the distant blue, which was so smooth and serene where the sky met the sea; she could not possibly want only one human being.³⁰

Rachel is quite introspective and mulls over her predicament as an intelligent young woman; she is resentful of male privilege and male power, but she doesn't set out to challenge them. She seems to be paralyzed. Woolf reveals that Rachel is aware that her options have been narrowly defined and that she resents that, but nevertheless she slips into the role society has prepared for her. Terence offers both excitement and security. Moreover, he embodies all that Rachel has missed. He has a university education; he has traveled; he has the freedom to make his own decisions without consulting anybody. Doubtless, a large part of his attractiveness is his liberty. Nevertheless, considering his possessiveness, Rachel's "natural" destiny, marriage, is for her a dubious proposition: it would have squelched her talent and stifled her growth.

There is a split in Rachel's consciousness insofar as her wishes are concerned. Near the end of chapter 22, Rachel realises quite vividly that marriage, at least any form of marriage that she is familiar with, cannot possibly fulfil all her dreams.

...she wanted many more things than the love of one human being- the sea, the sky. She turned again and looked at the distant blue, which was so smooth and serene where the sky met the sea; she could not possibly want only one human being.³¹

Her trepidation and Terence's apprehension of it are almost sufficient to make them break off the engagement at this point. But their fear of loneliness drives them back together, even though they suspect that they will be disappointed and disillusioned in the marriage. Woolf ends the chapter on a rather dismal note.

They stood together in front of the looking-glass, and with a brush tried to make themselves look as if they had been feeling nothing at all, neither pain nor happiness. But it chilled them to see themselves in the glass, for instead of being vast and indivisible they were really very small and separate, the size of the glass, leaving a large space for the reflection of other things.³²

Only two chapters later, Rachel sits serenely by Terence and contemplates her situation.

...the methods by which she had reached her present position, seemed to her very strange, and the strangest thing about them was that she had not known where they were leading her. That was the strange thing, that one did not know where one was going; or what one wanted, and followed blindly, suffering so much in secret, always unprepared and amazed and knowing nothing; but one thing led to another and by degrees something had formed itself out of nothing, and so one reached at last this calm, this quiet, this certainty, and it was this process that people called living.³³

She reaches these conclusions as she sits by Terence as he is sleeping. When he is awake, he irritates her more.

Part of this may be due to the fact that Virginia Stephen had a lot of conflicting feelings about matrimony. On the one hand, she did not want to go on living with

her brother Adrian; they were not well suited to each other in temperament. Also, even to her, marriage was proof of "normality"; proof that she was an acceptable and satisfactory woman. Moreover, the fact remained that she very much wanted to be special to someone. After her sister Vanessa married Clive Bell, she felt left out, especially since she had depended on her sister's attention, and this was pre-empted first by Vanessa's husband and later, by her children. Virginia tried to recover some of this attention by carrying on a long flirtation with her brother-in-law; this was unsatisfactory to her, because Clive had all the power in the relationship, and could hurt Virginia very much, as his son, Quentin Bell, writes, "...by the simple expediant of making love to his wife."³⁴ Virginia even once accepted an offer of marriage (which was hastily withdrawn) from an avowed homosexual, Lytton Strachey. Whether or not she would have withdrawn her acceptance if Strachey hadn't been the first one to panic is doubtful. She does seem to have had a strong desire for marriage at this time in her life. Violet Dickenson, who was woman towards whom Virginia directed a great deal of her passion, was nevertheless unable to supply enough affection and reassurance for Virginia's insatiable craving, at least since Vanessa's marriage had removed that source of warmth from Virginia's immediate environment. After a trip to Italy, where the unhappiness of

being the "odd one out" in a kind of love-triangle had driven her to cut short her journey with her sister and brother-in-law, and return to London alone. She wrote a letter to Violet which begins,

Why don't you write to me? I might be buried in Messina, or bug-eaten in Florence, or vanished, or prostitute, or in love, or pregnant, and you would not know or care.³⁶

She is only about one-fifth in jest. In fact, given the evidence of her overwhelming love-need, her very real reticence to become someone's wife seems somewhat surprising. However, unlike Rachel Vinrace, Virginia Stephen was already committed to becoming an artist. She had no desire to form an alliance which would mean giving up her solitary hours at her writing-table for sociable hours at a tea-table, or any other kind of domestic slavery.

When Leonard Woolf proposed, Virginia wrote him a long letter which reveals the deep conflict within her on the subject of marriage.

...I can't explain what I feel- These are some of the things that strike me. The obvious advantages of marriage stand in my way. I say to myself, Anyhow, you'll be quite happy with him; & he will give you companionship; children, & a busy life. Then I say By God, I will not look upon marriage as a profession... Then, of course, I feel angry sometimes at the strength of your desire...I sometimes feel that no one ever has or ever can share- something- Its the thing that makes you call me like a hill, or a rock. Again, I want everything- love, children, adventure, intimacy, work...So I go from being half in love with you, and wanting you to be with me always, to the extreme of wildness & aloofness. I sometimes think that if I married you, I could have everything- and then- is it the sexual side of it that comes between us? As I told you brutally the other day, I feel no physical attraction in you. There are moments- when you kissed me the other day was one- when I feel no more than a rock. And yet your

caring for me as you do almost overwhelms me. It is so real, and so strange. Why should you?... it's just because you care so much that I feel I've got care before I marry you. I feel that I must give you everything; and that if I can't, well marriage would only be second-best for you as well as for me...We both...want a marriage that is a tremendous living thing, always alive...We ask a great deal of life, don't we? Perhaps we shall get it; then how splendid!³⁷

Her passionate declaration, "By God, I will not look upon marriage as a profession" comes from the artist and feminist who had to "strangle" the "angel in the house" in order to create. In The Voyage Out, Evelyn's musings seem to give voice to some of that trepidation which the author felt, even after Rachel has accepted Terence and seems to find herself content with being engaged.

Evelyn...had been looking from Susan to Rachel. Well- they had both made up their minds very easily, they had done in a few weeks what it sometimes seemed to her that she would never be able to do...for the sake of this one man they had renounced all other men, and movement, and the real things of life. Love was all very well...but the real things were surely the things that happened...in the great world outside...Of course they were happy and content, but there must be better things than that.³⁵

After Rachel's death, it seems that much of the author's conflict about the state of matrimony finds an outlet in Evelyn; her gentle refusal of Mr. Perrott sounds as if it must have been taken from Virginia's own experience in refusing Walter Lamb.

There are not only the very real arguments of the feminist-artist against marriage, however. There are other fears about the fate of women who marry expressed in

Rachel's death. There is not only the fear of psychic death, there is the fear of literal death. How could she escape drawing (unconsciously, perhaps) the conclusion that sexuality and death are linked when Stella's death followed her marriage so quickly? The deaths of the two maternal figures in her life must have made it very frightening for her to contemplate having an active sexual life...which marriage seemed to demand.

Rachel's death is not only an opportunity for the author to express her feelings about death in general, and to express some of the conflicts most intelligent young women must have felt about marriage, but it was also an indication of her deepest fears about marriage and sexuality. Rachel's divided feelings about marriage are to a great extent, Virginia Stephen's divided feelings about marriage. And her fate, I believe, reflects the author's deepest fears for her own fate if she married.

Chapter 7

Jacob's Room

Woolf's treatment of character in Jacob's Room differs sharply from her treatment of character in The Voyage Out in several ways, but most noticeably in her substitution of a series of short vignettes for a detailed portrait of a personality. We have glimpses of Jacob, sometimes in conversation, sometimes in action, but mostly we receive our impressions of him indirectly, either through the thoughts and conversations of the other figures in the novel, or through the narrator.

The woman who sat down to write Jacob's Room had matured a great deal since she finished The Voyage Out. She had the satisfaction of being an established author; with four books to her credit which were selling reasonably well and which had received favorable criticism, she no longer considered herself a failure. She had the companionship and care of Leonard Woolf. That his love had survived her two years of madness must have been a source of great reassurance and security for her. Moreover, the fact that she had recovered, with her personality and creative gift intact, must have strengthened her sense of self.

Some or all of this may account for the freshness of her approach to Jacob's Room. Then too, she no longer had to write for the approval of a publisher; after they founded the Hogarth Press, she and Leonard could publish what they liked.

The entry in her diary for January 26th, 1920 reveals some of her feelings about her prospective novel.

I'm...happier today than I was yesterday having arrived at some idea of a new form for a new novel. Suppose one thing should open out of another--as in An Unwritten Novel--not only for 10 pages but for 200 or so--doesn't that give the looseness and lightness I want; doesn't that get closer and keep form and speed, and enclose everything, everything? My doubt is how far it will enclose the human heart--Am I sufficiently mistress of my dialogue to net it there? For I figure that the approach will be entirely different this time. No scaffolding: scarcely a brick to be seen; all crepuscular, the heart, the passion, humour, everything 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. Whether I'm sufficiently mistress of things--that's the doubt but conceive The Mark on the Wall, KG & Unwritten Novel taking hands and dancing in unity. What the unity shall be I have yet to discover: the theme is a blank to me; but I see immense possibilities in the form I hit upon more or less by chance 2 weeks ago. I suppose the danger is the damned egotistical self; which ruins Joyce and Richardson to my mind: is one pliant and rich to provide a wall for the book from oneself without its becoming, as in Joyce and Richardson, narrowing and restricting?¹

Whether or not such a method is "limiting" is not really the question; rather, one asks if the narrator has a limited vision, for no other mode of writing--perhaps not even a diary--displays the inside of a writer so completely as the method Woolf employs in Jacob's Room.



Woolf herself is the subject of her novel; Jacob is an occasion for her musings and ruminations about the problems, glories, possibilities, and limitations of civilization. His life is the scaffolding upon which she hangs her philosophy. In spite of occasional lapses into self-doubt ("the damned egotistical self"), she feels that she has something interesting to say, something worth listening to.

The largest part of Jacob's Room is authorial commentary, presented as something overheard, or as something aside from the "action" of the story. The author's tone is that of gossip and tour guide through the hero's life; we meet Jacob only at crucial instances, catching glimpses of him at home or at school, eavesdropping on him at a dinner-party. Most of the time Woolf is "meditating aloud" upon the world as it was about twenty years prior to and up until World War I.

While her journal entry (quoted above) shows her to be more interested in the style and form of her novel than in the theme, it must have been forming in her mind for several years. World War I had ended less than a year and a half before Woolf started to write Jacob's Room. Some years later, when Hitler and Mussolini were gathering their armies together for conquest, she sat down to write Three Guineas, in which she analyzed some of the cultural and psychological reasons why men wage war. It is an

outspokenly feminist book, and has never been very kindly treated, especially by male critics.

Even so sympathetic a reader as her nephew and biographer, Quentin Bell, describes it as

the attempt to involve a discussion of women's rights with the far more agonising and immediate question of what we were to do in order to meet the ever-growing menace of Fascism and war. The connection between the two questions seemed tenuous and the positive suggestions wholly inadequate.²

However, unhappily for our world even today, the connection between the psychological peculiarities which are developed in the private home and are conspicuous in the public sphere is in no way "tenuous"; the one is the logical and reasonable outcome of the other. Woolf's point, and it is quite valid, is that patriarchy depends for its existence upon the willing subservience of its women. If dominance were not considered a desirable male sexual trait, it is doubtful if men would be willing to go to war simply to maintain their feeling of being dominant.

In 1910, Virginia Stephen had had a brush with military pomposity and self-importance in the matter of the "Dreadnought Hoax," which was, briefly, a prank played on the British Navy by six young pacifists: Horace Cole (who planned and engineered it), Anthony Buxton, Guy Ridley, Duncan Grant, Adrian Stephen, and Virginia Stephen. Four of the party (Virginia included) were outlandishly garbed as "Abyssinians" and two as British Foreign Office officials. They simply sent off a telegram to the Commander-in-Chief

Home Fleet, allegedly from the Foreign Office, asking for a guided tour of the H.M.S. Dreadnought. They got it. They spoke a mixture of Swahili and Virgil, and the one seaman who spoke Abyssinian, and who would have been their downfall, was away on leave. The hoax was successful, and all but Horace Cole were willing to let the matter end there, but Cole reported the incident to the newspapers. Almost no one was pleased. Virginia received an admonitory letter

from Dorothea Stephen in which she declared that it was a silly and vulgar performance; she would not scold, she would merely point out that, clearly, Virginia's life was very unsatisfactory and that she stood in need of religion.³

More serious, in Virginia's eyes, was the near-beating of Duncan Grant.

Willy Fisher and his brother officers reacted in an appropriately aggressive manner, The Honour of the Navy had to be saved, and it could be saved only by the corporal punishment of the hoaxers. After a series of disappointments and of rather absurd arguments on matters of punctilio and propriety, the naval party did succeed in abducting Duncan Grant and taking him to Hamstead Heath, where they were again more than half defeated by the gentle perplexity and mild courage of a pacifist in carpet slippers.⁴

Quentin Bell's commentary on the matter reads as follows:

...the theme of masculine honour, or masculine violence and stupidity, of gold-laced masculine pomposity, remained with her for the rest of her life. She had entered the Abyssinian adventure for the fun of the thing; but she came out of it with a new sense of the brutality and silliness of men. And this perception came, in its turn, to reinforce political sentiments which had for some time been taking shape in her mind.⁵

In view of all this, it is surprising that Woolf is as restrained as she is.

Certainly the war must not only have horrified her in its ghastly destruction, and reinforced her disgust for the patriarchal system, but it must have also strengthened her doubts about its values. The war was the logical result of its love of hierarchies, its carefully codified bullying, its lust for authority and its contempt for gentleness and sensitivity.

Jacob's Room can be read as a why-war novel, if not as an anti-war novel. Her belief about war is that clamoring against it has never done any good, and that the proper tone to take is one of complete indifference to it. She is explicit about the political nature of that indifference in Three Guineas. The didactic, heavily ironic tone of that book would have been inappropriate in a novel, and probably have made caricatures of its characters.

Political writing, by its very nature, exaggerates those features of personality which seem to control a person's actions or define his limitations. The vignettes of Jacob's life are not colored by anger or prejudice; the voice of the narrator is neither strident nor harsh as she relates them; there is not a false note anywhere.

4

The creative artist and the social critic speak with two entirely different voices, even when they inhabit the same body. Woolf, as a planner and critic of her own novels, seems to be speaking out of a wholly different level--a whole different psychic "self" than the Woolf who plunges deep into the realms of pure imagination. So she sees, but does not always evaluate, Jacob's situation. She envisions him, and I do not think that it is so much conscious restraint of her ironic voice that keeps her from "telling" rather than "showing" us the reality that creates Jacob's personality, as it is the fact that she is simply operating out of a much more deeply imaginative level. She portrays, but does not interpret--didactically, at least--Jacob's reality.

Her social and emotional perspective must determine what she envisions, and her experiences must influence her interpretation of that vision, but she does not overtly proselytize. The closest she comes to it is in her commentary on the heads of state who are determining whether or not England should enter the war.

His head--bald, red-veined, hollow-looking--represented all the heads in the building.... Pitt and Chatham, Burke and Gladstone looked from side to side with fixed marble eyes and an air of immortal quiescence which perhaps the living may have envied....Moreover, some were troubled with dyspepsia, one had at that very moment cracked the glass of his spectacles...altogether they looked too red, fat, pale, or lean, to be dealing, as the marble heads had dealt, with the course of history.⁶

Woolf's point throughout Three Guineas is that patriarchy is a caste system which depends for its maintenance upon the willingness of human beings to let themselves be categorized as functions, rather than as full, spontaneous, creative beings...and that this system is one maintained by every "civilized" society in the world. Therefore, divisions of politics into "democracy", "socialism", "fascism", "communism", etc., are all less important to the functioning of these societies than the fact that all these systems are maintained for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many, and that they are all essentially similar in their treatment of women. Her argument is that if people really want a more pacific world, they would do well to examine their motives for excluding women from the larger world and for dividing that world into rigid categories, with carefully stratified ranks. She points out that many men's reason for living seems based almost entirely upon how many human beings they can control, beginning with the women in their families. Power over others becomes a raging mania which gets completely out of control...because patriarchy's definition of an important person is one who controls other people.

The cultural patterns which develop in males a sense that it is "natural" for them to wish to dominate others are explored artistically in Jacob's Room, as they were politically in Three Guineas.

While in Three Guineas she assures us that she knows and will explain to anyone with time to listen, the causes of war, in Jacob's Room she seems to be merely pondering them. Her assumption seems to be that all decent people are against war, so why do wars keep happening? What is it in the private world that encourages this cold impersonality, this lust for domination, this passion for superiority which must be maintained at all costs, in otherwise decent young men? In this novel, she is exploring the system of upbringing which leads cultured and intelligent young men to go to war.

The scene at the beginning of chapter three--when Jacob enters a railway carriage already occupied by a nervous elderly woman who knows, like Ti-Grace Atkinson, that "men are dangerous" and is prepared to heave her scent-bottle at his head should he attack her--is amusing to us because we know that Jacob isn't the type to attack his country-women. However, it is true that under the right circumstances, men are dangerous, and Jacob in a war is quite probably a different person than the Jacob traveling up to Cambridge.

Woolf deliniates some of the factors which helped to form character of a young man of the British middle classes prior to WWI. While there are almost certainly some traces of Thoby Stephen in Jacob's character--his bull-headed determination as a toddler, his large calm, his quiet self-sufficiency, his beauty--he is too

incompletely defined to be more than typical. If one dislikes Jacob, it is for those traits which are peculiar to his class and sex. Those passages which describe in Jacob some characteristics which are unbecoming to human beings might well be applied to any young man in his position.

Jacob seems to have been a satisfactory son to his mother; one who grew into a fine, upstanding young man. He is no monster; he is, in fact, exemplary. That is the puzzle. How can a lovable young man, deferential to old ladies, shy with young ladies, polite to both, respectful to his elders and honorable to his friends, be a party to something as horrible as war?

The circumstances and modes of behavior which develop a certain impersonality and aggressiveness in Jacob are so common as to be invisible. Yet Woolf describes them for us. Jacob is reared believing in his natural right to possess and control his world. From the incident with the crab, which Jacob removes from its habitat and then forgets, to the fact that Jacob's mother finds herself unable to make her toddler lay down the sheep's jaw he has found, Jacob subtly imbibes a sense of power. His mother does not rule him, she remonstrates with him.

It's a great experiment coming so far with young children. There's no man to help with the perambulator. And Jacob is such a handful; so obstinate already.
'Throw it away, dear, do,' she said, as they got into the road; but Jacob squirmed away from her.⁷

Even as a toddler, Jacob is supplicated, rather than commanded. Later on, he comes and goes as he pleases, at least in his mother's house. Probably much of Jacob's regal and pompous attitude towards women stems from his mother's reverential attitude towards men.

The narrator spends as much time on Jacob's surroundings and their history (the moors above Scarborough, Cambridge, Southampton Row) as she does on him. The history of Jacob's culture has a lot to do with who he is. "All history backs our pane of glass. To escape is vain."⁸ She frequently calls attention to Jacob's role as an heir. In spite of his father's early death, Jacob is not left fatherless. Mr. Floyd educates him; Captain Barfoot advises Mrs. Flanders on the subject of Jacob's education. He is treated paternally by his dons, and at Cambridge especially, he has the sense of being the continuer of a proud and hoary tradition that dates back to the age of Pericles. His mother, as a widow, has a harder time of it than Jacob has as an "orphan," for he is a favored son of his country. If he is not wealthy, he is at least "well-connected" and a member of the educated classes. England is his oyster. Wherever he goes, he is welcomed. Jacob's company is the prize for which all in the book compete.

The narrator's relationship to Jacob is an ambivalent one. Insofar as he partakes of Thoby Stephen's essence, he has a legitimate claim to her affection...and also to

her jealousy. To the extent that he is merely a "type" he seems to elicit a kind of oblique hostility, which is manifested chiefly in the author's depiction of his concrete relations with others, especially women.

That she wanted to guard against this tendency is plain from the number of times that she suggests, humorously or seriously, that she does not know everything about Jacob.

But how far was he a mere bumpkin? How far was Jacob Flanders at the age of twenty-six a stupid fellow? It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done. Some, it is true, take ineffaceable impressions of character at once. Others dally, loiter, and get blown this way and that. Kind old ladies assure us that cats are often the best judges of character. A cat will always go to a good man, they say; but then, Mrs. Whitehorn, Jacob's landlady, loathed cats.⁹

This particularly passage, as a denial that she has not got the key to Jacob's character, that she does not understand him completely, is unusual in its wittily derogatory nature. For the most part, such denials of knowledge seem perfectly sincere and straightforward.

As the quotation from her diary indicates, Woolf perceives her role as narrator in JR as a "wall" against which the other characters will appear, and fears that her presence will cast a shadow rather than a light upon the page.

...there remains over something which can never be conveyed to a second person save by Jacob himself. Moreover, part of this is not Jacob but Richard Bonamy--the room; the market carts; the hour; the very moment of history. Then consider the effect of sex--how between man and woman it hangs wavy, tremulous, so that here's a valley, there's a peak, when in truth, perhaps, all's as flat as my hand. Even the exact words get the wrong accent on them. But something is always impelling one to hum vibrating, like the hawk moth, at the mouth of the cavern of mystery, endowing Jacob Flanders with all sorts of qualities her had not at all--....what remains is mostly a matter of guess work. Yet over him we hang vibrating.¹⁰

Here she abdicates the role of narrator as one who is the omniscient discloser of personality; she appears to be evaluating Jacob entirely as an outsider. Her opinion seems to be that if Jacob can be known at all, it must be through observation rather than through intuition.

However, even though the author takes a pose of uncertainty regarding Jacob's character, nevertheless her protests that she does not really know him somehow ring hollow, as they do not when she uses a similar technique in assessing Mrs. Ramsey's character. Eric Auerbach, in Mimesis, discusses this.

...the author looks at Mrs. Ramsey not with knowing but with doubting and questioning eyes- even as some character in the novel would see her in the situation in which she is described...¹¹

Although in Jacob's Room Woolf moves around her character and views him curiously, from different angles, seeming to wait for him to reveal himself to her, she makes so

many definitive remarks about him that the reader feels that she is only feigning ignorance. While this passage by itself is quite convincing,

It seems then that men and women are equally at fault. It seems that a profound, impartial, and absolutely just opinion of our fellow-creatures is utterly unknown. Either we are men, or we are women. Either we are cold, or we are sentimental. Either we are young, or growing old. In any case life is but a procession of shadows, and God knows why it is that we embrace them so eagerly, and see them depart with such anguish, being shadows. And why...are we yet surprised in the window corner by a sudden vision that the young man in the chair is of all things in the world the most real, the most solid, the best known to us- why indeed? For the moment after we know nothing about him. Such is the manner of our seeing. Such the conditions of our love.¹²

taken with some of her more definite statements, it seems almost an apology.

She assumes a pose of comparative ignorance or bland objectivity concerning his character and then proceeds to sketch him in a rather compromising position. In spite of her disclaimers, she is assessing him constantly as a human being and finds him wanting. Sometimes the situation needs no comment from the narrator at all.

Mrs. Papworth, of Endell Street, Covent Garden, did for Mr. Bonamy in New Square, Lincoln's Inn, and as she washed up the dinner things in the scullery she heard the young gentlemen talking in the room next door....As she held the plates under water and then dealt them on the pile beneath the hissing gas, she listened; heard Sanders speaking in a loud rather overbearing tone of voice: "good," he said, and "absolute" and "justice" and "punishment," and "the will of the majority." Then her gentleman piped up; she backed him for argument against Sanders.

Yet Sanders was a fine young fellow (here all the scraps went swirling round the sink, scoured after by her purple, almost nailless hands). 'Women--she thought, and wondered what Sanders and her gentleman did in that line, one eyelid sinking perceptibly as she mused, for she was the mother of nine--three still-born and one deaf and dumb from birth. Putting the plates in the rack she heard once more Sanders at it again ('He don't give Bonamy a chance,' she thought)....she....heard something--might be the little table by the fire--fall; and then stamp, stamp, stamp as if they were having at each other--round the room, making the plates dance.

'Tomorrow's breakfast, sir,' she said, opening the door; and there were Sanders and Bonamy like two Bulls of Bashan driving each other up and down, making such a racket, and all them chairs in the way. They never noticed her. She felt motherly towards them....Bonamy....pushed Sanders into the arm-chair, and said Mr. Sanders had had smashed the coffeepot and he was teaching Mr. Sanders--Sure enough, the coffee-pot lay broken on the hearthrug.¹³

What kind of person can speak pompously and imperiously on "justice" when he depends for his comforts upon the slavery of another? Obviously, "justice" is for a privileged few. The charwoman's acceptance of her miserable existence is not an indication that the reader should accept it as complacently as do Jacob and Bonamy.

Not all the injustices noted are directed at women, either....Jacob treats all those beneath him in rank with a sublime complacency...he feels born to rule them. Jacob's education has conditioned him to believe in the superiority of his sex and class to the point of being able to shut out all who don't fall into that category as unimportant.

Meanwhile, Plato continues his dialogue...in spite of the woman in the mews behind great Ormond Street who has come home drunk and cries all night long, 'Let me in! Let me in!'

In the street below Jacob's room voices were raised. But he read on. For after all Plato continues imperturbably....Jacob, who was reading the Phaedrus, heard people vociferating round the lamp-post, and the woman battering at the door and crying, 'Let me in!' as if a coal had dropped from the fire, or a fly, falling from the ceiling, had lain on its back, too weak to turn over.¹⁴

While his dons might have approved of his powers of concentration, the author's revelation that the old woman in compared (in Jacob's consciousness) to a fallen fly seems her mordant comment on the sort of education young men received in the English public schools and universities, which was one that allowed them to dismiss as negligible anyone who was not a well-educated British male. Most particularly damning is the impersonality such education breeds in one, the assumption that concentration upon an abstract problem should take precedence over every kind of humane concern.

Jacob's scholarly training has been a thorough grounding in the art of dispute, or verbal combat. His bellicose behavior ('Damned swine!') in his critical review of some author is probably indicative of the way Jacob has been trained. Education is a battleground, and the students joust with ideas.

The narrator's estimate of Jacob's grasp of the classics is somewhat condescending.

Durrant quoted Aeschylus- Jacob Sophocles. It is true that no Greek could have understood or professor refrained from pointing out- Never mind; what is Greek for if not to be shouted on Haverstock Hill in the Dawn? Moreover, Durrant never listened to Sophocles, nor Jacob to Aeschylus. They were boastful, triumphant; it seemed to both that they had read every book in the world; known every sin, passion, joy. Civilizations stood round them like flowers ready for picking. Ages lapped at their feet like waves fit for sailing....
'Probably,' said Jacob, 'we are the only people in the world who know what the Greeks meant.'¹⁵

Elsewhere she refers to him as "insolent"; he certainly has a high opinion of his own capabilities:

The flesh and blood of the future depends entirely upon six young men. And as Jacob was one of them, no doubt he looked a little regal and pompous.¹⁶

Those who admire him unconditionally do not have the author's admiration.

...Dick Graves, being a little drunk, very faithful, and very simple-minded, told her that he thought Jacob the greatest man he had ever known.¹⁷

He is compared several times with Greek statuary:

...Sandra Williams got Jacob's head exactly on a level with the head of the Hermes of Praxiteles. The comparison was all in his favour.¹⁸

Fanny Elmer must repair to the British museum,

...where, keeping her eyes downcast until she was alongside of the battered Ulysses, she opened them and got a fresh shock of Jacob's presence.¹⁹

Woolf writes that Fanny's idea of Jacob was, "statuesque, noble, and eyeless." One wonders if the comparisons with Greek statuary are a comment on his mental capacities or

merely a comment on his sensibilities. Certainly he looks the part of a hero. Yet his role as a hero is a rather tongue-in-cheek affair. Woolf nearly always says something which seems to indicate that she is patronizing or condescending in her attitude towards him. We hear of Percival only from those who adore him, and he becomes for us also a myth and a hero. But Percival is a silent center, where our adulation can rush in unhindered. When we see Jacob in action, or hear his thoughts, his noble visage is somewhat tarnished. Certainly his attitude towards women would compromise him in the eyes of any feminist.

But this service in King's College Chapel- why allow women to take part in it? Surely, if the mind wanders (and Jacob looked extraordinarily vacant, his head thrown back, his hymn-book open at the wrong place), if the mind wanders it is because several hat shops and cupboards upon cupboards of coloured dresses are displayed upon rush-bottomed chairs. Though heads and bodies may be devout enough, one has a sense of individuals- some like blue, others brown; some feathers, others pansies and forget-me-nots. No one would think of bringing a dog into church, For though a dog is all very well on a gravel path, and shows no disrespect to flowers, the way he wanders down an aisle, looking, lifting a paw, and approaching a pillar with a purpose that makes the blood run cold with horror (should you be one of a congregation- alone, shyness is out of the question), a dog destroys the service completely. So do these women....Heaven knows why it is. For one thing, thought Jacob, they're ugly as sin.²⁰

The comparison of a woman in church with a dog looking for a pillar to spray is odious enough in itself, but the implication is worse: in Jacob's eyes, women are sub-human, perhaps soulless. They do not have any right to exist for

themselves; they exist for others. According to Jacob's view of things, they might logically be included in the service if they suitably beautiful. Lacking beauty, they ought to be dismissed as unsightly obstructions to reverant feelings. A similar instance occurs when Jacob is in Greece, visiting the Acropolis. He tries to appreciate the sublimnity of ruins, but cannot, and chooses to lay the blame on an overweight female tourist.

...there was Madame Lucien Grave perched on a block of marble with her kodak pointed at his head. Of course she jumped down, in spite of her age, her figure, and her tight boots- having, now that her daughter was married, lapsed with a luxurious abandonment, grand enough in its way, into the fleshy grotesque; she jumped down, but not before Jacob had seen her.

'Damn these women- damn these women!' he thought...

'How they spoil things,'....

'It is those damned women,' said Jacob, without any trace of bitterness, but rather with sadness and disappointment that what might have been should never be. (This violent disillusionment is to be expected in young men in the prime of life, sound of wind and limb, who will soon become fathers of families and directors of banks).²¹

Jacob is slyly compared to a healthy stud horse; perhaps as a dig at the culture which looked upon young women of good families as little more than brood-mares for the next generation.

The narrator is a feminist, but not her characters... at least not those that have anything to do with Jacob. The two exceptions, Mrs. Jarvis and the rather harrassed woman in the library, both seem faintly ridiculous. The charwoman's attitude towards the young men she waits on

is typical of the attitude of the women surrounding Jacob. Fanny Elmer does not see any injustice in her situation; she accepts Jacob's preeminence as part of the nature of things.

...isn't it pleasant, Fanny went on thinking, how young men bring out lots of silver coins from their trouser pockets, and look at them, instead of having just so many in a purse?²²

In her worshipful attitude towards Jacob, she is entirely free of any taint of jealousy. She does not ponder the contrast between his financial security and her own hand-to-mouth existence except insofar as his wealth seems to her another deliciously attractive sexual trait, like his self-assurance or his muscular build or his beautiful voice.

Clara Durrant (like Virginia Stephen in her youth) is kept under as tight a surveillance as an ax-murderer. She is accompanied everywhere she goes, her correspondence is subject to search and seizure, even her diary is rationed (actually, the author had more freedom than that, but there were strong similarities between the two situations).

While Clara's brother Timmy comes and goes as he pleases, her every move is monitored by her mother. Jacob's friend Bonamy, paying her a visit "kept on...accumulating amazement at an existence squeezed and emasculated within a white satin shoe."²³ However much pain this squeezing causes Clara, we hear no direct complaints from her; she is, however, subject to sudden and inexplicable outbursts of weeping. Clara is, of course, the logical companion for Jacob, but her relationship to him is very carefully

and narrowly defined by their culture. While they share a middle-class or upper-middle-class background, they do not share an intellectual background. Clara has not been to the university, nor traveled alone, nor been prepared for any wider role in life than that of a wealthy man's wife. So Jacob, if he wants to explore the world of women, must make do with mistresses, prostitutes, artist's models, other men's wives. To all of them he lends books, Shelly, Fielding, Donne. Only Sandra Wentworth Williams appreciates the book--as one more trophy for her collection. It is to Jacob's credit that he does not really appreciate this aspect of his "masculine privilege;" he has enough feeling to be frustrated and occasionally revolted by the fact that he cannot have a true companionship with a woman.

The problem is insoluble. The body is harnessed to a brain. Beauty goes hand in hand with stupidity. There she sat staring at the fire as she had stared at the broken mustard-pot. In spite of defending indecency, Jacob doubted whether he like it in the raw. He had a violent reversion towards male society...and was ready to turn in wrath upon whoever it was who had fashioned life thus.²⁴

He has not enough feeling, however, to reject what scraps he can have.

The narrator is very gentle with Jacob after his betrayal by Florinda; although she does say, "fear of him comes first," an indication that it might be wise to stay out of the way of intemperate male wrath. Given what we know of his sensibilities, his decision (though sanctioned

by male society) seems faintly disgusting. Jacob's reaction to Florinda's faithlessness is not, as one might surmise, to have done with the notion that women can be treated as bodies without minds, but rather to go the extreme, and exchange a mistress for a prostitute. In Jacob's brief exchange with the prostitute, Woolf manages to convey a stifling sense of claustrophobia felt by a woman trapped in that kind of life.

'This weather makes me long for the country,' she said, looking over her shoulder at the back view of tall houses through the window.

'I wish you'd been with me on Saturday,' said Jacob.

'I used to ride,' she said....

Altogether a most reasonable conversation; a most respectable room; an intelligent girl. Only Madame herself seeing Jacob out had that leer, that lewdness, that quake of the surface (visible in the eyes chiefly), which threatens to spill the whole bag of ordure, with difficulty held together, over the pavement. In short, something was wrong.²⁶

Just exactly how wrong is something Woolf does not seem eager to pursue at this time. To fully comprehend what kind of emotional make-up one must possess in order to buy the use of another's body might be to lose (at least temporarily) her capacity to be at all sympathetic toward Jacob. While it is clear that she does not always approve of him, she does not see him as despicable. But since her own reaction to sexuality was rather extreme, it would be logical to suppose that she would find prostitution more revolting than most, and that she might despise Jacob completely for being able to participate in such a sordid transaction.

If her point is that men as well as women suffer from the unfair treatment of the sexes, and that is stultifying to both men and women to be catagorized as functions, rather than as people, she cannot make Jacob so much a perpetrator as a victim of injustice. But it is difficult for her not to see him in that way. It is a measure of her artistic imagination that she is able to see such a person as Jacob as at all disadvantaged by the system...or find him as sympathetic a character as she does. Woolf seems to struggle to like Jacob; it doesn't come easily to her. She takes a condescending attitude towards him and his aims and accomplishments most of the time. He is presented as pompous-appearing, and what we see of his thoughts and actions confirm in us the suspicion that he is both pompous and conventional. He is willful and determined and adventurous, but not terribly bright. He isn't exactly an intellectual (certainly he isn't articulate), and although he had a kind of shallow idealism (why not rule countries the way they should be ruled?) he doesn't have a great deal of humanity. He is vain and callow and doesn't seem to have an original thought in his head. His fatuousness seems crowned by the sort of woman he chooses to fall in love with. While he is given all the opportunities Virginia Stephen yearned for: a university education, the opportunity to study at leisure uninterrupted by family duties, the opportunity for free conversation with brilliant men, the opportunity to travel unchaperoned, to have adventures,

to mix with all sorts of people, in the end he seems not to benefit very greatly from these advantages. His studies didn't seem to throw any special illumination on his way; he seems to stride the straight and narrow path of a mediocre conformity...and not to have any original insight. In spite of (or because of?) his Cambridge education, his intellectual friends, and his European tour, he emerges as a kind of moral bumpkin. Ultimately he is a "type" rather than an individual. Had Woolf made him more of an individual, his death might have moved us, even if we found much to disapprove. As it is, Jacob is not the most interesting or sympathetic character in this story; the narrator is. Her comments, asides, observations and philosophy are what make the novel interesting and worthwhile. She emerges as a curious, interested spectator and commentator on her world--and ours. She seems, moreover, to be striving for a pose of detachment (one which had seemed to come naturally to her in TVO) about human folly. Her affections have been engaged. She finds something in human beings more lovable than she used to, and she is therefore more passionate than dispassionate when she observes or records injustice.

Chapter 8

Mrs. Dalloway

In Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf's characters become fully alive. In The Voyage Out she told, rather than showed, what her characters were thinking and feeling, with the result that we never quite trusted the reality of characters' perceptions....especially as they sometimes appeared to be acting out of feelings which must have been at variance with those their author had ascribed to them. In Jacob's Room she gives us exquisite short snippets of personalities, but these are never quite enough to make up an entire human being. Also, there is, in Jacob's Room a single, although shifting perspective. For example, the bay wobbles when Betty Flanders' eyes fill with tears, but we are conscious that the narrator is telling us how Betty Flanders sees the world. Things come to us noticeably filtered through the consciousness of the narrator; she tells us what and how her characters are feeling, imagining, dreaming. It is the narrator's imagination--like a stage manager--guiding, arranging, coloring the flow of her characters' perceptions. In M D, she has granted her characters full humanity at last. For them, as for herself, flowers that do not bloom in

their imaginations as well as in their gardens have no fragrance. Moreover, these characters have a strongly diversified response to their external world. In MD, Woolf trusts her characters to speak for themselves. While it may be argued that they tend to speak in the same tone of voice (with the possible exception of Rezia), nevertheless they speak with strongly differing opinions. For example, Rezia sees the London park as bleak and hideous, to Peter Finch it is an ordered paradise after his sojourn in India, Septimus perceives it as alternately ravishing and terrifying, and Clarissa sees it through a haze of glory. For the first time, the subjectivity of each person is fully respected. Not that the narrator agrees with all their perceptions equally, but each character's perceptions seem to be coming from the character, and not through the consciousness of the narrator.

The author's movement towards her characters has in some respects been completed in this novel. Certainly this is not to say that either Septimus or Clarissa is identical to the author, but only that the most salient characteristics of each represent important aspects of the author's personality.

In this novel Woolf is exploring, more profoundly than ever before, some purely personal issues and she lets her characters express some of her deepest conflicts

and strongest tensions. Woolf draws very heavily on her own psyche for the various components of her characters' personalities.

In Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf portrays characters through whom she chooses to express some very important aspects of her own personality--Septimus and Clarissa. These characters are the ones closest to her--and at times I am not entirely certain whether the narrator is "overhearing" the internal monologue of one of her characters, or whether that character is talking about him or herself in the third person. "Such fools we are, she thoughtfor heaven only knows why one loves it so".¹

Too much has been written about the extent to which Woolf models Septimus upon her own remembrances of her madness--beginning with Woolf herself, in her diary--to warrant any serious doubt that that is, indeed, her intention. But Woolf's comments about Clarissa Dalloway indicate that she intended to sketch a personality more like that of Kitty Maxse or Ottoline Morrell than her own, and yet Woolf and her heroine do parallel each other in at least one important respect: their sexual reticence, or "frigidity." The author herself is the template for Clarissa's sexuality, which is expressed (or repressed) in a perfectly played role--so far as men are concerned--rather than acknowledged and accepted as a legitimate part of herself. To what extent Woolf was aware of this is problematical; there is nothing in her diary during

the composition of the novel that would indicate that this was part of her intention.

While it cannot be proven, I suspect one thing that both Clarissa and her author have in common is a feeling that they have not experienced life to its fullest in that they have not completely enjoyed their sexuality. Clarissa's repression of a vital fount of joy and pleasure drains her energy and creates in her a poignant aching awareness of her approaching death. "Fear no more heat 'o the sun," the tag from the mock-dirge sung over 'Fidele' in "Cymbaline" runs all day through Clarissa's mind and is indicative of her linking sexuality with death, but also the refrain could indicate that her feelings are more complex than that.

'Fidele' is a young woman who is disguised a youth and is not dead, but sleeping. The young woman, Imogen, was falsely accused of infidelity and condemned to death by her husband. She disguised herself to avoid his wrath. Like Imogen, Clarissa has put aside her sexuality except in relation to women--she feels something like men feel--in that respect it would be accurate to say that she has changed her sex. While she is not in danger of outright execution if she retains her female sexuality, she is certainly menaced by Peter's knife. Finally, like Imogen, her joy in life is not dead, but merely sleeping.

There is ample evidence in the text to support the idea that celibacy and living death are inextricably linked

Clarissa's mind; it is difficult to believe that they were not also linked in the psyche of the author that wrote it. "Virginity clung to her like a sheet" is suggestive of shrouds, clamminess, and the grave. The juxtaposition of the frigidity of her marriage bed and the chill of death is more explicit in this passage:

It was all over for her. The sheet was stretched and the bed narrow. She had gone up to the tower alone and left them blackberrying in the sun. The door had shut, and there among the litter of birds' nests how distant the view looked, and the sounds came thin and chill.²

Clarissa's frigidity gives her a kind of armor; since she lacks the strength of self-assertion, she must withdraw rather than give herself. It is done for self-preservation, but it is felt as a loss. The images used to describe that seclusion are cold, sad ones.

There are passages in Woolf's diary while she was writing MD, that show how concerned she was about life slipping away, and how determined she was to enjoy it while she could, but she is always reticent on the subject of sexuality, especially her own.

Clarissa's virginity is "preserved through childbirth," a phrasing that suggests her inner self remained untouched by her physical experience. Although she "gave" her body, she could or would not "give" her emotional self. Likewise, the author's "virginity" was emotionally preserved in that the physical side of the Woolfs' marriage was apparently abandoned quite early as a failure. Virginia's

inability to respond sexually caused her some distress;
it may have contributed to or exacerbated her mental
breakdown.³

Critics who write about Virginia Woolf often refer to her as "asexual," a term (when applied to humans) about as scientifically precise as "neurasthenic," also frequently used to describe her. Quentin Bell writes that she was "naturally shy" in sexual matters, and Jean Love's otherwise perceptive study of Virginia Woolf's childhood and subsequent development seems to ignore the fact that Virginia, at the age of six, felt terribly guilty both about looking at herself in a mirror, and about Gerald Duckworth's exploration of her genitals. Love writes that Gerald was responsible for her feelings of shame and guilt, but Virginia wouldn't have felt guilty about his behavior unless she had had it previously impressed upon her that her genitals weren't supposed to be touched. While Woolf writes that she could not remember having been told that touching her genitals was "shameful," Love makes no comment about the tendency of the mind to block or repress uncomfortable memories; she seems to accept Woolf's evaluation of the situation at face value.

Love also lets pass Bell's phrase "naturally shy" which seems strange, because, as a psychologist, Love certainly is aware that human beings are not "naturally"

shy about their sexuality; "shyness" is more or less rigorously (in our culture) forced upon them.

In the collection of reminiscent essays, published as Moments of Being, Virginia describes her mother's manner as rather sharp and severe towards her daughters. It seems likely that Virginia had been severely reprimanded for touching her genitals, almost certainly before she was able even to form words to describe the event to herself. Her elder sister, Vanessa, writes about Virginia a fact which seems astonishing (especially in light of her career) that she did not learn to speak until she was three years old. This suggests that her relationship with her mother was not terribly close.

We do know that Julia Stephen was not an indulgent mother to her daughters--given this information, along with the knowledge of Victorian attitudes towards sexuality--we can safely infer that somewhere in the misty background of Woolf's early childhood, she was given the message that sexual feelings were bad, naughty, and shameful feelings.

Those lovely vignettes of Woolf's childhood published as Moments of Being, contain passages that would seem to reveal that her early conditioning in the denial of her own sexuality was as rigorous, if not more rigorous, than most.

There was a small looking-glass in the hall at Talland House. It had, I remember, a ledge with a brush on it. By standing on tiptoe I could see my face in the glass. When I was six or seven perhaps, I got into the habit of looking at my face in the glass. But I only did this if I was sure that I was alone. I was ashamed of it. A strong feeling of guilt seemed naturally attached to it.⁴

Certainly Virginia's face must have been worth looking at: her enormous green eyes, set in a face composed of very fine, delicate features and framed with bright red hair, stared back at a miniature Titania. She must have derived a pleasure more highly charged than that which came from the perusal of even very lovely flowers. Her feelings of guilt seem to stem from something deeper than a feeling that people will find her vain.

In this passage from The Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir describes the erotic nature of narcissism.

For the young girl, erotic transcendence consists in becoming prey in order to gain her ends. She becomes an object, and she sees herself as object; she discovers this new aspect of her being with surprise: it seems to her that she has been doubled; instead of coinciding exactly with herself, she now begins to exist outside.⁵

Beauvoir is discussing the phenomenon largely in reference to what happens to the adolescent girl when she does not mature emotionally, and remains fixed in her infantile mode of narcissistic eroticism: "...she does not distinguish the desire of the man from the love of her own ego."⁶

For Woolf, as for many women raised in a culture which combines a paradoxical preoccupation with the appearance of the woman's body as a sexual object and a strong

prohibition of the woman's enjoyment of sexual pleasure, women find they can enjoy sexual feelings only by perceiving themselves as objects of desire, either in another's eyes, or by simultaneously becoming both subject and object, perceived and perceptor, as one confronts an image in a mirror. Our culture certainly encourages women to become narcissistic. Looking into a mirror, for a narcissistic person, can be a sexually charged experience.

I feel it necessary to quote this passage at some length, for not only its content, but also its tone.

....the looking-glass shame has lasted all my life, long after the tomboy phase was over. I cannot now powder my nose in public.* Everything to do with dress--to be fitted- to come into a room wearing a new dress--still frightens me; at least makes me shy, self-conscious, uncomfortable. 'Oh to be able to run, like Julian Morrell, all over the garden in a new dress' I thought not too many years ago at Garsington; when Julian undid a parcel and put on a new dress and scampered round and round like a hare. Yet femininity was very strong in our family....We were famous for our beauty--my mother's beauty, Stella's beauty, gave me as early as I can remember, pride and pleasure. What gave me then this feeling of shame, unless it were that I inherited, some opposite instinct? My father was spartan, ascetic, puritanical. He had I think no feeling for pictures; no ear for music; no sense of the sounds of words. This leads me to think that my-- I would say 'our' if I knew enough about Vanessa, Thoby and Adrian--but how little we know even about our brothers and sisters--this leads me to think that my natural love for beauty was checked by some ancestral dread. Yet this did not prevent me from feeling ecstasies and raptures spontaneously and intensely and without any shame or the least sense of guilt, so long as they were disconnected with my own body. I thus detect another element in the which I had in being caught looking at myself in the glass in the hall. I must have been

ashamed or afraid of my own body. Another memory, also of the hall, may help to explain this. There was a slab outside the dining room door for standing dishes upon. Once when I was very small Gerald Duckworth lifted me onto this, and as I sat there he began to explore my body. I can remember the feel of his hand going under my clothes; going firmly and steadily lower and lower. I remember how I hoped that he would stop; how I stiffened and wriggled as his hand approached my private parts. But it did not stop. His hand explored my private parts too. I remember resenting, disliking it--what is the word for so dumb and mixed a feeling? It must have been strong, since I still recall it. This seems to show that a feeling about certain parts of the body; how they must not be touched; how it is wrong to allow them to be touched; must be instinctive. It proves that Virginia Stephen was not born on the 25th January 1882, but was born many thousands of years ago; and had from the very first to encounter instincts already acquired by thousands of ancestresses in the past.

That passage is perhaps the longest one we get from Woolf on the delicate subject of her sexuality. While she makes fleeting references to it in her letters and diaries from time to time, they are usually rather flippant, in contrast to this one.

She writes "We were famous for our beauty....," but is only her mother's beauty, Stella's beauty, that give her "pride and pleasure." For her own attractiveness is somehow a source of shame to her. She says that she is "ashamed or afraid of my own body." It couldn't be a lack of beauty that would cause her shame, and that, in any case, wouldn't induce "fear." It seems reasonable to suppose that, since she writes that she was able to feel "ecstacies and raptures spontaneously and intensely and without any shame or the least sense of guilt, so long as

they were disconnected with my own body," that the pleasure she derived from gazing at herself in the mirror was connected with her own body; both induced by it and located in it, and this had been impressed upon her as shameful. Moreover, the incorrect use of "with" for "from" would indicate that there is in Woolf both an awareness that the feelings are "connected with" her body and a need to insist that they be "disconnected from" her body. That she still feels this ambivalence and conflict at the age of sixty is some indication of the strength of the repressive forces in her early childhood. Her linking of the memory of Gerald's exploration of her genitals with the memory of looking into the mirror makes the connection between her narcissism and her sexuality, and, unhappily, the connection between her sexuality and her shame of feeling sexual, evident to the reader, if not to herself. The denial of sexual ecstasy in her own body, her refusal to let herself feel sexual pleasure if it was apparent to her that that was the source of her sensation, seems to have been instilled very early (as such feelings usually are). She recalls that the incident with Gerald took place when she was six or seven. What strikes the contemporary reader, besieged as she is with psychological monographs and studies, is that Woolf feels that the incident proves her shame "instinctive!"

For a woman in our culture, even today, sexuality is perceived as a state of objectivity; the only conceivable

end of desire is to become an object for the beloved, or an object for one's own imagination. When the divided consciousness assumes the roles of both subject and object, as in narcissism, the girl projects her desire for her own body reflected in the mirror upon an imaginary lover, and becomes--in her imagination--both the passive recipient of desire and the active agent.

Since females are harshly penalized for taking the active or initiating role in sex relations, they learn to define themselves as wholly passive, i.e., a hole to be filled. They learn that their own desire or receptivity, whatever effect it may have on the male in actual fact, is, in the myth of the relationship between the sexes, utterly ignored. So, in the language of dream and symbol, formed beneath the conscious mind at an age when she lacks words to shape and comprehend and argue her case, the girl learns that her sexual presence in the world, if she is not desired, is obscene. By feeling these shameful desires and making her desire apparent to observers, she renders herself vulnerable to their scorn and she takes the risk of turning into a pure object, mindless tissue, which may excite, not desire, but disgust and contempt.

For Virginia Woolf, the capacity to openly flaunt one's attractiveness (like Julian Morrell) is something she both envies and despairs of being able to enjoy herself. It is too risky.

Woolf's most vulnerable character, Rhoda, says again and again of herself: "I have no face." And even the far more composed Clarissa, at the height of her party, thinks to herself, "....oddly enough she had quite forgotten what she looked like...."⁸

The fact that Woolf couples the memory of Gerald's exploration of her genitals with her memory of looking into the mirror suggests that she felt her pleasure was perceived as shameful, not only because it may have had erotic overtones, but also because she might have confusedly felt that her interest in herself as an attractive object caused Gerald to be curious about her body. Moreover, she had a very strong need for attention and affection--she never was able to have enough to satisfy her--and she may have felt that her hunger for affection led to Gerald's sort of attention. Jean Love discusses her craving for affection and the reasons for it very cogently.

....her parents and family failed to give her the love she wanted. Thereasons are obvious.... her mother's chronic over-extension of herself.... it required a crisis such as the illness of a child for Julia Stephen to [focus] upon an individual child....there were times when not even a sick child kept Julia at home...Virginia was seventh in a household of eight children, one of whom was psychotic and in a crisis stage during Virginia's first years.it is inaccurate to suppose that Virginia was a rejected, unloved child, although perhaps she felt she was. Certainly she received enough affection to know she wanted more.... Virginia's mother was especially loving with infants although she seemed to have time to express that love consistently and in ways that Virginia could understand only during the early months of Virginia's life.⁹

Love also points out that Virginia's psychological development was adversely affected by the fact that she was weaned at ten weeks--far earlier than her siblings--due to Julia's ill health.

While Julia Stephen was loving with her infant daughters, she demanded that they be more self-sufficient than her sons...as a rule. This combination of severity and tenderness that she extended towards her female children might have been adequate for most children--assuming that she was well enough to be consistent--but it is doubtful whether so sensitive and delicately balanced a child as Virginia would have been "satisfied" with anything less than the kind of "Jocasta mothering" that many gifted people--especially sons--remember enjoying.

Virginia apparently felt that to want something as innocent as cuddling or stroking was to make too great a demand on her mother, unless she was sick. Not to be flippant about Virginia's insufficient supply of affection, she seems to have even envied the family pets in that regard. Perhaps, as a child, she saw dogs and cats getting the kind of stroking and affection she longed for, because for the rest of her life she could ask for affection from others, even from her husband, only if she took the role or persona of some sort of little furry beast. Her nicknames for herself ranged from "apes" to "baby wallaby." Quentin Bell described Flush as a book written, not by a dog-lover, but by a person who wished to be a dog. The point I am

stressing is that she did not feel fully entitled even to the satisfaction of being held--to openly admit to wanting sexual pleasure must have been impressed upon her as something extremely wicked, and something that must have rendered her absolutely unlovable and to feel unlovable is the most distressing feeling any person can experience. For someone as sensitive and emotionally dependent as Virginia Woolf, it must have been unbearable.

In spite of the fact that she was only six years old, and Gerald was 18, and she was obviously too much in awe of him to struggle or protest this unwelcome invasion of her privacy--of her body--she felt guilty, rather than angry. She feels somehow responsible for the molestation: "...it was wrong to allow them (her genitals) to be touched".

She makes herself take full responsibility for the molestation, in spite of the fact that there was no choice for her but to endure it or to put up with the greater shame of having her parents know about it and then having to endure either Gerald's anger or her parents' anger, or both. Virginia's perceptions about the situation might have been correct, for the usual response to a situation like hers has been to suspect the victim of having been in some way mischievous, provoking, or otherwise "seductive" and inviting. To be the centre of an attention consisting wholly of shocked displeasure was not the kind of attention she had in mind.

Further on she writes,

Though I have done my best to explain why I was ashamed of looking at my own face I have only been able to discover some possible reasons; there may be others; I do not suppose that I have got at the truth; yet this is a simple incident; and it happened to me personally; and I have no motive for lying about it....Let me add a dream; for it may refer to the incident of the looking-glass. I dreamt that I was looking in a glass when a horrible face - the face of an animal - suddenly shoed over my shoulder. I cannot be sure if this was a dream, or if it happened.¹⁰

It seems less important whether or not she actually saw a face--an animal's face--in the mirror behind her or dreamed it, than the fact that sexuality and bestiality were linked in her mind at a very early age. One recalls Rachel Vinrace's dream of men who "snuffle" at her door, and Woolf, in her sketch of George Duckworth, describes him as having the eyes of a pig.

During Virginia's adolescent years, when the patterns of her relationship with the opposite sex were being established, she was treated with appalling cruelty and callousness; physical beatings could hardly have been worse than the emotional drubbing that her half-brother, George, meted out. Her father, in his dotage and grief and deafness, left much of the business of running the family to his step-son, George Duckworth, who was at that time about thirty-four years old, fairly handsome, a snob, and an extremely ambitious social climber. Having failed in his attempt to get Vanessa to accompany him on his "party circuit" in the evenings, he turned his attention to Virginia. Like some inept Pygmalion, he attempted

to force his miserably shy, self-conscious, intellectual half-sister into the role of a social butterfly. She had the beauty for it, but no aptitude for empty chatter, and being subjected to the cold scrutiny of indifferent glances was for her a torture of the first magnitude. But the glances of strangers were not the worst thing she had to endure.

Down I came: in my green evening dress; all the lights were up in the drawing room; and there was George....He fixed on me that extraordinary observant....gaze with which he always inspected clothes. He looked me up and down as if [I] were a horse turned into the ring. Then the sullen look came over him....I was condemned from many more points of view than I can analyze as I stood there....and conscious too of fear, of shame, and of despair--"Go and tear it up," he said at last.¹¹

This was the same man who made a practice of coming into Virginia's bedroom at night, lying down on her bed, and caressing her. She had no one who could defend her from his unwelcome attentions. While his mauulings and gropings may have left her technically a virgin, she was emotionally raped.

I am indebted to Roger Poole for his term, "anesthesia" to describe Virginia's condition in relation to male sexual desire.

The effect of George Duckworth's attentions was, I believe, to traumatize Virginia, and to provoke in her a sexual anethesia. She could not feel any normal sexual feeling, and sexual matters were attended in her mind with fantasies of horror and dread.¹²

The complete paralysis of her sexual feeling in relation to men corresponds to the emotional and physical anesthesia of rape victims who have not been able to work through the trauma of their violation. The anger that cannot be released on the violator of one's integrity is turned inward upon the self. It was only many years after the incidents took place that Virginia was able to release some of the anger in her descriptions of George. She does not seem to have felt so much guilty as outraged while she wrote of him, but she may have been repressing guilt as well as anger. The reason I suspect she felt nothing, in other words, repressed her feelings--is that the repressed feelings are those that cause trouble later. Moreover, that "numbing herself" was her usual method of dealing with troublesome feelings, we know from other instances.

From her accounts of her feelings at her mother's death, we know that she was extremely detached from her grief; she felt quite numb.

....I remember....the great bed on which my mother lay. I remember very clearly how even as I was taken to the bedside I noticed one nurse was sobbing, and a desire to laugh came over me, and I said to myself as I have often done at moments of crisis since, 'I feel nothing whatever'. Then I stooped and kissed my mother's face. It was still warm. She [had] only died a moment before.¹³

Also, during Leslie Stephen's terminal illness, Virginia got through her ordeal by gritting her teeth and refusing to feel--only after he died could she collapse under the

strain that the combination of nursing and the suppression of her feelings caused her. Probably she felt equally distant and numb in George's arms; her anesthesia was her only refuge. What was being repressed came boiling to the surface later on...during her periods of madness... in manic anger.

The male-female relationship was presented to her in its rawest state as a purely hypocritical exercise of power. George was less concerned about the welfare of his sister than the figure he could cut as a benevolent brother. That he considered himself the judge and owner of her body and her feelings ("You're too young to have an opinion!") let alone her intellect (which he considered a nuisance) must have impressed her as profoundly unjust, but she had no recourse: her opinion did not count. It must have seemed to her that her body was a kind of commodity. She had no voice in the dressing of it or the disposal of it. The only realm of her self that was secure from invaders were her feelings. She could numb herself and refuse to respond to male desire.

What I have sketched out above is a very abbreviated version of Woolf's emotional background. However, I hope I have managed to make clear the fact that her difficulties in owning her feelings, especially her sexual feelings, stemmed from a variety of sources. The authors whose works I have quoted have differing opinions about who should bear the brunt of the blame for her difficulties. When I

first read Moments of Being, I was struck by the anger Woolf showed in her descriptions of George Duckworth. Whether he was fully deserving of her rage (as Poole thinks), whether he was an easy target for all her accumulated rage because of the injustices she had suffered at the hands of her male relatives, is rather difficult to say. She was envious of Thoby's education, she was jealous of her mother's doting on Adrian, Gerald was the first to molest her, her father was from time to time given to rages which she described as "blind, sinister, animal, savage"--and she was expected to endure all this without overt anger.

George was a convenient target, in that he had the least attractive personality (for her) of all her male relatives. He was a philistine and a snob, he denigrated her intellect and ignored her feelings, and he was personally repulsive to her in his emotionalism and greediness.

Given such a miserable introduction to sexuality, it is doubtful whether, even under ideal conditions, she would have been able to have a good marital relationship. And conditions were not ideal--at least not for her sexual relationship with Leonard.

Since a woman was considered acceptable only if she was "feminine," that is, of service to others, self-fulfillment was out of the question. Virginia's case was no exception. She never had (how many women did?)

a model of a woman who was both autonomous and sexual, at least not when she was very small and impressionable. Her mother and father, according to the chapter entitled "Reminiscences," found "joy" and "delight" in each other. That this was physical delight, as well as emotional, seems fairly clear. But Virginia's mother was quite literally the slave of her husband. The price she paid for her physical relationship with her husband was a complete abnegation of her self. For Virginia, a sexual relationship in which she allowed herself to respond, to feel satisfaction, would almost certainly have meant losing her autonomy, for the price her culture and her family insisted upon her paying for sexuality was a complete self-effacement. She might, when still a child, have struck such a terrible bargain, if it were not for two things. First, she defined herself as a writer, even before she was eleven years old. Second, Julia Stephen's self-effacement led to self-eradication.

One of the assumptions of our culture has been that women can find in spinsterhood or frigidity a kind of refuge where they are free from male domination. The marital relationship has been, and in some cases, still is, regarded as one where the wife "submits herself" to her husband's sexual desires. If she frankly surrenders to her own sexual feelings, in or out of marriage, she is regarded with feelings ranging from distrust to disgust. Since sexual feelings were "bad" feelings, of course it

was "bad" to give in to them. Especially in Victorian England, women were trained to believe that it was "wicked" to surrender to their own sexual feelings, and that "good" women "surrendered" to their husbands, more was involved in a sexual relationship than physical "giving" or "being taken"...it was a surrender of one's own judgement, one's own will. So it would have been perhaps impossible for Virginia to feel that she could have a sexual relationship with a male without losing her integrity.

So what is the relationship between sexuality and creativity? If Virginia had had to say to herself, each time she wrote a sentence, "Would Leonard approve of this?" it is safe to say that she could not have written anything of lasting value. This is not to say that Leonard would have demanded such sacrifice; but rather that Virginia's conditioning in "the feminine role" would have made her demand it of herself...and it would have choked off the wellsprings of her creative self. There would always have been the shadow of another presence between her pen and the page. It was safer not to feel...not to risk both the loss of love and the one thing that allowed her self-definition, her chance to create, to write out her personal vision of the world.

It was undoubtedly due in part to that reason that Woolf saw marriage and sexuality as so dangerous.

Clarissa's need for solitude--for an undisturbed center of "inner space"--parallels Woolf's own need as a writer for an undisturbed center. In order to secure for themselves that "ivory tower" of inner stillness, they had to relinquish sexual "fulfillment"...at least the pattern of sexual "fulfillment" offered them by their culture.

Clarissa is ambivalent about her sexual "coldness" as this passage reveals: "She resented it, had a scruple picked up Heaven knows where, or, as she felt, sent by Nature (who is invariably wise)..."¹⁴ On the one hand, she "resents" it...on the other, she feels that it was "sent" (beyond her control) by an "invariably wise" nature. She resents the fact that it deprives her of pleasure and gaiety, but as it gives her some measure of emotional privacy, she values it.

Clarissa chooses a cloistered emotional life. She sleeps alone (like Woolf), rather than with her husband.

....lying there reading....she could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet. Lovely in girlhood, suddenly there came a moment - for example on the river beneath the woods at Clevden - when, through some contraction of this cold spirit, she had failed him. And then at Constantinople, and again and again. She could see what she lacked. It was not beauty; it was not mind. It was something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together.¹⁵

Even her husband who gives her more emotional freedom than Peter Walsh would have given her, must be kept at bay. For Clarissa fears that she cannot give herself sexually

without losing herself, without being destroyed. Peter certainly refuses to give her any privacy: "everything had to be shared, everything had to be gone into"...Peter intrudes himself without even trying. He disapproves of her flightiness, her shallowness, her willingness to compromise. Harsh, aggressive, full of high-minded ideals but blind to the beauty around him, he is able to spoil it for Clarissa. When he comes to her party, he stands in a corner and sulks.

If Clarissa was an artist, then her life as a society hostess would have been a kind of death...but that is all she really wants to be: a hostess, she wants to be felt kind, considerate, pleasure-giving...she creates an atmosphere of gaiety and pleasure; in that sense she is an artist...and Richard Dalloway not lets her do this, he needs her to do this. And certainly Peter wouldn't have any use for it.

She could see Peter out of the tail of her eye, criticizing her, there, in the corner....It was extraordinary how Peter put her into these states just by coming and standing in a corner. He made her see herself; exaggerate. It was idiotic. But why did he come, then, merely to criticize? Why always take, never give? Why not risk one's little point of view?¹⁶

Apparently Peter is able, by her very presence, to make Clarissa feel foolish and inadequate. If she is not able to stand up to him in that situation, to oppose his view of life with her own, then she was wise to avoid marrying

him. Without sufficient firmness of character to stand up for her view she would have lost her inner self.

Even Richard Dalloway, who is much less obtrusive than Peter Walsh, is too threatening for Clarissa. Her choice of a single bed suggests that she had to establish some kind of sexual distance from her husband in order to feel free enough to think her own thoughts, or to feel her own emotions. In her relations with her husband, Clarissa needs to shut off the warm sexual part of herself, and can only feel it--to some extent--with women, who do not threaten her.

Clarissa's feelings for Sally Seton parallel those of Virginia Stephen for Madge Vaughn, who was Virginia's first youthful passion. Like her author, Clarissa is able to feel some sexual response with women. Apparently she was unable--always--to feel any "normal sexual feeling" with a male, but that she was eventually able to feel some sexual pleasure is suggested by the description of Clarissa Dalloway's sensations when she is attracted to a woman. Whether the author was able to feel this when she was young, and emotionally involved with Madge Vaughn and Violet Dickenson is difficult to say. There is no authentic-sounding evidence of sexual experience in any of her artistic work until Mrs. Dalloway; not even in descriptions of supposedly romantic relationships.

The sensuousness of the passage which describes Clarissa's feeling for women is the most sexual thing we have had so far in Woolf's novels--and seems to be a revelation of her own subjective experience.

....yet she could not resist sometimes yielding to the charm of a woman....confessing, as to her they often did, some scrape, some folly....she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt....a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with and extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores! Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination.¹⁷

All her life Woolf depended on affection and warmth and reassurance from women. Her most constant supply of this came from her elder sister, Vanessa, but she also had a series of love relationships which apparently ranged from filial to sexual. She was never able to feel sexual passion for a man. Her husband, although she loved him dearly, served her more as a parent, a female parent, than a lover.

At the time Woolf was writing Mrs. Dalloway, she was also starting to have a friendship with Vita Sackville-West. This famous relationship is apparently the closest thing to a genuinely erotic experience Woolf had; at least this seems to be so in light of the evidence that is now available. An even more powerful argument for the fact that Woolf had had some genuinely erotic feelings by the time she writes MD is the passage quoted above.

A great many women in our culture are unable to feel sexual pleasure, but they do not necessarily go mad as a result of this. What contributed to Woolf's anguish may have been her guilt for not feeling. It is unpleasant enough to be unable to feel anything physically positive (or positively physical) for the man one has married, without feeling oneself at fault for this disability.

She was rather light and flippant on the subject of her marital relationship in a letter to Ka Cox soon after her marriage.

Why do you think people make such a fuss about marriage and copulation? Why do some of our friends change upon losing chastity? Possibly my great age makes it less of a catastrophe; but certainly I find the climax immensely exaggerated.¹⁸

"Chastity" as it is used here suggests that Virginia saw intercourse, even with one's husband, as a kind of violation of her integrity, for married women were considered "unchaste" only if they were promiscuous. Also, it sounds as if she does not intend to change. And why does she refer to it as a "catastrophe" unless it was really felt as a terrible thing? It seems that the wittiness of her communication is intended to distance her as far as possible from the whole distasteful subject, but the strength of her distaste is shown in her choice of language.

To continue the same letter, the next sentence reads, "Except for a sustained good humor (Leonard shan't see this) due to the fact that every twinge of anger is at

once visited upon my husband, I might still be Miss S." Leonard did love her very much, he was protective and comforting and she needed his affection too much to deny herself the pleasure of it....in spite of the fact that she could not return the love in kind. Hence her guilt.

The oscillation between guilt for not feeling, and anger for having demands made upon her that she could not fulfill, must have contributed to the worst of her mental breakdowns, which occurred shortly after her marriage.

The double bind, the awareness of duality, the conflict between the need to give and the needs to remain whole, the need to feel and the fragmentation of the self that is threatened by feeling, created a tension which resonates throughout the novel; the energy that pervades the book has been expended in an attempt to control the opposing forces within the author.

In creating her two characters--the sane and the insane--Woolf deals with two aspects of her self that compete from time to time for center stage.

Septimus Warren Smith never meets Clarissa Dalloway outside the imagination of the reader. She is ensconced in the most dazzling of London's society, and he is relegated to the shabby suburbs, the "intellectual underworld" with no one to communicate with him if he were capable of communicating. Why Woolf chose such widely differing characters, and drew parallels between their

situations--made them spiritual twins, but kept them distant--might indicate that she wants those two aspects of her self to remain forever separate.

However, in Woolf's characters--male and female, sane and insane--we are made aware not only of the contrasting qualities--which are obvious and visible to the naked eye, but also of their very subtle likenesses, which are not visible to the casual observer, and which we can discover only by overhearing their thoughts.

These two passages, the one describing Mrs. Dalloway's reverie, the other, Septimus's, establish a parallel mood.

Quiet descended on her, calm, content, as her needle drawing the silk smoothly to its gentle pause, collected the green folds together and attached them, very lightly to the belt. So on a summer's day waves collect, over-balance, and fall; collect and fall; and the whole world seems to be saying "that is all" more and more ponderously, until even the heart in the body which lies in the sun on the beach says too, That is all. Fear no more, says the heart. Fear no more, says the heart, committing its burden to some sea, which sighs collectively for all the sorrows, and renews, begins, collects, and lets fall. And the body alone listens to the passing bee; the wave breaking; the dog barking.¹⁹

She imagines herself to be lying on a beach, while Septimus, on his sofa, imagines himself at sea.

....the sound of water was in the room and through the waves came the voices of birds singing. Every power poured its treasures on his head, and his hand lay there on the back of the sofa, as he had seen his hand lie while he was bathing, floating, on top of the waves, while far away on shore he heard dogs barking far away. Fear no more, says the heart in the body; fear no more.²⁰

Here Woolf contrasts Clarissa's greater security (she stays on the shore) with Septimus's vulnerability (the every-susceptible Septimus); for he is more in touch with the fluid, living, mysterious depths, while Clarissa prefers to rest on edges of experience.

Clarissa has carefully arranged her life so as to bask in its pleasures without fear of drowning. However, she misses the ecstasy of really letting herself be borne on the tide of her delight, of surrendering to her pleasurable feelings.

Septimus is as sensitive and as vulnerable as a babe whereas Clarissa is almost too well defended....she knows but can barely feel the ecstasy of the passing moment. She wants to live in the present moment so as not to lose it forever, but that would mean surrendering herself to the flow of her feelings....and that, she believes, is dangerous. For a woman to surrender herself to a man can be an extremely dangerous, perhaps deadly experience.

In The Voyage Out, Woolf reveals a terror that sexuality can lead to death; less drastically, Mrs. Dalloway suggests that a completely felt or expressed sexuality - for a woman - leads to the death of the creative self. This fear--which the author may or may not recognize--might be seen in Sally Seton's fate...bright young woman, lovable, beautiful, original, gets married, produces six sons, and is extinguished as a person; all her flamboyant charm has evaporated when Clarissa meets her again.

Clarissa, however, while aged, has preserved her "grace of the fairy queen" and still wields her magic sceptre.

Virginia's first two breakdowns both occurred soon after the death of a parent. Julia Stephen died in May, 1895, and Virginia broke down the following August. From her memoirs, we know that she could not feel her grief, but was numb and detached--in a kind of psychic shock. Not only was she unable to feel the sorrow she felt she ought to feel, but she was expected to behave with an outward show of exaggerated sorrow that created an even greater distance between herself and her real feelings. Leslie Stephen's histrionic overdone lamentation for his wife, and the muffled mourning he forced on his unhappy children, must have made it seem to Virginia that she was a monster of callousness. The more she was expected to parade a grief she could not get in touch with, the more hypocritical, false, and monstrous she must have seemed to herself. Thirteen years is no great age, and Virginia, from all accounts, was somewhat less mature even than most other children. The result was her collapse.

When Leslie Stephen finally died, Virginia was worn out with the ordeal of nursing him through his slow dying, of dealing with the solemn parade of relatives--mostly lacrymous and female--and of dealing with George, who was "consoling" her for her father's illness by coming into her bedroom every night.

While her sister, Vanessa, who seems to have been made of sterner stuff than Virginia, was "frankly delighted" to be delivered of the burden of caring for her father, Virginia was suddenly overwhelmed with feelings of guilt. Her natural relief at being delivered from a heavy load of care and responsibility and misery turned, in her mind, to "having wished her father dead" and her imagination "that was equipped with an accelerator but no brakes" went charging on full speed ahead, and as she succumbed to insomnia and exhaustion, she may have begun to believe that her longing for his death to release them both from suffering had caused his death. What characterized her breakdown, according to Quentin Bell, was terrible grief for her father, and rage against Vanessa. Since Vanessa was delighted to be rid of her father, it could be that Virginia was dealing with her own guilt feelings by turning on Vanessa.

The "raptures" Septimus experiences are very like-- or seem to be like the "raptures" Woolf experienced as a child. She describes these as "disconnected from my own body." The question that occurs to me is this, did Woolf see exquisite beauty, or experience "ecstasies" or "raptures" during her periods of madness? There is no biographical evidence that she did; all the descriptions of her illness, by herself and those who remember it, describe her blinding headaches, backaches, relentless insomnia, self-starvation, hallucinations that terrified

or enraged her, nothing, in fact, that could have been in any way pleasurable. She felt, not ecstasy, but physical and emotional agony. In creating her first account of delirium-induced hallucinations (for The Voyage Out) she drew on her own experience, and Rachel's visions are not pleasant ones. One wonders why she describes Septimus as having visions and sensations which he perceives as having an origin outside his own body, as a gift, that causes him to weep from ecstasy unless she sensed, or believed, or knew, that her deepest trouble was somehow related to her difficulty in owning or acknowledging her body and its feelings as legitimate. The fascinating thing, for me, is the recognition, somewhere in Woolf's artistic self, of the connection between the repression of her feelings, disowning part or all of the self, and the inability to enjoy life, between being unable to feel, and the loss of sanity.

While Clarissa has separated herself from her body's sexual feelings, insofar as men are concerned, Septimus has disowned his "self" altogether. His terrible guilt prevents him from owning his own body. He takes no responsibility for his feelings--he also has no "self" with which to oppose other's judgements of him--hence his leap when the doctor forces his way into Septimus' room.

Septimus, the completely disowned and alienated self, the self that is so guilty for its inability to feel grief that he finally kills himself....that self sees humanity

as "ravening dogs....scouring the desert seeking whom they can devour"....that Septimus is like Rhoda, like Rachel in her delirium, like Woolf in her madness.

Virginia Stephen could not feel anything at her mother's death-bed besides a desire to giggle at the sobbing nurse. She could not feel as she "ought"....with no one to tell her that her numbness was an indication of a grief too great to bear, she believed herself wicked for not feeling sorrow.

The "sins" for which Septimus condemns himself sound very like the "sins" which tormented Virginia.

So there was no excuse; nothing whatever the matter, except for the sin for which human nature had condemned him to death; that he did not feel. He had not cared when Evans was killed; that was the worst; but all the other crimes raised their heads and shook their fingers and jeered and sneered over the rail of the bed in the early hours of the morning at the prostrate body which lay realizing its degradation; how he had married his wife without loving, had lied to her; seduced her....The verdict of human nature on such a wretch was death.²¹

Sexuality is completely repulsive to Septimus. We see Shakespeare through the eyes of a "madman" here.

How Shakespeare loathed humanity--the putting on of clothes, the getting of children, the sordidity of the mouth and the belly! This was...the message hidden in the beauty of the words. The secret signal which one generation passes, under disguise, to the next is loathing, hatred, despair....Love between man and woman was repulsive to Shakespeare. The business of copulation was filth to him before the end.²²

Easy to dismiss, is it not? Of course only a crazy person would read that into Shakespeare. Certainly Septimus, in his misery, ignores the real gaiety and delight in life that Shakespeare creates, but his interpretation is partly true.

All literature which has been written under the influence of patriarchal religion, that is to say, all literature, promulgates the belief that women produce only bodies, as opposed to men, who produce souls. The Christian religion has stressed the filthiness of women's bodies to a morbid degree. The extreme care with which Virginia and her sisters were inculcated with the feeling that they must strive to be clean and decent must have impressed upon Virginia that without such excessive and strenuous effort to abstain from all impure thoughts and actions, she would quickly descend to a state of filth and depravity. To be made aware of the fact by her marriage that she had a female body, one which has been described in moving and memorable language by the most gifted poets in the world as a sewer of carnal lust, must have been distressing in the extreme.

Woolf, in her periods of mental breakdown, saw her world not as cheery or optimistic platitudes would have it; when she was able to consider it at all, she doubtless saw it stripped of all pretences. We know too little of what she felt or heard or saw during her periods of illness, there are a few tantalizing hints, but no more.

However, Septimus' sexual revulsion makes sense in a number of ways. Once again, he is feeling a magnified and distorted emotion of Clarissa's. What for her is a "scruple" about her sexual responsiveness has become for him something horrible and vile.

It seems apparent that Woolf's primary source of difficulty in dealing with her feelings was that she had been taught that certain feelings were unacceptable, and that she should feel shame and guilt for having them.

That her rational, mature self grew better and better able to handle these feelings, we know because she continued to grow and develop as a writer and as a human being. But that she was never fully comfortable with her sexuality was also apparent. Some of the tremendous force of her self-disgust in her bouts of madness can be seen in Septimus' attitude towards sexuality, and in his feeling that all the great authors were, at bottom, disgusted with human filth.

Septimus' qualities are qualities he shares with Clarissa, but to an exaggerated degree. The guilt she feels for "failing" her husband is the guilt that drives him to suicide.

In each, the source of guilt is an inability to feel, in Clarissa's case, an inability to respond sexually to her husband, which parallels Virginia's inability to respond to Leonard and in the more drastic case, Septimus'

inability to feel sorrow for Evans' death is an echo of what Virginia felt (or didn't feel) at her mother's death-bed.

"He had married without loving her"...without feeling anything for her, in fact, but some kind of comfort in her presence, and that is what Clarissa feels towards Richard.... and she does feel badly about that...that she takes comfort in the shelter of his living presence...he shelters her from complete loneliness and solitude, without asking anything too much in return, perhaps asking nothing in return, or, having been failed, he will forgive.

Septimus chooses death over a violation of his integrity; Clarissa chooses a cloistered existence, a rather lonely existence, in preference to what she sees as a death of the deepest self. Clarissa's sacrifice of her sexuality cuts her off from a great deal of pleasure in her own body, and exacerbates her fear of death, but she sees it as necessary to preserve her integrity; and Septimus' decision to preserve his integrity through suicide is the result of that kind of logic carried to its extreme.

Clarissa--as one aspect of Woolf's sane of functioning self, is able to comprehend other states of being--and respect them. She is aware that she is not the last word on the state of the world...she is aware that her reality is not perhaps the ultimate reality...and this is a salvation for her...because she is able to receive gifts of

insight and experience from others in a way that Septimus is not. He feels that he is the chosen, the prophet, the one who has the key to the universe. He is not able to accept the reality of another point of view. Therefore, if for him, the world is "without meaning"...then it is without meaning indeed.

And how does Clarissa deal with her guilt? She is saved by the grace of Richard's love for her. It is a gift that absolves her from having to bear the burden of all that guilt alone. Richard forgives her. She has "failed" him, but he does not hold it against her, he does not exact any recompense from her. His love is a gift freely given, and it saves Clarissa from the terrors of utter aloneness, in which state she must have perished. She is humble, she accepts Richard's gift with humility. She feels that she is not entirely worthy of his love, since she cannot return it in kind, she feels she has "pilfered, schemed" to get what she wants. She feels that it is disgraceful for her to stand alone, supported by Richard's love, and see others sink beneath the earch, too oppressed to go on.

While Woolf may or may not be consciously sketching a self-portrait here, it seems safe to say that Leonard's unswerving care and affection for her were enough to keep her feeling safe and loved, and that without him she might have taken Septimus' leap earlier than she did. While she feels herself "not wholly admirable" for taking

the gift, we do not have to concur with the author's opinion of herself. Humility can be an attractive trait, and the reader can only regret that she felt so guilty for what was, after all, an offense against her integrity, and nothing she could have been responsible for.

Chapter 9

To The Lighthouse

Worshipping Mrs. Ramsay as she does, Lily Briscoe wonders to herself:

What art was there, known to love or
cunning . . . for becoming . . . like
waters poured into the same jar inextric-
ably the same, one with the object one
adored?¹

With love and cunning and art, Woolf has answered this question.

In Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf drew her characters into herself; she took two characters, outwardly dissimilar to herself and to each other and endowed them with characteristics of her own. In this novel, she moves through herself and beyond herself to embrace another person: her mother.

Woolf touches upon the most sensitive areas in her past, her feelings of not having had enough of her mother's attention as a child, her anxiety that her mother would not have fully approved of a life devoted to artistic endeavor, rather than a husband and children, the pain of her mother's death and her subsequent relationship to her father, and finally, the resolution of her anguish and grief into a calm acceptance by means of her creative gift.

To The Lighthouse is the most autobiographical of her novels. In it she traces the events that shaped her over that course of time just prior to her mother's death and during the ten years that followed; that time also encompassed the deaths of her half-sister and her brother.

In that novel one watches her retrace her past and discover her progress from the comparative happiness and peace of her childhood through the misery of her adolescence (which she treats only as allegory in "Time Passes"), to an epiphany when the mature artist realizes that the gift of making "the moment out of time" stand still is one that she shares with her mother; it is not a wedge dividing them, but common ground where the daughter can bring her mother to life for our delight, as the mother once brought, vividly, delight to the author's life.

Julia Stephen's death left an enormous aching void in Virginia. Those parents who have given their children an adequate amount of love and affirmation are those whose children usually make the best adjustment to that parent's death. Virginia's need was far greater than that of most children--apparently--and she got less affection than most children receive, simply because there wasn't enough of her mother to go around.

If one reads Woolf's account of her mother in the chapter entitled "Reminiscences" in Moments of Being, written when the author was about twenty-five years old, one has the impression that Julia Stephen was rather cold and severe with her daughters, and remote, like a goddess. When Woolf wrote "Reminiscences," Julia had been dead about twelve years, and yet was still a "presence" to her daughter.

It is perfectly true that she obsessed me, in spite of the fact that she died when I was thirteen, until I was forty-four.²

When she describes her mother's death, she does so in mythic terms.

If what I have said of her has any meaning you will believe that her death was the greatest disaster that could happen; it was as though on some brilliant day of spring the racing clouds of a sudden stood still, grew dark, and massed themselves; the wind flagged, and all creatures on earth moaned or wandered seeking aimlessly.³

Ceres had the power to return from the underworld; that Woolf used such imagery may (despite her disbelief in immortality) indicate that she could not really accept her mother's death.

After her mother died, Virginia must have realized that she was never going to get what she needed . . . and she could not afford to let her mother go.

When I first read To The Lighthouse, I read it as a magnificent elegy to Woolf's mother, and I thought, "What a marvelous woman Julia Stephen must have been!" After reading more of Woolf's life, I thought, "What a marvelous woman Virginia Woolf must have been!" She is richly forgiving, she does not dwell on her mother's inadequacies; indeed, she never calls them that. As she writes of her, no buried anger obtrudes in the mellow flow of her prose for the reader to trip on; only if one reads carefully does the author's pain become apparent in the graceful lines.

Your grandmother . . . was . . . ruthless in her ways, and quite indifferent, if she saw good, to any amount of personal suffering. It was characteristic of her to feel that her daughter was, as she expressed it, part of herself, and as a slower and less efficient part she did not scruple to treat her with the severity with which she would have treated her own failings, or to offer her up as freely as she would have offered herself . . . when your grandfather remarked to her upon the harshness with which she treated Stella in comparison with the other children who were both boys, she gave the answer I have written.⁴

The adjectives she uses to describe her mother are not pleasant ones: "harsh," "ruthless," "indifferent to any amount of personal suffering" . . . at least where her daughter was concerned.

While she regarded it as her maternal duty to crush any signs of pride in her eldest daughter, Stella, Virginia's mother was not one to encourage the

development of any egotism in any of her female children.

Vanessa, Virginia's elder sister, who showed at an early age a rich artistic talent, was shy of expressing her dreams or ambitions, even to her sister.

Once I saw her scrawl on a black door a great maze of lines, with white chalk. "When I am a famous painter--" she began, and then turned shy and rubbed it out. . . when she won the prize at her drawing school, she hardly knew, so shy was she, how to tell me, in order that I might repeat the news at home. "They've given me the thing--I don't know why." "What thing?" "O they say I've won it--the book--the prize you know." ⁵ She was awkward as a long-legged colt.

It would be difficult to imagine any of Virginia's complacent brothers so uncomfortable with success, so diffident about having to report winning a prize for excellence that they could not bear breaking the news to the family themselves. One suspects that Julia Stephen would have felt compelled to deliver a little homily upon the value of a becoming modesty to Vanessa, had she had the audacity to proudly bear her parents the news herself. Because she was a girl she had, in her mother's eyes, but one destiny: marriage and motherhood, all else was frippery.

As a very small girl, Virginia remembers sitting beside her mother in the evening, perhaps being read to or just enjoying her mother's nearness. Then Julia

would look up and notice that her husband had something that needed tending to.

. . . my father, sitting reading with one leg curled round the other, twisting his lock of hair; "Go and take the crumb out of his beard," she whispers to me; and off I trot.⁶

That's learning her "proper role in life" literally at her mother's knee.

Julia Stephen's attitude towards her daughter is unhappily archetypal in patriarchal cultures. Phyllis Chesler, in her book Women and Madness, points out that female children are always orphans. They are expected to minister to the needs of their brothers and, more specifically, their fathers to provide nurturance, support, sympathy, comfort, and are frequently seen as rivals with their mother for his favor.

All four of Julia Stephen's sons, Gerald and George Duckworth, and Thoby and Adrian Stephen, got more attention than their sisters . . . or at least, more indulgence.

Thoby was two years (about) older than I was. He dominated us four. He was a clumsy little boy, very fat, bursting through his Norfolk jacket. He was not a fawning or ingratiating child, I imagine: Napoleonic, one of the Aunts described him as a baby . . . He grew very quickly out of nursery ways, I cannot remember him, as I can Adrian, appealing, childish . . . Thoby was a determined, resolute little boy: whose rages were very thorough and formidable. I see him struggling with

Gerald; or so truculent with the nurses
that father had to be sent for.⁷

It is common knowledge nowadays that children tend to live up to their elders' expectations of them, they also sense at a very early age which behaviors will win them love and acceptance, and which will threaten them with loss of love. If Thoby was a fat little boy, he must have been allowed to eat as much as he wanted without being reprimanded; it must have been acceptable for him to be greedy. The relationship between food and mother-love has been pounded almost to death, but I feel that perhaps one reason Virginia later developed the mental aberration known as anorexia-nervosa may have been that she felt, deep down, unworthy of even the love that she did get from her mother. Girls who suffer from this disease seem to feel, pathetically, that their mothers cannot love them, and that this is due to their own disgusting greed. Virginia nearly managed to starve herself to death during her bouts of madness.

Apparently it was easy to displease Julia Stephen, if one was her daughter:

. . . she disliked affectation. I can remember her saying to me: "If you hold your head on one side like that, you shan't go to the party."⁸

It is significant that her mother's last words to her were an admonition: "Hold yourself straight, my little goat."

In spite of the fact that Julia Stephen ferociously subdued her own peace and comfort to the good or comfort of others, she could not have been described as a doormat (unless one could imagine a doormat animated enough to chase one and scour one's shoes). Instead of having been a superior mother, she seems, rather, to have been more of a Mother Superior; completely devoted to and worshipful of the male sex, she saw her daughters as postulants who must be made worthy of their future service to husbands.

Woolf writes that her mother's gallant efforts to invest every moment of life with vitality and interest had about them "an inimitable bravery." Her energy didn't wane in spite of the fact that she doubted the ultimate value of her efforts.

You may see two things in her face. 'Let us make the most of what we have, since we know nothing of the future' was the motive that urged her to toil so incessantly on behalf of happiness, right doing, love; and the melancholy echoes answered 'What does it matter? Perhaps there is no future.' Encompassed as she was by his solemn doubt her most trivial activities had something of grandeur about them⁹

It is difficult to believe that a child of thirteen or younger (even Virginia!) could have seen all that in her mother. What is written here seems partly something endowed in retrospect--or perhaps partly projected. This may have been a feeling Woolf had about her own life.

Woolf remembered her mother as a person of immense practical wisdom and efficiency; however she could not or would not delegate responsibility:

"She was impetuous, and also a little imperious; so conscious of her own burning will that she could scarcely believe that there was not something quicker and more effective in her action than in another's."¹⁰

In the first memoir, Woolf's mother emerges as rather a martinet . . . and so she may have been at times.

However, strict and exacting as she was with her daughters, Julia Stephen also created a sense of liveliness and gaiety around her. The household, large as it was, was augmented by their live-in servants, and a constant stream of visitors. While there was never any privacy, there was also never a dull moment. It must have been a veritable circus of emotions, with always some little drama for a child to observe or participate in.

Julia herself set high standards, and Virginia writes that she experienced a glow of pride and pleasure when she made her laugh. While she was not an educated woman, she was extremely quick, witty, and intelligent. She had a sensitive ear for language.

. . . she gave a jump, I remember, when reading Hamlet aloud to her I misread 'sliver' 'silver'--she jumped as my father jumped at a false quantity when we read Virgil with him.¹¹

Julia was an interesting conversationalist, and apparently an entertaining person to listen to.

It had often occurred to me to regret that no one ever wrote down her sayings and her vivid ways of speech since she had the gift of turning words in a manner peculiar to her . . . striking out in a phrase or two pictures of all the people who came past here.¹²

Woolf herself was never entirely at ease in a group until she finally acquired the reputation of being a literary "lioness;" she used her wit and malice and brilliant imagination to awe her admirers . . . and in that way she became somewhat like her mother. And it was not only in the sphere of literary activity that she saw herself as creating something permanent of the moment . . . because those who had the privilege of knowing her as a friend and companion valued her sparkling conversation above any they had ever enjoyed. Clive Bell reminisces about her:

I remember spending some dark, uneasy winter days, during the first war in the depth of the country with Lytton Strachey. After lunch, as we watched the rain pour down and premature darkness roll up, he said, in his searching, personal way, "Loves apart, whom would you most like to see coming up the drive?" I hesitated a moment, and he supplied the answer: "Virginia of course."¹³

At any rate, Virginia felt and expressed something both of her mother and of herself in Mrs. Ramsay. As she writes of her mother in "A Sketch of the Past":

. . . one day walking around Tavistock Square I made up, as I sometimes make up my books, To The Lighthouse; in a great, apparently involuntary, rush . . . I wrote the book very quickly; and when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her.

I suppose that I did for myself what psychoanalysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and then laid it to rest. But what is the meaning of "expressed" it? Why, because I described her and my feeling for her in that book, should my vision of her and my feeling for her become so much dimmer and weaker?¹⁴

Although Woolf writes that her vision of her mother and her feeling for her become much "dimmer and weaker" after she wrote To The Lighthouse, the memories that she relates in "A Sketch of the Past" are much warmer, more colorful, and more physical ones than those she described in "Reminiscences," perhaps because in the process of making up her novel, she recalled memories other than the ones which had obsessed her, also, in re-entering that world, if she did so as completely as she could re-enter her earliest memories of St. Ives, perhaps she brought to the surface buried colors, sounds, and happier occasions than the ones she usually had by her. Her memories of her mother are happier, more tender, and more understanding than they had been. She remembers physical details that are warm and brightly colorful.

Certainly there she was, in the very centre of that great Cathedral space which was childhood; there she was from the very first. My first memory is of her lap; the scratch of some beads on her dress comes back to me as I pressed my cheek against it. Then I see her in her white dressing gown on the balcony; and the passion flower with the purple star on its petals. Her voice is still faintly in my ears--decided, quick; and in particular the little drops with which her laugh ended--three diminishing ahs . . . "Ah--ah--ah . . ." I sometimes end a laugh that way myself. And I see her hands, like Adrian's, with the very individual square-tipped fingers, each finger with a waist to it, and the nail broadening out. (My own are the same size all the way, so that I can slip a ring over my thumb.) She had three rings; a diamond ring, an emerald ring, and an opal ring. My eyes used to fix themselves upon the lights in the opal as it moved across the page of the lesson book when she taught us, and I was glad that she left it to me . . . Also I hear the tinkle of her bracelets, made of twisted silver, given her by Mr. Lowell, as she went about the house; especially as she came up at night to see if we were asleep, holding a candle shaded; this is a distinct memory, for, like all children, I lay awake sometimes and longed for her to come. Then she told me to think of all the lovely things I could imagine. Rainbows and bells . . . ¹⁵

The pleasant memories of her mother, deeply buried during the misery of her adolescence and mental illness, seem to have resurfaced during the composition of her novel. In spite of the fact that her mother "obsessed" her until she was forty-four, the spectral presence may have been strict and severe and stern, rather than tender and forgiving. Her mother's laughter, her mother's lap, her mother's hands--here so well and so vividly

recalled--are an indication that, as a child, Virginia had received enough affection from her mother to make her bitterly aware of its absence.

The novel gave her a chance to re-enter her lost world--but freed from the subjectivity of a child--she slips from soul to soul and sees the world from various perspectives.

In Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf gave to her different characters various components of her own personality, and they looked out upon the world as she herself did in varying moods or states of being. Now, in To The Lighthouse, she makes a leap into another's psyche, and looks out upon the world from that point of view.

The three personas of the author are represented by Mrs. Ramsay, Lily Briscoe, and Cam. However, when Cam is in her mother's presence, we do not hear from her, we see Cam entirely as she appears to her mother. It is not until Mrs. Ramsay has died, and Cam is an adolescent, that we have her perceptions presented to us directly.

In her creation of Mrs. Ramsay, Woolf looks upon the world of her childhood through her mother's eyes. . . upon herself as a child through her mother's eyes . . . and when she does so, she sees that world in a very different light. It becomes a different place from the one she had remembered as a child.

When Woolf looks at herself through Mrs. Ramsay's eyes, she sees "Cam"--a small, lively girl whose demands for attention do not make her unlovable, but which her mother has not always got the strength to cope with.

'Come in or go out, Cam,' she said, knowing that Cam was attracted only by the word 'Flounder' and that in a moment she would fidget and fight with James as usual. Cam shot off. Mrs. Ramsay went on reading, relieved, for he and James shared the same tastes and were comfortable together.¹⁶

There seems to be something of Thoby in James, but in reality, he was Adrian . . . the one whom Virginia was no doubt most jealous of . . . and probably the reason why Cam would have fought with James. For Woolf to be able to say--in her mother's words, or mind--"he was the most gifted, the most sensitive of all her children" and not make some editorial comment seems remarkably restrained. In fact, poor Adrian had a very hard time finding his bearings and settling on a profession. While he did not break down to the extent that Virginia did, he was apparently subject to bouts of severe depression, and underwent extensive psychoanalysis. Apparently, Virginia could afford to be generous for, by that time, she has proven her gift. She was never really fond of her younger brother. However, her jealousy does not show through in the novel.

The device of assuming another person's point of view is very useful for understanding his or her actions

and possibly even what motivates them. However, it can be very threatening. For once one abandons one's protective blinkers and sees oneself in the role of object, only peripherally important to the person whose point of view one is examining, the resulting shock to the ego can be very great. It is probably for this reason that most of us avoid doing it . . . whenever possible. Perhaps Woolf trusted that her mother's point of view would be loving enough for her to assume it without risk. At any rate, that is the art--known to love and cunning--that enables the author to become one with the object she adores.

While there are varieties of angles from which Mrs. Ramsay herself is studied--Auerbach calls them "spirits hovering between heaven and earth;" I tend to think they're the author's memories--the most exciting prospect for Woolf was probably the one Mrs. Ramsay surveys. That horizon was the clue to the person her mother really was, and the clue to what her mother thought of her youngest daughter. It must have taken great courage to honestly risk losing her protective buffer of subjectivity; it certainly took a great deal of humility. It seems to have been worth the risk, however, for in the long run it proved to be healing.

As she comprehends how she must have appeared to her mother, Woolf is able to fully accept the fact that there was nothing lacking in herself that caused her mother to give her less attention than she needed. Even the fact that "James" was preferred is understood because it is clear that he and his mother share the same tastes and have the same temperament. "Cam" is lively and fidgety, "a wild villain" Mr. Bankes calls her; her mother finds her lovable, but somewhat of a handful. Perhaps she feels some real compassion for her mother's burden by the time she reaches 43 . . . there is the matter of physical and emotional fatigue which the young do not even imagine can exist in the middle-aged body.

Immediately, Mrs. Ramsay seemed to fold herself together, one petal closed in another, and the whole fabric fell in exhaustion upon itself, so that she had only strength enough to move her finger, in exquisite abandonment to exhaustion, across the page . . . while there throbbed through her, like the pulse in a spring which has expanded to its full width and now gently ceases to beat, the rapture of successful creation.¹⁷

Here is another tie, of course, besides the empathy of the body; Woolf has experienced the "rapture of successful creation." She remembers enough of her mother's activities and speech to recall that much of her energy went into bolstering her husband's fragile

ego. It was doubtless such an ego that Woolf would be recalling when she wrote in A Room of One's Own about the vanity of men who need to believe that they are superior by their sex alone to "half the human race." Women, she says, have always had the magic and delicious power of reflecting the images of men at twice their normal size. This is the primary function of "The Angel in the House"--to nurse and nurture the self-esteem of her husband.

While Woolf says that she strangled the "Angel in the House" in order to write, it seems more probable that she assimilated her. "You had your area of creative endeavor; I have mine"; she does not admonish her mother's shade thus in so many words, but rather draws such subtle parallels between them that the haunting presence is appeased, and goes to its rest.

One wonders why Woolf makes a painter of Lily, instead of a writer. Perhaps she did not want to seem conspicuous. Moreover, it is easier to get the required effects with a painter in this story: Lily has to move quietly and exercise various stratagems in order to get the proper combination of perspective and privacy she needs in order to work. She struggles painfully and visibly with her medium, and the reader can see the progress of her painting even as the monotonous drone of "women can't write, women can't paint" preoccupies

but does not paralyze her, as it would a writer. Her work is painfully exposed to the causal, critical eye, and one suspects Lily would almost rather have her canvasses hung unremembered in attics than be scorned.

Lily is one aspect of her author's persona; certainly Vanessa could not have been the template for Lily. Lily is charming, but rather lacking in juice; she is the archetype of the "old maid." Vanessa was, in her sister's eyes, a statuesque Juno, a creatrix. Mother as well as artist, she could not have recognized any element of herself in Lily beyond the title of "painter." Lily seems rather to be Virginia's "bogie": a "sexless, unfeminine, dried-up old maid" producing art which will be ignored, discarded, or appreciated only by the most understanding of friends.

Lily is pitied by Mrs. Ramsay, patronized by Mrs. Ramsay, and believes herself quite misunderstood by Mrs. Ramsay. And besides Mrs. Ramsay, Lily does seem like a humble pawn beside a magnificent, domineering queen. The first section of the novel explores the attitude of each one towards the other.

Woolf examines the situation first from one point of view, then from the other. Lily, it seems, is "in love" with the Ramsays, especially Mrs. Ramsay. She feels that there is some intuitive knowledge deep within her that love, or intimacy, will reveal to her.

Mrs. Ramsay's certainty that "an unmarried woman has missed the best of life"¹⁸ shakes Lily's confidence in herself even as her intellect persuades her that Mrs. Ramsay presides ". . . with immutable calm over destinies which she completely failed to understand."¹⁹ Lily, the artist, desires unity with the mother. However, in the first section, Lily feels that Mrs. Ramsay merely patronizes her, does not properly value her. But after the dinner, Mrs. Ramsay thinks:

. . . comparing her with Minta . . . of the two, Lily at forty will be better. There was in Lily a thread of something; something of her own which Mrs. Ramsay liked very much indeed, but no man would, she feared.²⁰

Woolf, through her creation of Mrs. Ramsay, obtains her mother's blessing. It is in the third section of To The Lighthouse that Lily finally realizes what she and Mrs. Ramsay share.

. . . Mrs. Ramsay saying, "Life stand still here"; Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent)--this was of the nature of a revelation. In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was struck into stability. Life stand still here, Mrs. Ramsay said.²¹

In that vision that combines past and present, she asserts its primacy for her, this celebration of her individual ego's unique perception of reality and interpretation of it.

Even though Mrs. Ramsay's mode of artistic creation touches more lives, and seems to be less "selfish" than Lily's, Woolf shows how the dinner-party gives her (Mrs. Ramsay) a chance to create an atmosphere of serenity, a chance to exercise her "astonishing power" over her guests and have them behave well towards each other. And so they do. In spite of Mr. Bankes' restless longing for his work, in spite of Mr. Ramsay's self-centeredness and the irreverent hilarity it inspires in his children, in spite of Lily's rebelliousness and Charles Tansley's surliness, in spite of the tardiness of Paul, Minta, and Nancy, the party goes off well.

While it seems safe to assume that Woolf admires the effort involved, and appreciates the determination to be civilized, it seems also apparent that the person who achieves the greatest benefit is Mrs. Ramsay herself. She reaches a kind of epiphany. It is her work of art; it is her triumph. Even though her arrogance about managing other people's lives knows almost no bounds, (she totally misperceives and misunderstands Lily's proper destiny and the Rayley's marriage disintegrates) she is loved, admired, forgiven, much as a gifted artist is forgiven his or her egotism. That she hopes to achieve a kind of immortality through her efforts, Woolf makes plain:

Yes, that was done then, accomplished; and as with all things done, became solemn. Now one thought of it, cleared of chatter and emotion, it seemed always to have been, only was shown now, and so being shown, struck everything into stability. They would, she thought, going on again, however long they lived, come back to this night; this moon; this wind; this house; and to her too. It flattered her, where she was most susceptible of flattery, to think how, wound about in their hearts, however long they lived she would be woven.²²

By comparison with his wife, Mr. Ramsay has a rather wooden grasp of reality, and a limited capacity for joy. He seems somewhat masochistic in his refusal to let himself experience happiness without tainting it in some way (one feels he is trying superstitiously to ward off disaster). It is a fairly common malady for people to fear letting themselves experience intense happiness, partly because it cannot last, and partly because it seems to be tempting fate.

He turned from the sight of human ignorance and human fate and the sea eating the ground we stand on, which, had he been able to contemplate it fixedly might have led to something; and found consolation in trifles so slight compared with the august them just now before him that he was disposed to slur that comfort over, to deprecate it, as if to be caught happy in a world of misery was for an honest man the most despicable of crimes.²³

Even though he can grasp the tragedy of the human situation on an intellectual plane, he cannot grasp it emotionally; it is all a kind of game for him, as it is not for his wife. She lives in the world he can

only grasp with his imagination. For her, happiness is a triumph; for him, it is a sin.

"Poor little place," he murmured with a sigh. She heard him. He said the most melancholy things, but she noticed that directly he said them he always seemed more cheerful than usual. All this phrase-making was a game, she thought, for if she had said half what he said, she would have blown her brains out by now.²⁴

It is only in his imagination that he can grasp the fact that human work is indeed ephemeral, that our values are transitory.

It is only by an heroic leap of the imagination that he can grasp the fact that it is not a matter of much importance whether or not his books will last.

"And what are two thousand years? (asked Mr. Ramsay ironically, staring at the hedge). What indeed, if you look from a mountain top down the long wastes of the ages? The very stone one kicks with one's foot will outlast Shakespeare."²⁵

And here is Mr. Ramsay again:

It was his fate, his peculiarity, whether he wished it or not, to come out thus on a spit of land which the sea is slowly eating away, and there to stand, like a desolate seabird, alone. It was his power, his gift, suddenly to shed all superfluities, to shrink and diminish so that he looked barer and felt sparer, even physically, yet lost none of his intensity of mind, and so to stand on his little ledge facing the dark of human ignorance, how we know nothing and the sea eats away the ground we stand on--this was his fate, his gift.²⁶

Yet, in spite of his imagination, when we seem to be seeing something through Mr. Ramsay's eyes, nature slows down. When he looks at the hedge, it just sits there, and a pot of red geraniums is merely a pot of red geraniums.

. . . seeing again the urns with the
trailing red geraniums which had so
often decorated processes of thought . . . 27

The relationship between the way nature is portrayed or perceived through Mr. Ramsay's eyes shows that he really feels, if he does not believe, his universe to be secure, unchanging. Wrapped in his wife's protective concern, he can flagellate himself to earn even more of her sympathy and attention. The remarkable thing is that Woolf can show this behavior on his part without despising him for it. He absorbed the time and energy his wife would have done better to spend on her children.

In the third section, Mr. Ramsay's own perceptions are available to us only through his actions and through what his children imagine his perceptions to be. They find him, as did Lily Briscoe, theatrically self-pitying, parading his grief for sympathy, and they find this intolerable. Near the end of the story he has an opportunity to indulge this ungallant and unbecoming impulse but he refrains and does not quote William Cowper

as their boat passes over the spot where the sailors were drowned. Rather than allude to his own "rougher seas"

. . . all he said was "Ah" as if he thought to himself, But why make a fuss about that? Naturally men are drowned in a storm, but it is a perfectly straightforward affair, and the depths of the sea (he sprinkled the crumbs from his sandwich paper over them) are only water after all.²⁸

If for him, "water is only water after all," for Cam it is much more:

One could hear the slap of the water and the patter of the falling drops and a kind of hushing and hissing sound from the waves rolling and gambolling and slapping the rocks as if they were wild creatures who were perfectly free and tossed and tumbled and sported like this forever.²⁹

Mr. Ramsay draws himself up to his full height by the end of their journey, both literally and figuratively.

He rose and stood in the bow of the boat, very straight and tall, for all the world, James thought, as if he were saying, "There is no God," and Cam thought, as if he were leaping into space.³⁰

Mrs. Ramsay's leap from the safety of dogma to the uncertainty of atheism is a daring one, for it leaves him cold and comfortless in an eternity where he really does not have anyone to console him for his loss or to pity him for his grief. It is also an example for his children; he frees them to work out their own relationship to reality.

Virginia's portrait of Mr. Ramsay is a generously retouched picture of her father. In the amusing scene with Lily, when he poses and groans and parades his grief, the reader tends to giggle nervously and identify with Lily: what, after all, can one say or do for such a man? His aching need for pity makes him seem rather harmless and faintly ridiculous. Is it with scenes like that that his children's spirits were "subdued and coerced?" Not, apparently, according to "A Sketch of the Past."

. . . the horror of Wednesday. On that day the weekly books were shown him. If they were over eleven pounds, that lunch was a torture. The books were presented. Silence. He was putting on his glasses. He had read the figures. Down came his fist on the account book, There was a roar. His vein filled. His face flushed, Then he shouted "I am ruined." Then he beat his breast. He went through an extraordinary dramatization of self-pity, anger and despair . . .

Never have I felt such rage and such frustration. For not a word of my feeling could be expressed.³¹

It was not, surely, Virginia's lack of ability to express herself that kept her silent. Both Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Stephen threw things when they lost their tempers. Virginia never hints that things got worse than that. But if Leslie Stephen felt free to indulge in an unrestrained temper tantrum over the high cost of beef and milk, it is appalling to think what his

reaction might have been to an open and candid appraisal of his behavior from his youngest daughter.

By the time she writes To The Lighthouse, she has come far enough, climbed high enough, to regard him with affection and amusement and pity. And by the time she writes "A Sketch of the Past," she analyzes him skillfully:

. . . the fact does seem to be that at the age of sixty-five he was almost completely isolated, imprisoned. Whole tracts of his sensibility had atrophied. He had so ignored, or refused to face, or disguised his own feelings, that not only had he no conception of what he himself did and said; he had no idea what other people felt. Hence the horror and the terror of these violent displays of rage, They were sinister, blind, animal, savage. He did not realize what he did. No one could enlighten him . . . There was no possibility of communication.³²

There was, of course, much that was good and wise and generous in her father's character; she remembers that when she wanted him to go fishing with them, he replied: "'I don't like to see fish caught; so I shan't come; but you can go if you like.' I think it was very admirably done. Not a rebuke, not a forbidding; simply a statement; about which I could think and decide for myself."³³ Moreover, Leslie Stephen allowed Virginia the free choice of his library, and with a large-mindedness, which was entirely unVictorian, did not attempt to keep her away from "unsuitable" reading. Had he been younger, more in touch with his own and others' human

feelings, or even been less deaf, Virginia's adolescence might have been a much happier one. For, according to her, the real tragedy of her mother's death was not that poignant loss and its real, sharp pain: it was the unreal and artificial world of stuffy, claustrophobic, muffled mourning they entered as a result. Whatever solace Julia's children might have found in continuing life as well as they could was denied them. They had to pretend that they too, would rather be dead than alive, with the result that Virginia, at least, tried to bring it off.

Chapter 10

The Waves

The Waves seems to quiver with rainbow fires, tremulous lights that flash from some translucent shape which shifts with every breath. The boundaries, the containers of this flow of lucent prose are never made completely visible.

In The Waves, context has all but disappeared. We are led through six different lives, but we are led as the blind. We are completely dependent upon the speaker's voice. We have no other authority; we must take his or her word for the verity of the reality described. We are never given an "objective" point of reference from which we can gage the accuracy of the speaker's version of reality. Usually one can examine character by overhearing a dialogue, or observing that character in action. There is no "action" in the story, except reported action, and there is no dialogue. Even when the speakers say they are sitting together in company, they are not addressing each other; each addresses the reader directly, as in a soliloquy. Each one of the six speakers has a slightly different evaluation of any particular occurrence, but none of them really evaluates himself or herself much differently from the way the

others evaluate him. Woolf called The Waves a "mystical, eyeless" book, and indeed, the reader does feel "eyeless" when no intermediary in the form of a narrator, omniscient or otherwise, comes forward to place the occurrences of the story in any world that we can recognize. It is true that each of the nine sections has a prologue that describes seascape and landscape, but it becomes immediately obvious that this is not where the story takes place; it is allegory rather.

If the "wedge-shaped core of darkness" that Mrs. Ramsay becomes when she is freed from the eyes of others were given a voice, it would speak like the voices in The Waves. It seems to be each surface "self" that--trapped and visible in the naked light--writhes with shame or swells with pride. Only that subterranean voice that speaks from the center of the universal "I" can go beyond shame or pride. Alone, the soul can slip the traces and skim distant horizons where differences seem petty and egotism futile. Woolf is writing about the attempt to bypass the boundaries of separate personalities in a subterranean way--by ignoring surfaces and communicating by means of some inner core of shared reality. However, the individual's sense of being limitless, of surveying the universe with a completely subjective eye, can exist only in solitude. And it is out of a vast, unbroken silence that the

subjective voices of The Waves speak to us. So, paradoxically, the speakers seem to be sharing their inmost selves with each other, even while they never address each other directly.

While Clarissa, Septimus, Mrs. Ramsay, and Lily (to name the most important) all communicated their thoughts to the reader rather directly in the form of an interior monologue, the speakers in The Waves communicate almost entirely in poetry. Jean Guiget's expression for this mode of communication is poetic correlative.¹

We hear only one speaker at a time, and all six speak in the same tone of voice, so the effect is that--almost--of hearing from one single consciousness. Yet, in spite of the identity of tone, all six are distinguishable as separate personalities. They differ in their likes and dislikes, their concerns and fears and desires. While Woolf certainly was not attempting to "create character" in the traditional or conventional sense of the word, it would be exceedingly odd, to say the least, for her to have Bernard say something like this if she had not intended to create six separate beings.

'But we are all different. The wax--the virginal wax that coats the spine melted in different patches for each of us.
.... 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.'²

If one argues that we are dealing with one character instead of six, one misses Woolf's point altogether. Each character is circumscribed by his or her "givens," his or her limitations. The book is the story of their attempt to transcend these limitations of self--especially it is about the attempt to transcend our human finitude through communication, and through love.

While many critics seem to regard The Waves as a novel that diverges from the line of development which culminated in To The Lighthouse, I see at least one thread which can be traced through all Woolf's major novels and that includes The Waves. That is her relationship to her characters.

In The Voyage Out she was somewhat wary of them, often contemptuous of (some of) them. In Jacob's Room she seems more compassionate . . . towards the women at least. She begins to share her perceptions of the world with her characters in Mrs. Dalloway, she deepens them in To The Lighthouse, and finally, in The Waves, the narrator merges with her characters. No one stands outside them, guiding the readers perceptions; the characters speak for themselves.

While before, the author had regarded herself as rather superior to the dull and insensitive masses who

were all unaware of the terror and absurdity of the human condition, she has matured enough to be able to extend a more tolerant and compassionate feeling for those who are unable or unwilling to face the ultimate reality of existence. She had more compassion for those who attempt to blind themselves to their approaching oblivion with various games. She concentrates less on their lack of similarity to herself, and pays attention to those things she shares with others--delight in affection, and happiness, and living. She extends the circle of her empathy wider and wider until in The Waves she embraces even those who are quite different from herself. She immerses herself completely in her characters and the effect is to reveal the shared substratum of our common humanity.

Woolf's relationship to her characters in The Waves can be best explained by terming it an "I-Thou" relationship. Martin Buber's description of disinterested love, wherein one individual confronts another in all his subjectivity and richness, and regards him not as a means to his own end, but an end in himself, is most illustrative of what Woolf does with character in this novel.

This confronting of the other being as complete subject, who is never object for his creator, endows each character with an existence as seemingly limitless

as our own. These individuals who egos we briefly inhabit seem to be as vast as ourselves, as able to leap the boundries of the individual life. Woolf does not judge them; these six evaluate each other, but their world is without reference to any reality but their own. We enter into their reality and leave our own behind. They do not exist as means to an end for the reader or for the author. Even Mrs. Ramsay, as universal and all-pervading as she seems to be, is still at times an object, albeit a revered object. Woolf had seen in that shadow of her mother someone whom she wished to grasp; someone whose blessing she desired. But that need has been laid to rest.

Now, others are apprehended as ends in themselves. However, the characters of The Waves are best understood by their relationship to each other. In spite of the fact that their subjectivity is fully respected . . . fully acknowledged, they are not to be understood only in terms of their own motifs or concerns; they are best understood in their relationship to one another. They help each other to define themselves, to realize themselves. They enrich each other by extending the gifts of their perception and understanding. They enlarge each other by existing in the others' consciousness. . . . They define each other's limitations but also, they

extend the boundries of consciousness by their shared existence.

While I felt that it was fruitful in Mrs. Dalloway and To The Lighthouse to give some biographical information, not to "explain" the novels, but rather to explain the sense I had of necessity, or urgency behind the author's desire to recapture some part of her past, to transcend or transfigure it, I have no such feelings about The Waves. Certainly Woolf has taken parts of her characters from the personalities of her friends and family, and I will indicate where I think she has done this, but it is not, I feel, illuminating in itself to do so. There is not much of value to be learned by drawing such comparisons here, because there is no sense of the author's having some strong emotion attached to the characters' relationship to her . . . there is no "her." She is her characters; they are their own author. Whereas before, one felt she had a strong desire to come to grips with something in her past that had troubled her, a need to embrace, with love and understanding, something that eluded her, there is nothing like that evident in The Waves. The tone is quite disinterested. There is no sense of having to recapture anything, unless perhaps, life itself.

Woolf has taken parts of her friends and family and woven them into her characters' personalities . . . some

seem more directly "lifted" from real life than others . . . Bernard seems to be Desmond McCarthy, who was both charming and witty, a brilliant conversationalist whose friends tried desperately to get him to write a novel, and finally even hired a stenographer to take down his elusive wit. Foregetful, beset by indecision, a mass of seemingly infinite creative potential, he expended it all in conversation and charm. He was much-beloved, but left nothing behind.

Bernard is the spokesperson for the group insofar as he seems the most detached, the most dispassionate, the most easily entertained, rather than distressed, by the vicissitudes of life. And he is the one Woolf chooses to do the summing up at the end of the story.

Although each of the characters is treated not only empathetically, but sympathetically, nevertheless it is Bernard's voice, Bernard's perceptions, which seem to be closest to those of his creator.

I would designate Bernard as the most perceptive voice of any of Virginia Woolf's characters, not only in comparison to the rest of the characters in TW, but anywhere. Certainly Lily Briscoe is terribly perceptive, as is the narrator of To The Lighthouse. But one judges an intelligence by the questions it asks; while Lily's question is: "Why create?," Bernard's question is the more fundamental: "Why live?" Bernard seems to know

more about the nature of nature than the narrator of To The Lighthouse (who seems still to bear Nature a slight grudge or resentment for having left her out of its "plans") . . . he styles it "stupid" . . . he is angry with Susan for submitting to the "stupidity of nature."

The difference between Bernard and the rest of them is his willingness to face reality . . . he really sees "what habit covers."³ He sees ". . . to the bare bottom."⁴ And he goes on living, he goes on making friends and phrases, rejoicing in his "ring of light." The poignancy of his fate is that it is he who has always sought out someone with whom to share the grate, the circle hanging in its "loop of gold," he, who has always "gone with his kind," faces his death alone--uncomforted by any companion--and unsupported by any illusion.

Bernard, the valuable story-teller, is Woolf's strongest self. He reveals to us her reasons for living, at least, he seems to be the one who epitomizes her feelings about life. He is the one in whom she places her confidence . . . if reality is not trustworthy, then let us "reduce it to order." If we cannot trust life itself to give us a meaning, then it is for us to endow life with meaning. "Let us oppose ourselves to this illimitable chaos!"

I jumped up, I said, 'Fight.' 'Fight,' I repeated. It is the effort and the struggle, it is the perpetual warfare, it is the shattering and the piecing together--this is the daily battle, defeat or victory. . . . The trees, scattered, put on order; the thick green of the leaves thinned itself to a dancing light, I netted them under with a sudden phrase, I retrieved them from formlessness with words.⁵

Bernard thinks to himself:

I . . . evoked to serve as opposite to myself the figure of Rhoda . . . always with fear in her eyes . . . she had killed herself. 'Wait,' I said, putting my arm in imagination . . . through her arm . . . these men are your brothers. In persauding her I was also persuading my own soul.⁶

Bernard seems to be Woolf's self that persuaded her to continue to live . . . the self that rejoiced in earthy things, beauty, warmth, color, pleasure in company . . . the self that lived because life was good, the sun hot, not because there was any "purpose" to action . . . any imprint the course of history would take from our actions.

Rhoda and Bernard are diametrically opposing personalities in the book; they are also the two sides of Woolf's personality. Rhoda, who "cannot make one moment merge with the next,"⁷ who craves solitude and flees from life and finally commits suicide, seems a more tangibly obvious version of Woolf's most vulnerable self than Septimus. Rhoda is the composite of all Woolf's fears in dealing with people and with life; she

feels herself "plucked at" by indifferent glances; she feels that even her friends are crueler than "old torturers" because they will see her fall (into despair) and not keep her from falling. She has no confidence that the human race is marching forward to a brave destiny; she sees no rational plot or design in all its flurried activity. The human beings whose glances pin her down are despicable: cowardly, they are too afraid to be different to even "pin a blue feather to a hat,"⁸ all alike, they feared originality, daring, courage, and tried to bend her to be like them. Fearful of being torn to bits, she tries to masquerade as ordinary, but dreams obsessively of oblivion. She is unable to believe in any tomorrow; therefore, she is unable to take any real decision in shaping her life. Rhoda has the least confidence of any of the six that she will find a dwelling place in their hearts; perhaps she does not want even that. It is she who thinks, "we place a square upon an oblong; very little is left outside." When a life goes out, there is nothing left but the memory of its illumination.

Rhoda is Woolf's most vulnerable and fragile side; her extremely tenuous sense of self is apparent in this passage:

. . . I have no face. I am like the foam
that races over the beach or the moonlight

that falls arrowlike . . . on a spike
of the mailed sea-holly, or a bone or
a half-eaten boat.⁹

Woolf, like Rhoda, recalls being unable to cross a puddle that lay in her path. The difference is that Rhoda's experience is supposed to happen to her when she is in her teens; Woolf's happened when she was six or seven.

. . . in the middle, cadaverous, awful,
lay the grey puddle in the courtyard . . .
I came to the puddle. I could not cross
it. Identity failed me. We are nothing,
I said, and fell. I was blown like a
feather. I was wafted down tunnels. Then,
very gingerly, I pushed my foot across. I
laid my hands against a brick wall. I
returned very painfully, drawing myself
back into my body over the grey, cadaverous
space of the puddle.¹⁰

This brief reference to a similar experience occurs in
"A Sketch of the Past."

There was the moment of the puddle in the
path, when for no reason I could discover,
everything suddenly became unreal; I was
suspended; I could not step across the
puddle; I tried to touch something . . .
the whole world became unreal.¹¹

She was unable to explain her paralysis and fear, but part of her vulnerability to events apparently lay in the fact that she felt "she had no body" . . . her sense of self was very imperfect and tenuous. She says again and again, of Rhoda, that she had to "bang herself against something hard" to bring herself back into the body. This numbness was perhaps a defense against

getting hurt, but it was an unsatisfactory defense, for it left her without a clear sense of self, of a clear sense of diversion between the outside world and her inside world.

Yet there are moments when the walls of the mind grow thin; when nothing is unabsorbed, and I could fancy that we might blow so vast a bubble that the sun might set and rise in it and we might take the blue of midday and the black of midnight and be cast off and escape from here and now.¹²

Rhoda's bubble (that appears on p.331 of The Waves) had its forerunner years ago.

Hewet proceeded to think:

"The truth of it is that one is never alone, and one is never in company," he concluded.

"Meaning?" said Hirst.

"Meaning? Oh, something about bubbles--auras--what d'you call 'em? You can't see my bubble; I can't see yours; all we see of each other is a speck, like the wick in the middle of a flame. The flame goes about with us everywhere; it's not ourselves exactly, but what we feel; the world is short, or people mainly; all kinds of people."

"A nice streaky bubble yours must be!" said Hirst.

"And supposing my bubble could run into someone else's bubble--"

"And they both burst?" put in Hirst.

"Then--then--then," pondered Hewet, as if to himself, "it would be an e-- nor-- mous world," he said, stretching his arms to their full width, as though even so they could hardly clasp the billowy universe, for when he was with Hirst he always felt unusually sanguine and vague.¹³

Apparently this image was one that occurred to Woolf rather early . . . the most striking thing about the two quotes is the difference in the visions of possibility

which they reveal . . . especially considering the settings in which the two characters find themselves. Hewet, in TVO, is part of a novel where the characters are not very close to each other, and are not seen as particularly empathetic by their author. Rhoda was created by a novelist who felt great empathy with her characters, but Rhoda's vision is far more modest (if that is the word) than Hewet's . . . he hopes to merge entirely with another personality (or even personalities); she acknowledged the illusion.

The imagery that runs through Neville's speech evokes both death and love. The love is homosexual love, and is suggested by the testicular imagery of his first sentence. "I see a globe hanging down against the enormous flanks of some hill."¹⁴

This is very abstract; later on he will become more explicit. Naked boys playing together sprawling in the dust, or squirting each other with hoses, romp through his thoughts. Death is his real fear and his real obsession and the sexuality is an escape from his awareness of this. His first lengthy speech runs thus:

. . . I heard about the dead man . . . He was found with his throat cut. The apple-tree leaves became fixed in the sky; the moon glared; I was unable to lift my foot up the stair. He was found in the gutter. His blood gurgled down the gutter. His jowl was white as a dead codfish. I shall call this stricture, this rigidity, 'death among the

apple-trees' forever. There were the floating, pale-grey clouds; and the unintelligible obstacle," I said. And the others passed on. But we are doomed, all of us by the apple trees, by the immitigable tree which we cannot pass.¹⁵

Neville cannot come to terms with that horror; "The ripple of my life was unavailing" . . . all his life he will seek to escape the knowledge of his own death by the attempt to lose himself in sexual passion. In the opening sequence, his last line, "Suddenly a bee booms in my ear, It is here; it is past"¹⁶ brings to mind Shakespeare's line from Romeo and Juliet, "Death . . . hath sucked the honey of thy breath" a metaphor which compresses the themes of sexual love and early death into one neat image. Woolf is drawing upon the power of that image for her purpose here.

Neville's "solution" to the fear of death is eros:

I see everything--except one thing--with complete clarity. That is my saving. That is what gives my suffering an unceasing excitement . . . since I am, in one respect, deluded, since the person is always changing, though not the desire, and I do not know in the morning by whom I shall sleep at night, I am never stagnant; I rise from my worst disasters, I turn, I change.¹⁷

Even the reality of Percival's death is blunted by sentimentality--"Come pain, bury your fangs in my flesh . . ."¹⁸ He seeks to numb himself to the real horror of death by wallowing in the pain. It is not who the person really is that interests him, hence the failure

of his love, but the script, rather what function will the person play for him? Neville seeks the awareness of his sensuality as a narcotic against anxiety.

Neville:

We look at each other; see that we do not know each other, stare, and go off. Such looks are lashes. I feel the whole cruelty and indifference of the world in them. If he should not come I could not bear it.¹⁹

Neville's response here reminds one of Rhoda . . . yet she fears everyone; Neville can go on because the role is more important to him than the actor. It does not matter who plays the part so long as he keeps to the script Neville has designed for him . . . perhaps that is why the actors keep moving on . . . they wish to be regarded as separate persons and not part of Neville's script.

Neville is probably at least part Lytton Strachey... his homosexuality, his literary brilliance, his homeliness and oddity . . . all these would be Lytton. Louis may be partly Leonard, though more heavily disguised. . . his difference, his strangeness for Virginia stemmed from his Jewishness; Louis is different because he is a "colonial." Leonard's father left his family in dire straits, not by financial failure, but by dying. Leonard, too, was a brilliant scholar. His exile, however, was not to an office in Fleet Street, but to

the remotest ends of the empire. The arthritis in Louis' hands may be similar to Leonard's nervous tremour . . . which eliminated him from military service in World War I.

Woolf believed poets to be special creatures, who, because of their gifts, have roots which extend deeply into the past, and who can therefore speak with authority about the truth of the human condition. In a letter to a young man who was starting out on such a career, she writes, "You come of a very ancient race, so treat yourself with respect."²⁰

That both Louis and his author thought he had a more noble calling than that of merchant-prince is indicated by this reverie:

. . . if now I shut my eyes, if I fail to realize the meeting-place of past and present . . . human history is defrauded of a moment's vision. Its eye, that would see through me, shuts--if I sleep now, through slovenliness, or cowardice, burying myself in the past, or in the dark; or acquiesce, . . . or boast . . . Then I shall grow bitter.²¹

He knows he has the ability to produce something that will add to the intellectual treasure of human culture; he knows also that not to use it is to become envious of those who have made use of their capacities.

Louis, in moments of detachment, can reflect:

These hard thoughts, this envy, this bitterness, make no lodgement in me. I am the ghost of Louis, an ephemeral passer-by, in

whose mind dreams have power, and garden
 sounds when in the early morning petals
 float on fathomless depths, and the birds
 sing. I dash and sprinkle myself with the
 bright waters of childhood. Its thin veil
 quivers. But the chained beast stamps and
 stamps on the shore.²²

His self, his physical body and its function in the world
 are still chained to his ambition and bitterness. Louis,
 at the end of his life, has not proved to himself what
 the others know about him all along; his superiority and
 pre-eminence. He is still intimidated by headwaiters;
 he still cannot allow himself any personal luxury. While
 he dresses impressively for his public, he still retires
 every night to his garret in the somber London rooftops,
 and still tries to forge that clear ring of poetry, but
 his life, the circumstances of life kept his whole soul
 from concentrating on that one effort. And great art
 requires a great effort.

Louis is aware of the valuelessness of the purely
 material life, of its aimlessness, of its mean standards
 of "success," how shoddy it is. Against the scruffy
 backs of shop-men jabbering over their wares, he sees
 the shadows of hundreds of their predecessors from past
 ages unaware, as Louis is aware, of eternity breathing
 down their necks.

I see the gleaming tea-urn; the glass cases
 full of pale-yellow sandwiches; the men in
 round coats perched on stools at the counter;
 and also behind them, eternity. It is a
 stigma burnt on my quivering flesh by a

quivering flesh by a cowed man with a red-hot iron. I see this eating-shop against the packed and fluttering birds' wings, feathered, folded, of the past.²³

Yet, he cannot disdain them and their values completely. He detests speaking and calling attention to his accent. Knowing the waitress to be ignorant, he cannot, nevertheless, shrug off her scorn. Louis is concentrated power, chained by his ambition and insecurity to the conquest of material wealth, as the "great beast," the elephant, is chained; born to wander free, his longings are a poet's longings. He evades his true calling to "forge a ring of poetry like clear steel."²⁴ The shadow that falls on his path is the shame of his father's financial failure. To allay that gnawing pain, and the humiliation of being a colonial, never at his ease, he spends his energy accumulating capital.

Susan, whose "maternal passion" the author styles both "bestial" and "beautiful" has characteristics undoubtedly drawn from Virginia's elder sister. Rather, it might be more accurate to say that Susan's characteristics are based on Virginia's imaginative version of her sister. Everyone who knew Virginia well remembered her as having a penchant for making up characters for people whom she hardly knew; and then behaving as if they really were the fanciful characters she had invented . . . or spun, out of her ceaselessly frothing

imagination. That she did this to her family for fun or mischief is a matter of record, too . . . although she probably had a clearer idea of where fact left off and fantasy began . . . in their cases. Virginia tended to exaggerate Vanessa's solicitude for her children. "You would fry us all to cinders to provide an afternoon's pleasure for Angelica!" (I don't know what brought that on; apparently Virginia was feeling slighted.) There is supposed to be a deliberately anti-intellectual quality about Susan. "The only sayings I understand are cries of love, hate, rage and pain."²⁵ Whether this is due to a kind of jealousy of the maternal condition, or whether (more probably) the author's deepest sense about motherhood is that it is incompatible with the kind of dedication needed for intellectual endeavor, or whether it is simply because Woolf needed to simplify or reduce each of her characters to his or her "essence" in order to make it possible to easily identify each one. And Susan's essence is her maternity. Completely rooted in the earth, she is wild and maternal and untamable as a cat . . . a kind of glorious earth-mother, powerful and generative, she seems a pagan goddess and is one of Woolf's most beautiful and unforgettable creations.

She is one of "the shadows of people one might have been"²⁶ highly romanticized; a self Woolf would not have minded becoming, but only in her imagination. The only

concession to complexity is that Susan is aware of a lack in herself; she yearns for an intelligence more subtle than her own, a sensitivity concerned with more ephemeral things and less tied to necessity.

One of the most remarkable things, in fact, about these characters is that they convince us that they are complex, many-facted, capable of speaking with great depth and feeling about any human emotion, but to keep them easily identifiable, Woolf has distilled their personalities to one over-riding aura. Bernard is sociable and talkative; Louis is morose and ambitious; Neville is gay and romantic, or, as Bloomsbury would have put it: a high-brow bugger; Jinny is a sensualist; Rhoda is terrified. "Jinny" is the kind of person Virginia envied--especially in her youth-gay, flirtatious, frankly sensual, completely at ease in body and proud of its feminine allure, she represents a mode of being that was completely closed to her author. Unlike Neville, she is not a romantic, she is merely amorous. A female Don Juan, her reason for existence is solely to enjoy the pleasures of the flesh.

Jinny, in her amorous adventures, seems most unlike her author in her frank pursuit of physical lust. However, she shares with her a Wolfish hunger for surface fact and information about people.

One must be quick and add facts deftly, like toys to a tree, fixing them with a twist of the fingers, . . . that man is a judge; and that man is a millionaire, and that man, with the eyeglass, shot his governess through the heart with an arrow when he was ten years old. Afterwards he rode through deserts and dispatches, took part in revolutions and now collects materials for a history of his mother's family . . . That little man with a blue chin has a right hand that is withered. But why? We do not know.²⁷

Woolf herself had a passion for factual information about people, and those who remember her questions felt that she really had a sense of being remote from other human beings, cut off from them, and collected information about them for the same reasons that an entymologist collects information about butterflies. Jinny continues, "I drop all these facts--diamonds, withered hands, china pots and the rest of it, as a monkey drops nuts from its naked paws."²⁸

When the narrator is Jinny (a diminutive for Virginia) she speaks so that we can understand, tolerate, and empathize with her point of view. This certainly shows a largeness of spirit in Woolf, for nothing more remote from her mode of behavior could be imagined.

Jinny's conduct has a kind of gallantry in it; she is not about to dissolve into passivity and self-pity, even when she faces old age.

Little animal that I am, sucking my flanks
in and out with fear, I stand here, palpitating,
trembling. But I will not be afraid.
I will bring the whip down on my flanks. I

am not a whimpering little animal making for the shadow. It was only for a moment, catching sight of myself before I had time to prepare myself for the sight of myself, that I quailed . . . But now I swear making deliberately in front of the glass those slight preparations that would equip me, I will not be afraid . . . I am a native of this world, I follow its banners. How could I run for shelter when they are so magnificently adventurous, daring, curious, too, and strong enough in the midst of an effort to pause and scrawl with a free hand a joke upon the wall? . . . Let the silent army of the dead descend. I march forward.²⁹

While it is true that Woolf does not admire Jinny's solution to dissolution as she does Bernard's, nevertheless there is compassion and empathy for this kind of life, even though it revolted her sensibilities.

It is in the relationship of human beings to one another that Woolf sees the most exciting possibilities. When two or more people can communicate, share their perceptions, a realm of potential far richer than that of the single, individual consciousness is open for exploration. Bernard is the first to discover this.

' . . . when we sit together, close, . . . we melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory.'³⁰

The aura that two people create seems to open up new territory, where each can be more than he was alone.

Conversely, each can learn to define himself by comparing himself with the other. Susan would like to possess Bernard, to lay hold of him, but it is his nature to "slip away, making phrases." While she will

love Bernard to the end of her life, they will not marry, because they are incompatible. But Susan, through Bernard, is made aware of some need in herself which her way of life will not satisfy. Her love for Bernard may be a yearning for that part of herself which must go unsatisfied because life is short and its luxuries are usually sacrificed to its necessities.

In this exchange, Neville also learns how he is different from Bernard; he wants everything tidy and orderly. At the end of the story, when Bernard is summing up, he remembers that Susan's tears made him "melt."

Neville did not melt. 'Therefore,' I said, "I am myself, not Neville," a wonderful discovery.³¹

Just as Bernard discovers that he is "not Neville" as he scampers off (with Neville's knife) to comfort Susan, he performs a similar service for Neville, who finds himself exasperated by Bernard's inability to follow something through in an orderly manner.

As young men, Neville and Bernard wonder at the effect each has on the other. Neville, in particular, is ambivalent about the effect of his friend upon him. He is aware that he needs the relationship with a dispassionate observer; completely immersed in his own subjectivity, he cannot be sure that the poems he has written are meaningful to anyone besides himself. Yet

the contact is painful just because he is no longer sole judge of himself. He is not at liberty to ignore certain facets of existence which Bernard's presence will illuminate for him. These may be exciting; they may also be painful. Bernard, also, is equivocal about their meeting. He is suddenly aware of his untidiness (even the willow tree, in Neville's presence, takes on a carefully groomed aspect, "a combed look").³² Yet he flowers in the presence of another person. His conversation bubbles up, he becomes more delightful to himself now that he has someone whom he must entertain; he becomes far more in company than he could ever be alone. Yet after Neville leaves, he is still tingling with the humiliation of being ". . . contracted by another person into a single being."³³

After Neville leaves, Bernard thinks to himself:

How grateful . . . to feel returning from the dark corners in which they took refuge, . . . those familiars, whom, with his superior force, he drove into hiding . . . For I am more selves than Neville thinks. We are not as simple as our friends would have us to meet their needs. Yet love is simple.³⁴

There is a constant tension between the need to be realized, that is, made real, in company with others, and the need to be the deepest, most extensive self one can be . . . and that self can be realized only in solitude. The ideal state would be to attain all that potential, to realize all that potential in company.

The closest the characters come to feeling that is when they meet in love and friendship. The tag line to Bernard's ruminations (above) is perhaps not true in itself, but the juxtaposition of that thought with Bernard's recovery of solitude suggests that he is aware that his friends can see him as more than a limited, precisely defined, and tightly bounded creature only when they extend to him the same generosity they extend to themselves in solitude . . . that is, the willingness to suspend judgment and to avoid pinning him to the wall with definitions. He wishes Neville to regard him, not as a means to an end, but as an end in himself.

The first of the two dinner-parties, before Percival sets out for India, is a drama wherein Woolf sets forth her vision of the possibilities and limitations of human love.

The source of Percival's power is that the others allow themselves to be magnanimous in his presence. That each of them loves Percival is reason enough to feel that he or she is safe from hurt in this circle, and when he arrives, they drop their defenses and speak freely as they did when they were children. In this atmosphere of trust and sharing, Bernard notes that the centerpiece has become:

Now a seven-sided flower . . . a whole
flower to which every eye brings its
own contribution.³⁵

From this point, each one goes on to speak openly of himself to the others, making the kind of revelation possible only to trusted friends who are in the mood to hear such confidences.

That is the composite flower. Each is privileged to hear the fullest possible expression of the others' perceptions; each one feels himself free to give and free to accept. Finally, even this expansive and delightful egotism ceases. Significantly, it is Rhoda, the most fragile of them who notes how beautiful the room has become. When she speaks again, it is with a sense of peace and rapture in company which she does not show again in the entire book.

. . . we undulate and eddy contentedly.
Comfort steals over us. Gold runs in our
blood . . . the heart beats in serenity,
in confidence, in some trance of well-being,
in some rapture of benignity.³⁶

This moment that they have made of Percival is one where the love they feel for each other is made real.

Part III: Ethos

Chapter 11

Did Virginia Woolf Have a "Philosophy of Life?"

I use the term "ethos" to define Woolf's outlook, rather than call her fundamental system of values a philosophy--which people say she has not got--and indeed, her values do conflict, if they are carried to extremes.

The paradox inherent in Woolf's outlook is that while she maintains that one of the highest values of human existence is the ability to look out upon the world without preconceived notions of reality, whether cultural or emotional, to perceive it without reference to human purpose, and thus strip away what she calls the "cotton wool" of accumulated meaning and perhaps get a glimpse of "reality," she knows full well that such an achievement is not within the grasp of everyone, and if it were--assuming that such a vision of the world were not too arduous or too frightening to maintain for any length of time--communication--upon which she also places the very highest value--would become impossible.

In fact, "communication" seems too cold a word for the kind of sharing of perceptions Woolf envisioned;

"communion" ... seems more appropriate. She felt that existence unshared and uncommunicated lost its value, for only by attempting--at least--to expand the individual consciousness could human beings transcend their finite condition. I would go further and say that she believed this sharing of self with others constituted the only sort of immortality we can aspire to.

This tension between the individual's need to perceive and define his own reality, and the equally strong need to communicate experience, to be understood and accepted, is a concern that runs through every novel from The Voyage Out to The Waves. And while the yearning for communion never diminishes, the realization that it is extremely rare in any case, and impossible in any absolute sense, grows with her over the years. For the image of two personalities whose union might result in "an e--nor--mous world"¹ appears very early and is echoed by Rhoda--who desperately needs acceptance and sharing and communication--in The Waves.²

Woolf, in her youth, had a rather superior attitude, and one senses in The Voyage Out that she thought a love which never rose above conventional expression or conventional forms was perhaps not worth expressing (for the characters in The Voyage Out spend a great deal of time on what love is, what friendship means, what human beings are worth, after all), but as she matured, she

came gradually to feel that all human love and kindness is precious, and that while those who are equipped to do so should serve as visionaries for the rest of us, they are not necessarily better human beings than those with more limited imaginations, if the less imaginative have kindly dispositions.

Having said this about Woolf in her maturity, I would hasten to add that she took no such position as a matter of policy; she never talked about "loving mankind" or failed to be impatient with mediocrity or stupidity. She demanded the same things of her intimates that she demanded of herself: that they be alert, witty, amusing . . . that they try to wring from life all that it could yield. Her humanity shows forth in her art, however.

While in her youth, especially, she tended to mock those who were comfortably blinkered by their biases or prejudices from comprehending just how precarious the human condition really is; she also came to acknowledge her need of them. They provide the cozy shelter in which she can take refuge from time to time . . . even if it's too confining a space in which to live. For example, St. John Hirst, wrung out by the emotional horrors of Rachel's death and Terence's breakdown, can be consoled by sympathetic people in the hotel lobby, and their sympathy is probably more soothing than their

empathy would be. Clarissa can find shelter in the limited universe of her husband, and Bernard says, "What a sense of the tolerableness of life the lights in the bedrooms of small shopkeepers give us."³ Woolf herself wondered (in her diary) why she felt such pity for humanity when most of them seemed on the whole to be busy, cheerful, content. While it cannot be denied that her outlook is elitist, it is not snobbish.

Woolf certainly did have an ethic--the humanitarian one--and I believe it distressed her not to have any rational basis (such as a belief in a transcending order of reality where good reigned) for it. Irony presupposes a better world than the world one is faced with, and tyranny of any sort roused Virginia to sardonic fury, all the more formidable for its being so carefully controlled. For an example, see Three Guineas.

While it is true that Woolf cannot be said to have a "system of ethics," nowhere in her writing does she give serious credence to any but humane values. Her beliefs about life would preclude any abuse or waste of it, her own or others.

I have sketched out in the following pages--very briefly--what I consider to be the author's strongest ethical concern in each of the novels. Sometimes the emphasis is on sharing perceptions, on communication;

sometimes the stress is laid on the individual's task to create and communicate meaning. To some extent she seems to fluctuate between these concerns.

In The Voyage Out the emphasis seems to be on the desire to share meaningful experience, a yearning for understanding. But the attempt breaks down, probably because the author perceived herself as a person so unique and so remote from others as to be almost unintelligible. The novel's conclusion seems to be that we cannot hope for much more than the comfort that ordinary sympathy and kindness can bring . . . real communion is doomed to failure.

In Jacob's Room there is an even stronger emphasis on the importance of communication. The implication is that breakdown of communications, whether on an individual or national scale, can lead to chaos.

In Mrs. Dalloway, she lays stress upon the problems of perception and raises the question of what is the true reality. She unites this with the problem of the individual's need for love (Clarissa sacrifices some of the integrity of her perceptions for the luxury of sharing Richard's life, and having his affection). However, Woolf is no longer content with mere kindness. She shows that it isn't enough in all cases by depicting what happens to Septimus--who is not understood, although he is loved.

In To The Lighthouse, she takes control of her universe. The difference between this novel and its predecessors is that the theme is the triumph of the individual vision. She stresses, not what the individual needs from others, but what the individual must do for himself. The love in this novel is not the love that is lacking, but the love that is freely extended. Mrs. Ramsay's love for her family and friends, Lily's passionate affair with her art, the love of the characters for their world and for each other, and the author's love for them and for the world all combine to create a sense of triumph and serenity in spite of tragedy and chaos.

The Waves is a balance of these two concerns; the need to realize one's existence as a solitary individual in relation to the universe, and the need to communicate--as fully as one is able--this self to other selves. I would almost go so far as to call it a religious book, were it not for the fact that Woolf disbelieves in any transcendent reality. It is the most complete expression of her belief about the human condition.

Chapter 12

The Voyage Out

The Voyage Out is a rather grim novel, dark with premonitions, brooding, boredom, and troubled reflections upon the meaning of life, or the lack thereof. Both Hewet and Mrs. Ambrose at different times state their belief that we can hardly be certain of anything, certainly not justice; both Helen and Terrence subscribe to very bleak views of the human condition.

. . . Mrs. Ambrose was not severe upon individuals so much as incredulous of the kindness of destiny, fate, what happens to people in the long run, and apt to insist that this was generally adverse to people in proportion as they deserved well. Even this theory she was ready to discard in favor of one which made chaos triumphant, things happening for no reason at all, and everyone groping about in illusion and ignorance.¹

This pessimistic outlook does not change during the course of the novel; rather, the events seem to reinforce it. However, Woolf's main question in The Voyage Out is not if life is good--at this point she obviously thinks it isn't--but how we are to get through it all.

Over the years, Woolf's outlook remained ironic; whether she was humourously or bitterly ironic depended on the circumstances of her life at the time, but always she felt that the world was a travesty of what, in the

light of reason, it ought to be. However, in none of her later novels is she as bitter-seeming as she is in her first one.

It took Virginia Woolf a long time to recover from the feeling that nature, "the gods," or some inhuman force was actively seeking her out for its fury. Given the unusually bad run of luck the Stephen family suffered during her youth, this is quite understandable. Her youthful sense was that she was being "singled out" for suffering and that this suffering conferred on her a kind of importance.

When she was young, she had some very strong presentiments of a cosmic consciousness. She refers to this quite explicitly in Moments of Being when she recalls her emotions following her brother's death.

. . . even if it was painful, yet it meant that the gods (as I used to phrase it) were taking one seriously; and giving one a job which they would not think it worthwhile giving, say, to Meg and Imogen Booth . . . ? I had my visual way of putting it. I would see (after Thoby's death) two great grind-stones . . . and myself between them. I would typify a contest between myself and "them"--some invisible giant. I would reason, or fancy, that if life were thus made to kick and rear, it was, at any rate, the real thing . . . this . . . increased my feelings of my own importance. Not in relation to human beings: in relation to the force which had respected me sufficiently to make me feel what was real.²

Her sense of things seemed to be that only sensitive and intelligent people suffer deeply, that the mass of

humanity is too coarse, too dull for tragedy to leave any mark, or to shake their belief in a beneficent providence.

However terrifying it may be to feel oneself the special antagonist of fate, there are consolations. Prometheus has the kind of grandeur that even more favored gods might envy.

When, after losing one beloved member of her family after another, she found the blank, indifferent sky did not share her grief, but continued as blue and sunny as ever, it seems understandable that she would treat the notion of a pathetic fallacy with some bitterness and resentment--and this is the most readily available explanation for the austerity with which nature is presented in The Voyage Out.

That philosophy which professed to discover in natural phenomena evidence for supernatural wisdom or goodness is raked backwards over the coals in this first novel and treated disdainfully in her subsequent ones. However much her feelings toward nature changed over the years, the implied author of Virginia Woolf's novels never felt that human beings could look to nature either for evidence of divine goodness or for answers to the human predicament.

In The Voyage Out, Woolf is battling with every weapon at her disposal against organized religion, smug

adherence to convention, and the happy notion that all things work out well for those that love God.

Her mockery of organized religions seems to have been in defiance of the malevolent supernatural force. In fact, her very fury with conventional religion suggests that she strongly desired some kind of logical basis for her humanism, for her belief that human beings should be decent to each other.

Woolf's opinion of organized religion is not precisely respectful. Helen Ambrose, whose opinion the author admires, has this rather trenchant remark on the question of her children's learning to pray: "I would rather my children told lies."³ To continue on the subject of religion, Woolf includes a lengthy sermon by the Rev. Mr. Box, whose opinion she admires no more than she admires his appearance.

Standing in the pulpit he looked very large and fat; the light coming in through the greenish unstained windowglass made his face appear smooth and white like a very large egg. [His sermon] rambled with a kind of amiable verbosity from one heading to another . . . each of us, who dropping a little word or a little deed into the great, universe alters it; yea, it is a solemn thought, alters it, for good or evil, not for one instant, or in one vicinity, but throughout the entire race, and for all eternity.⁴

Without dwelling overlong on the suggestive sound of "dropping a little word" into the vastness of the universe, it is quite apparent that Woolf considers

both the man and his theme ridiculous, and his pomposity appears almost obscene.

The question is, what did Virginia Stephen believe in when she wrote The Voyage Out? Not God, apparently, nor Providence, nor the beneficence of nature--or even in the "fundamental goodness" of human beings. At least, she didn't seem to believe in their goodness at the outset of the novel. One senses that she is trying very hard to believe in their fundamental goodness; certainly she is saying we have only each other, and that it behooves us to try and take care of each other, but even her most amiable relationships are shown as rather impotent and lacking in basic understanding, the characters have difficulty communicating their most important feelings to each other, and romantic love is seen primarily as fuel for anguish when catastrophe strikes. While it seems fairly clear that Woolf believed that human beings should try to take care of each other, and be concerned about each other, because they are really all alone in a blind and unfeeling universe, nevertheless, she seems ambiguous and ambivalent about how much human beings can do for each other . . . in other words, perhaps the question is not: ought we to love one another? but rather: does it matter whether or not we love one another?

Just before starting out on his picnic, Hewet:

. . . wondered why on earth he had asked these people, and what one really expected to get from bunching human beings together in a crowd.

'Cows,' he reflected, 'draw together in a field; ships in a calm; and we're just the same when we've nothing else to do. But why do we do it?--is it to prevent ourselves from seeing to the bottom of things' . . .⁵

This is a question Terence can ask, in his rather superior way, because he is comfortable, and happy, and in a mood to question the ordinary things in life. Philosophical questions are usually raised when one's emotional energies are not being drained in some sink of catastrophe. As a matter of fact, the novel's conclusion does seem to be that the main reason human beings "draw together" is precisely to keep from "seeing to the bottom of things." That phrase will crop up again in Bernard's thoughts: "I see to the bare bottom. I see what habit covers."⁶

At the end of the novel, after Rachel's death and Terence's apparent mental breakdown, St. John Hirst enters the cozy warmth of the hotel and finds that:

. . . the shock of the lamp-lit room, together with the sight of so many cheerful human beings sitting together at their ease . . . after the long days of strain and horror, overcame him completely.⁷

Human beings are lamentably imperfect, but they have only each other for value and comfort. Unfortunately,

the message we get about "love" is highly ambiguous, at least it is ambiguous about romantic love.

Woolf's final scene suggests that we can be of comfort to each other in a kind of dispassionate, distant way. Attempts at intimacy are doomed to failure, especially sexual intimacy. The only times Rachel and Terence feel really close and united are the times when one of them is sleeping, and, most memorably, Terence feels that his union with Rachel is finally perfect when she is dead. Woolf seems to distrust intimacy, especially the intimacy of sexual love. She is willing to regard her fellow humans with tolerant affection and compassion only if they don't crowd in too closely. She finds their "otherness" intolerable, but she also finds loneliness intolerable--she is torn between need and mistrust.

Woolf, at the conclusion of the novel, shows that human beings can be some comfort to each other, if in a limited way. It all depends on the situation; if you wish to do something extraordinary or unconventional all the cheerful, vulgar, well-meaning people in the area will come in a body to sit on your head; but if you have been struck by tragedy, ordinary kindness can be a great comfort.

Chapter 13

Jacob's Room

The concluding pages of The Voyage Out would lead us to believe that Woolf has decided in favor of human company. However, the circumstances that lead St. John Hirst to take comfort from his fellows are rather extreme and terrible. Under more normal conditions, perhaps he would find nothing to say to them. Jacob's Room returns to the question of communication; how much is it possible to share?

. . . letters are venerable; and the telephone valiant, for the journey is a lonely one, and if bound together by notes and telephones we went in company, perhaps--who knows--we might talk by the way.¹

There are numerous references to letters and letter-writing in Jacob's Room; Betty Flanders is an indefatigable correspondent. Fanny is despondent because she never hears from Jacob. When he is abroad, Jacob's letters to his mother are conspicuous for what they don't say. The problem of communication is raised not only in letters (the novel opens with a letter), but also there are many scenes where the characters are tongue-tied--usually Jacob is one of them--and things which ought to be said don't get said.

The metaphors for natural things in Jacob's Room (as I pointed out previously) are all lively, homely ones. Many of them suggest scampering animals or playful children. When the narrator looks at something in nature, she relates it, not only to human activity, but to the cheerful, happy aspects of life. There is nothing grim or foreboding in the smiling face of the landscape in Jacob's Room. While she does acknowledge that it is possible to see things in this way (gloomily), she doesn't try to make the reader feel it.

. . . who, save the nerve-worn and sleepless,
or thinkers standing with hands to the eyes
on some crag above the multitude, see things
thus in skeleton outline, bare of flesh?²

While she may be glancing back on her horrific experience of 1913-1915 (nerve-worn and sleepless), it seems that another factor may be that the war made human-created disaster and disorder far more threatening to her than nature's indifference . . . which may have seemed welcome relief to hostile armies. Nature's cruelty is far less horrible than man at war.

It seems almost as if the author--who had feared the chilly indifference of the non-human world, and shivered at its immensity, now feels more isolated from human beings who lack the willingness or ability to communicate meaningfully. She turns back toward that indifference for healing, and reads into its beauty a sentient, human-seeming quality.

Woolf is in the mood to enjoy the bright carnival of life for its own sake.

But colour returns; runs up the stalks of the grass; blows out into tulips and crocuses; solidly stripes the tree trunks; and fills the gauze of the air and the grasses and pools.

The Bank of England emerges; and Monument with its bristling head of golden hair; the dray horses crossing London Bridge show grey and strawberry and iron-coloured. There is a whir of wings as the suburban trains rush into the terminus. And the light mounts over the faces of all the tall blind houses, slides through a chink and paints the lustrous bellying crimson curtains; the green wineglasses; the coffee-cups and the chairs standing askew.

Sunlight strikes in upon shaving-glasses and gleaming brass cans; upon all the jolly trappings of the day; the bright, inquisitive, armoured, resplendent, summers day which has long since vanquished chaos; which has dried the melancholy medieval mists; drained the swamp and stood glass and stone upon it; and equipped our brains and bodies with such an armoury of weapons that merely to see the flash and thrust of limbs engaged in the conduct of daily life is better than the old pageant of armies ³ drawn out in battle array upon the plain.

This last paragraph seems to be a kind of mock-heroic celebration of civilization She sounds playful, but somehow serious, when she says the ". . . summer's day . . . has long since vanquished chaos." The summer's day which she refers to is the brisk, bustling city day of London. The aspects of civilization which Woolf finds glorious are those ordinary rites and duties that everyday people perform; nurse-maids, merchants,

apple-vendors and lawyers all seem to her, as they keep the wheels of commerce turning and the surface of civility polished, more admirable than any "old pageant of armies." The "chaos" to which she is referring is undoubtedly the chaos which follows the collapse of these kindly rituals . . . as happens in war. Her comments on war and the human beings who engineer war are quietly bitter. The understated suffering in this passage is easy to overlook:

Like blocks of tin soldiers the army covers the cornfield, moves up the hillside, stops, reels slightly this way and that, falls flat, save that, through field-glasses, it can be seen that one or two pieces still agitate up and down like fragments of broken match-stick.⁴

She deals briefly and sarcastically with those who worship force. The gathering of statesmen who decide in favor of war is comprised of very uninspiring persons. While it is true that brute force rules the affairs of humanity, Woolf sees it as despicable to admire it or promulgate it as a creed.

. . . by men as smoothly sculptured as the impassive policeman at Ludgate Circus. But you will observe that far from being padded to rotundity his face is stiff from force of will, and lean from the efforts of keeping it so. When his right arm raises, all the force in his veins flows straight from shoulder to finger-tips; not an ounce is diverted into sudden impulses, sentimental regrets, wire-drawn distinctions. The buses punctually stop.⁵

The attributes of the soldier (usually acquired in battle) are mocked by applying them to a policeman directing traffic. This sarcasm is directed toward those who believe that brute force is the vital stuff of life, rather than curiosity and creation . . . that the humane arts are weak and flimsy compared to the arts of war. Her implicit criticism of such a philosophy is that it takes a great deal more restraint and self-control and self-discipline to maintain peace than it does to break into a state of war.

Her passage is a sardonic comment on the misdirection of human energy. The "unseizable force" comes hurtling not through the novelists' nets but through people's lives because they can't manage to communicate on matters of importance, whether on the personal or the public level. Perhaps her implicit point is that, if people spent more time attempting to communicate, and less time training young men to "suffocate uncomplainingly together,"⁶ the world would be a better place.

Perhaps the philosophical message of Jacob's Room is that we should turn to the natural world with a heightened awareness; a heightened appreciation of its beauty. What is, finally, the message of Jacob's Room unless it is a kind of chiding for the stupidity that ignores the gifts of life, delight in natural beauty, and burrows into the grubby concerns of power-seeking.

This joyous message (like Septimus'!) seems to be inharmonious with the mood of irony . . . her urge to make a comment on the war, and perhaps to make a comment on her brother's death. These last two themes generate a great deal of conflict, for Thoby Stephen, Virginia's beloved elder brother, carried within his character all the destructive dragon's teeth of the patriarchal culture that Virginia saw as directly responsible for war.

Perhaps the flaw of the book is that she seems to wish that we see Jacob's life as a waste, a misdirection of the vital flow of energy that should enrich his life and the lives of others, and yet she does not really establish a strong enough sense of Jacob as a really lovable individual, so that we mourn his death and are deeply moved by it . . . we do not suffer a sense of loss in his death, hence our bitterest feelings are diluted . . . we should feel that his death in war is an outrage . . . instead, we feel no more than "tsk, tsk . . ."

His solemn self-importance and his unquestioning acceptance of his pre-eminence in his society as belonging to the natural order of things seem to be his worst faults. He is willing to die to maintain that order . . . he seems to be one of those about whom Russell wrote: "People would rather die than think, and do."

Chapter 14

Mrs. Dalloway

The underlying theme of Mrs. Dalloway seems best expressed in one of Woolf's notable exceptions to her rule not to discuss her work in letters. In a Christmas letter to Gerald Brennan (who had written and asked her about Jacob's Room) she illuminates, not only some of her feelings about Jacob's Room, but also seems to be looking ahead to what will become Mrs. Dalloway. I will quote rather more than I need to, as her letter is delightful.

You said you were very wretched, didn't you? You described your liver rotting, and how you read all night, about the early fathers; and then walked, and saw the dawn. But were wretched, and tore up all you wrote, and felt you could never, never write--and compared this state of yours with mine, which you imagine to be secure, rooted, benevolent, industrious--you did not say dull--but somehow unattainable, and I daresay, unreal. But you must reflect that I am 40; further, every 10 years, at 20, again at 30, such agony of different sorts possessed me that not content with rambling and reading I did most emphatically attempt to end it all; and should have been more thankful, if by stepping on one flagstone rather than another I could have been annihilated where I stood. I say this partly in vanity that you may not think me insipid; partly as a token (one of those flying signals out of the night and so on) that so we live, all of us who feel and reflect, with recurring cataclysms of horror:

starting up in the night in agony. Every ten years brings, I suppose, one of those private orientations which match the vast one which is, to my mind, general now in the race. I mean, life has to be sloughed: has to be faced: to be rejected; then accepted on new terms with rapture. And so on, and so on; till you are 40, when the only problem is how to grasp it tighter and tighter to you, so quick it seems to slip, and so infinitely desirable is it.¹

Mrs. Dalloway clasps, grasps at life so intensely that it can't breathe in her; she has to be able to distance herself from her own immediate life, from her fear of death, and this she does by imaginatively experiencing Septimus' death. Awareness of one's own approaching death is paralyzing; but awareness of death in the abstract can be liberating.

Woolf's attitude towards Septimus' madness is ambiguous, ambivalent, and paradoxical. Through him, she expresses her feelings about madness and "mad" people. On the one hand, Septimus' version of reality is, in its clarity of perception, superior to the perceptions of the so-called "sane;" on the other, he lacks the rational apparatus to interpret the extraordinary powerful sensations he experiences in such a way that he can go on living. He cannot distinguish (for he has no boundaries between himself and the rest of the world) between the cruelty of his own self-accusation and self-hatred and the cruelty of anonymous

humanity. "Human nature . . . was on him--the repulsive brute, with the blood-red nostrils."²

We see Septimus responding to nature as if it were conscious of him. Human beings frighten him; he cuts himself off emotionally from everyone, including his wife, and projects onto the natural world those emotions which can find no outlet in relationships with humans. He is alternately delighted and horrified by natural phenomena. Sometimes nature soothes him; sometimes "they" threaten to devour him in flames. He is oversensitive to all stimuli. When he sees a plane sky-writing, he thinks:

So, thought Septimus, looking up, they are signaling 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.³

In her diary, Woolf wrote that Septimus' mad scenes made her mind "squint so badly" that she could hardly face writing them. Yet, unlike the delirious visions of Rachel--which were rather depressing--Septimus' are exuberant. We are told that Septimus went through a state of non-feeling; but when he is presented to us he is extraordinarily sensitive to

stimulation. His ultimate suicide tells us that he feels terror, horror, and ugliness with the same sharp intensity that he perceives beauty; but apparently, for artistic reasons, Woolf wants us to see his super-real, super-sensitive response to natural beauty.

In this novel, unlike The Voyage Out, Woolf shows the raptures of the insane; the ecstasy ordinary sights and sounds can produce in someone who has temporarily (through drugs) or permanently lost touch with what most of us call reality. We are told that Septimus sees horrors, sees the flames of hell, sees the dead walk, but these are not described. His visions seem not only more exciting, but more vivid and real than the world of the sane. Septimus, during the few hours we are acquainted with him, perceives beauty and receives sensuous pleasure from it, with an intensity that is overwhelming to the reader as well as to him. The sensuous impressions of the sane characters (in comparison) seem to come through a pane of thick glass.

His delight in the natural beauty around him, his sensitivity to it, is, in his author's eyes, evidence of his superiority. Woolf, through Septimus, says, "Look! Look around you! This is reality! This is what it means to be alive! If you were to be buried tomorrow, would you not weep with ecstasy and anguish for the beauty of the world?" Although we are given to

understand that his reality is not "normal;" Woolf apparently believes "much madness is divinest sense."

On the other hand, this ecstasy stems from Septimus' lack of definable boundaries; he seems disembodied altogether. He, like the author in her childhood, enjoys ecstasies disconnected from his own body. Septimus believes his ecstasy to be a gift from the gods: "they are signalling" to him. He feels that his alternating states of joy and anguish are ordained by heaven. Woolf, apparently, sees his belief as the symptom of a disordered mind: this conviction that there is a supernatural order of reason, goodness, truth, beauty overseeing the lot of imperfect humanity. One infers that Woolf believes it not only futile but dangerous to imagine supernatural forces which concern themselves with human activity . . . that way lies madness.

As the saner half of the dyad, Clarissa also delights in the beauty of the morning.

Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street. For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh; but the veriest frumps . . . can't be dealt with . . . by Acts of Parliament for that very reason: They love life . . . in the bellow and uproar . . . in the triumph and jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June.⁴

Clarissa believes her delight to be irrational because there is all that pain and suffering underneath it: the aftermath of war, her illness, her approaching death; yet that awareness is what sharpens her perceptions.

It was June . . . And everywhere, though it was still so early, there was a beating, a stirring of galloping ponies, tapping of cricket bats; Lords, Ascot, Ranelagh and all the rest of it; wrapped in the soft mesh of the grey-blue morning air, which, as the day wore on, would unwind them, and set down on their lawns and pitches the bouncing ponies, whose forefeet just struck the ground and up they sprung, the whirling young men, and laughing girls in their transparent muslins who, even now, after dancing all night, were taking their absurd woolly dogs for a run.⁵

It seems that perhaps both Woolf's and Clarissa's sense of the beauty of life grows more poignant with their awareness of death:

The sight of two coffins in the Underground luggage office I daresay constricts all my feelings. I have the sense of the flight of time; and this shores up my emotions.⁶

The perception that life is exquisite and fleeting and must be enjoyed now, for it will not wait, creates in the perceiver a sense of panic and numbness. Frantic to lay hold of the life that remains to her, cut off from her sensual self, unable to own it without another's permission and scorning to make such a bargain, Clarissa is numb, frigid, wooden . . . unable to feel the pageant that passes before her, until she confronts the extremity of death. She has felt numb, deadened, until

she imaginatively grasps the reality and finality of Septimus' death . . . and this in its stark contrast, frees her to feel. The desire for death is usually a mask for an intense desire to live.

Clarissa stands alone at the end, newly aware of her love of life, and what it is worth to her to go on living. She is aware, through her awareness of his sacrifice, how much life means to her . . . she relishes it, understanding that it is all we know, all that matters.

If there is a "message" in this novel, perhaps it is that we ought to love one another . . . at least to be sensitive to one another. People cringe from empathizing with pain, but Clarissa empathizes with Septimus' pain and death, and it frees her; she realizes what she has been struggling to realize the whole day; she is alive.

Chapter 15

To The Lighthouse

In To The Lighthouse, Woolf expresses a kind of philosophy, or rather a code, of human behavior. Interspersed with the shifting and variable points of view are several which Woolf sees as more important than the rest. The most important perceptions are reflected in the minds of Mrs. Ramsay, Lily Briscoe, and the narrator. From these emerge a kind of philosophy of human behavior, a way of seeing the universe and of defining human relatedness or unrelatedness to it.

Woolf extends "artistic creation" not only to Lily Briscoe, but also to Mrs. Ramsay, whose highly developed social instincts and unerring tact draw out the best in the people around her and make their brief intercourse delightful, an occasion which they will remember all their lives and a standard by which they can judge the best of civility and civilization.

Woolf, is again enveloped by a sense that nature is eternal, and humans ephemeral. There seems an even stronger sense that time is slipping away, but in spite of the anxiety and tension before that feeling, there is a sense that it is possible to make something eternal

out of ephemeral materials. In spite of the fact that whenever nature is alluded to, the characters seem to be measuring their own short lives against it, there is a sense of serenity pervading the book.

When Mrs. Ramsay is busy with her household chores, and preoccupied, the sound of the waves on the beach seems soothing, like a "cradle song," but 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 as ephemeral as a rainbow--this sound which had been obscured and concealed under other sounds thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror.¹

The stress on human temporality makes human happiness seem more precious.

Now all the candles were lit up, 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 and a table, for the night was now shut off by panes of glass, which far from giving any accurate view of the outside world, rippled it so strangely that here, inside the room, seemed to be order and dry land; there, outside, a reflection in which things wavered and vanished, waterily. Some change went through them all, as if . . . they were all conscious of making a party together in a hollow, on an island; had their common cause against all that fluidity out there.²

Here the stress is upon shared perceptions and on communion . . . that is, loving communication. There is nothing stable or enduring in the non-human world; humans alone pretend that there is such a thing as continuity. While this distorts the view of the outside world (rippled it so strangely) it also allows people to communicate not only ideas, but values, and to impose order. Or what seems to be order. Woolf's point is that humankind can impose its own values on its own world (that is, the world that each of us carries in his head). While nature is not concerned with mercy or justice, we can attempt to be.

She says of the mood: ". . . it partook of eternity." It had some stability for all those present at the table that evening would remember it. It suggests that human civilization, in spite of its being woven of such gossamer tissue as good manners, kindness, and hospitality, is enduring in memory . . . perhaps because of its rarity. Mrs. Ramsay's exertions are exhausting for her. It is easier to shovel manure in the rain, where one is at least free to curse one's lot, than to smile, and be gracious, and give another human being one's full attention at the end of a fatiguing day. How much easier to Mr. Ramsay, who slumps frowning--possibly groaning--at the other end of the table, waiting for someone to cheer him up. Yet

all that we have and are and all that is good in human relations must depend upon the willingness to make the effort, to be forbearing and decent to each other.

Woolf's concerns are really quite practical; her ethic is simply that human beings should behave well towards each other, that they should recognize their common cause against "all that fludity out there," against chaos, moral chaos, specifically. She certainly thought we have a choice. Certainly she did not feel we are predestined to anything. While she appreciated the fact that all human activity, measured against the slow turning of the stars, is inherently futile, nevertheless, she would no doubt say with Auden, "I don't measure time that way, nor do you."³

The dinner party is one aspect of Mrs. Ramsay's fullness of life . . . her creativity and her sociability. The mystical experience of the lighthouse is another. Mrs. Ramsay renews herself in solitude. She sinks into herself when she is alone. As a "wedge-shaped core of darkness" (which Lily Briscoe perceives to be her essence) she can leave behind the boundries wherein others confine her by their demands, their expectations. Only in solitude can she replenish herself. Her husband is sterile (figuratively, that is) and has no gift of self to offer.

It is rather his "barrenness" that must be made "fertile" and like the "rosy-flowered tree," Mrs. Ramsay gives because it is her nature to give life and sustenance, as a tree puts forth flowers and fruit. She is the Tree of Life, the primordial symbol of the mother-goddess. Beauty and warmth and nourishment are in her being, and Mr. Ramsay drinks her almost dry. That he has a part to play which he is either shirking or simply incapable of performing is suggested by the phallic symbol of the lighthouse, and the sensuously erotic way in which the "long, steady," beams from the lighthouse stroke and stroke Mrs. Ramsay with "silver fingers" until:

. . . the ecstasy burst in her eyes and
waves of pure delight raced over the floor
of her mind and she felt, It is enough!
It is enough!⁴

This lyrical passage portrays an orgasm of the spirit, a mystic's experience of rapture.

Mrs. Ramsay's receptivity to the beauty of the sea is a metaphor for her receptivity to her own feelings. She has no fear that she has missed anything life has to offer. She has been filled brim-full with joy . . . since she has been able to open herself to happiness, she can confront her death without fear. Virginia Woolf wrote that her mother said of herself that she had been as happy and as unhappy as it was possible to be, and

that must be part of the source for this revelation of Mrs. Ramsay's personality. However, it is difficult to believe that Woolf could have written a passage like this one without having experienced the sensations she describes. As Woolf became more and more aware of how life ended, she seems to have come to the realization that the end of life is joy; that triumph consists in letting oneself be seized by ecstasy and carried to dizzy heights despite the danger.

In this novel, she takes control of her universe. She claims for herself the right to define her relationship to reality, and the necessity for human beings to define themselves as humane, as having concerns which nature takes no note of. This perception of the universe as indifferent is liberating, for it frees the individual from the tyranny of fear, from the foreboding that something malevolent is waiting to destroy whatever happiness one can attain to. Mrs. Ramsay is free to experience ecstatic moments because she is courageous enough to see that whether or not she suffers or rejoices is all one to the unseeing eye of God.

In the second section, "Time Passes," Woolf seems to be questioning the relationship of the natural world to the human world. Again, she feels a little cheated, a little bitter. One senses some yearning for a

transcendent order to manifest itself, some meaning that would make the suffering fall into place, in a pattern.

This is perhaps the first place where Woolf deals so bluntly and at such length with the topic of man's relationship to the rest of the cosmos . . . and poses the eternal questions: can the secret of human fate be found by studying the non-human world? Is our fate written on the wind? Can we trace our future in the waves, or in the stars? Can we put our questions to such oracles as birds in flight or look for answers in the entrails of slaughtered beasts? The answer is no... The task for human beings is to make an answer for themselves, rather than find it . . . it is not outside of them, but within them. The mind has powers that can create an answer, but it takes effort.

That dream, of sharing, completing, of finding in solitude on the beach an answer, was then but a reflection of a mirror, and the mirror itself was but the surface glassiness which forms in quiescence when the nobler powers sleep beneath?⁵

As far as Woolf is concerned, there is no such thing as an "objective relationship to reality." When Andrew Ramsay remarks, "Think of a kitchen table . . . when you're not there [to see it]," he shows the influence of his father's mind. It is Mr. Ramsay's (and Leslie Stephen's) belief that there is a reality whose meaning can be perceived or known apart from the

observer. His daughter would not deny that there is a world apart from the world of human concerns, but she would insist that we cannot know anything about it. That what we really know is only the state of our mind in the process of observing the world. However, in spite of the more modest claims she makes about knowing the nature of the universe and the primacy she asserts for the human mind, she makes a more radical demand on the powers of the observer . . . she insists that one face the world--insofar as this is possible--without its gauze of history. She did not believe in "revealed truths" in the sense that religious minds have believed in them, but she did believe that there was a reality outside ordinary human perception, and that it could shock the mind into a new understanding of the world. She writes that the "shock . . . is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words."⁷ This suggests, not that she has understood what "objective reality" apart from the human mind actually is . . . but that she has divested herself of preconceptions--her own or others' so that she is able to create fresh versions of reality . . . to be receptive to change. The most valuable thing about such epiphanies--for her--was the sensation of having seen through the "cotton wool" from the surface of the world, so that it appeared starkly and sharply new, seen through

her eyes alone, through her senses, clean and untarnished.

Of course, one's perceptions about one's proper role in life naturally will color the way the world is perceived--and vice-versa. If the world is perceived as static and unchanging, then it is perfectly proper to accept roles passed down from our predecessors--to allow ourselves to be defined by those who have gone before us--because they know more about the world than we do since they have had more time to observe it. However, if it seems that the essence of life is change and instability--if the nature of the world cannot be grasped or defined because it will not hold still long enough for the observer to understand it--then we must constantly reassess our lives and our purpose.

Chapter 16

The Waves

The Waves is Woolf's attempt at discovering the essential truth of all human life; her attempt to reveal what we all share. It does precisely the opposite thing expected of the traditional novel. Instead of allowing us to vicariously live another's life, to identify with another character, it forces us to separate ourselves from those lives it suggests, and also from our own lives. Rather than showing us lives which we might want or not want to live, it removes us from particular environments, and from the necessity of identifying with an insistent ego-bound pursuit of something or other. This faceting of drives and ambitions does not really allow us to identify with any one of them. It makes us pause, consider, and reflect upon the multiplicity of drives that impel us all onward. Also, it separates impulse from action. In the normal course of things, we tend to imagine that our goals are the source of our energy, rather than see the goal as an excuse for expending our energy. We tend to locate power and energy in our goals, rather than see the goal as a somewhat arbitrary choice (insofar as our life-energy is concerned) and the life-energy as needing some

outlet. Woolf's allegory of the wave--of the rising and ebbing tide--for human energy forces us to see how our blood-pulse carries us, lifts us, not compelled from without, but impelled from within.

Woolf, now, exhaults as well as fears the non-human within us. The warm flesh, alive and full of energy, delights our consciousness in its full strength, and terrifies us as its energy dwindles and fades. The human relationship to nature takes on the aspects of a martyrdom. Woolf celebrates our human immersion in nature as the church celebrates Christ's immersion in flesh, but whereas traditional religion sees the immortal spirit trapped in the mortal flesh, Woolf sees that matter is eternal and our minds, ephemeral: a reverse. Our only transcendence consists of the fact that though we are one with material nature, we alone are capable of--briefly--transcending it. The Waves is both a celebration of oneness with nature and a celebration of the human ability to transcend that nature.

Woolf believed in the human ability to transcend our lot by sheer courage--to be able to look dissolution squarely in the face without cringing behind any illusion of another, better world beyond this one. Our immersion is the opportunity for heroism . . . it is an occasion for greatness . . . because we may choose to roll with the waves like Susan--to let ourselves be

borne on them, like Jinny . . . like a gull, an animal . . . to be scattered . . . to choose oblivion immediately like Rhoda, to be willfully blind, like Neville . . . or to deny our singleness . . . like Louis . . . or finally, we can face squarely the fact of our own dissolution, unsupported by the illusion that anyone or anything is in control of this whirl and sift . . . and yet go on.

The novel, or "play-poem" as Woolf called it, is divided into nine sections, corresponding (roughly) to one and one-half hour intervals from sunrise to sunset. The characters enter the story as children and leave it at the day's end as aged men and women, thus heightening the sense of human temporality.

The six voices speak as one. They intertwine, they almost persuade us that they have no creator, so completely do they dominate our perceptions. What Bernard says of himself (in his summing-up) could be Woolf speaking of herself as narrator or author.

. . . 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 . . . I cannot find any obstacle separating us. There is no division between me and them. As I talked I felt, 'I am you.'¹

By merging and intertwining of personalities and perceptions, Woolf makes the point that all human beings are one; no thought or action can be directed only

outward, every human action is in some way directed towards oneself. Love or hatred can be displaced, anger can be directed towards another, but that other is only a symbol of oneself.

Perhaps, also, the emphasis on what we share as human beings is an attempt to transcend the pain of impending oblivion. If one can realize that each "I" is only part of the voice of life, that each "I" is the same, but for accidents or particulars of inheritance and place, then dying is not so frightening . . . "I" will continue in another form . . . it may not be my form, but the essential "I" will continue.

As Bernard ruminates among the empty cups, the leavings of a meal with a friend, he blesses his solitude, it frees him from the task of being a particular "self," a particular form different from other forms. He is weary of living, of the struggle of living, and if he is freed from the necessity of being an individual, life is not so burdensome, nor death so terrifying.

'Let me now raise my song of glory. Heaven be praised for solitude. Let me be alone. Let me cast and throw away this veil of being, this cloud that changes with the least breath, night and day, and all night and all day. While I sat here I have been changing. I have watched the sky change. I have seen clouds cover the stars, then free the stars, then cover the stars again. Now I look at their changing no more. No

one sees me and I change no more. Heaven be praised for solitude that has removed the pressure of the eye, the solicitation of the body, and all need of lies and phrases.'²

But he is not allowed to sit quietly. Life is not over yet. The head waiter comes and bustles around, gathering up his things, forcing Bernard to resume his individual life.

'Curse you then. However beat and done with it all I am, I must haul myself up, and find the particular coat that belongs to me; must push my arms into the sleeves; must muffle myself up against the night air and be off. I, I, I, tired as I am, spent as I am, and almost worn out with all this rubbing of my nose along the surfaces of things, even I, an elderly man who is getting rather heavy and dislikes exertion must take myself off and catch some last train.'³

Bernard leaves the restaurant; it is nearly dawn. He tries to shield himself from the dawn with reason, tries to recover that sense of selflessness that descended when he sat alone, faceless, and in solitude. "There is some sense of the break of day. I will not call it dawn."⁴ Bernard perceives with heartbreak that renewal of the day does not bring any renewal for him but the renewal of a failing struggle. The brightening of color in the day no longer is no longer echoed by the surging of his youthful blood, his strength. But even without strength, he feels joy, the excitement rising in him with the sun; he forgets his desire to be

done with it all and rest. He will not shield himself from this painful ecstasy: this desire for life and yet more life.

'And in me too the wave rises. It swells; it arches its back. I am aware once more of a new desire, something rising beneath me like the proud horse whose rider first spurs and then pulls him back. What enemy do we now perceive advancing against us, you whom I ride now, as we stand pawing this stretch of pavement? It is death. Death is the enemy. It is death against whom I ride with my spear couched and my hair flying back like a young man's, like Percival's, when he galloped in India. I strike spurs into my horse. Against you will I fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!'⁵

Bernard's triumph at the moment of his death is that he meets it head-on, not turning away from the terror of that encounter. He chooses full awareness of what awaits him in the space of an instant, and riding on the ecstasy of his challenge, full of defiance, he has no room in him for fear or despair. Death takes him at the crest of a breaking wave, and he dies without knowing defeat.

Conclusion

Woolf's journey from 1915 to 1931 was--artistically and emotionally--a gradual crescendo. She enjoyed her friends, her literary fame, her family, and the problems of the world around her did not seem severe enough to claim her attention--at least not to the point of draining her creative energy. With the onset of the depression and the rise of Hitler, Woolf began to feel despair about the future. The books that she wrote after The Waves are less poetic and imaginative (with the exception of Between the Acts) than they are political and polemical. While Three Guineas--damned as it was and damned as it is--has a kind of unity, The Years was an attempt to combine a novel with an essay, and it became rather unwieldy. In "The Leaning Tower"--an essay addressed to the rising generation of poets--Auden and Spender included--Woolf says that their poetry seems to be declaimed from a podium (I am paraphrasing) and addressed not to an individual, but to a crowd. It was not poetry but oratory. This same criticism could be extended to include most of Woolf's work after 1931, if not all of it. No single work after The Waves has the imaginative exhilaration of her previous novels. The short work finished just before her death, Between the

Acts, is very rich, but very dark. Its imagery seems to originate not from a sense of human possibility, but human limitation.

The critics have accused her of being politically insensitive to the world around her, but she was in fact too aware of what was taking place around her to devote herself to purely imaginative works. She possessed an enormous range of vision, in which various political allegiances seemed symptoms of humanity's difficulties, rather than possible cure-alls. For that aspect of her work she has been condemned by those to whom political allegiances are everything.

The death of her beloved nephew, Julian Bell, in the Spanish Civil War must have certainly undermined her sense that the future was going to be one worth living for.

Virginia, as she had done during her father's terminal illness, put aside her own shock and grief to tend Vanessa after her son's death. Vanessa literally collapsed from grief and was an invalid for several months. It was largely due to Virginia's efforts that she did not herself commit suicide.

While Virginia could not be optimistic about her future, she continued her struggle with her present, right up until the time of what looked to be the end of civilization as she knew it. Moreover, at a time when

invasion by the German army seemed inevitable, it became apparent that her sanity was again failing her. She began hearing voices again, as she had before her other breakdowns. And this time she felt that she was too old and too tired to recover from such an ordeal.

At the outset of this study, I stated that the reason I found Woolf so admirable was not only her literary genius, but her personal courage. Almost certainly, the question of her suicide will arise at some point, perhaps as evidence that she was lacking in sufficient courage to face another bout of madness. While that prospect may have been enough in itself to cause her to take her own life, there was a good deal more to cause her distress. As Spater and Parsons point out:

By the end of June 1940 a seemingly invincible German army had conquered Poland, Norway, Denmark, Holland and Belgium and swept through northern France, driving the British out of Dunkirk, to stand fifty miles from the Sussex coastline.¹

Airraids (Rodmell was in the path of the German bombers) continued night and day, sometimes as many as six in twenty-four hours. Food and fuel were in short supply. The defenders erected their pill-boxes and fences of barbed wire around the Woolf's house. Leonard had stored a sufficient supply of petrol in the garage for them to commit suicide in the event that the Nazis

succeeded with their invasion. Adrian Stephen had supplied them with lethal doses of morphia. Suicide, then, was something that they had already considered as preferable to what they would have to endure at the hands of Hitler's thugs.

On March 20, 1941--eight days before Virginia's suicide--her sister wrote her a letter urging her to take better care of herself, for:

What shall we do when we're invaded. . .
if you are a helpless invalid.²

Vanessa may have later regretted her way of expressing herself. Notice she does not say "if" but "when." In light of the circumstances in which Virginia found herself losing touch with reality, it does not seem far-fetched to point out that she was sane enough to realize that she would not only be unable to help herself or anyone else, but that her continued existence--as an invalid--would be a positive danger to the lives and welfare of those she loved most. It may be that some could say that suicide, under any circumstances, is a cowardly act, but in this instance, it may have been motivated by a certain altruism. Perhaps not. At any rate, when one considers the many ways there are to die, one wonders why Virginia chose the way she took. Perhaps Leonard kept the morphia under lock and key.

After writing her brief farewell to Leonard, she went out:

. . . taking her walking-stick with her and making her way across the water-meadows to the river . . . Leaving her stick on the bank she forced a large stone into the pocket of her coat. Then she went to her death, "the one experience," as she had₃ said to Vita, "I shall never describe."

Is it possible that the woman who described Bernard's last conscious moment had determined that her death would be one she chose? Seeing death as both imminent and inevitable, would she not prefer to meet it on her own terms? War and madness together had flung down the gage; she took it up and it was up to her to decide how best to meet them.

Woolf's suicide was not the reckless waste of life that it would have been in her youth; she was fifty-nine years old. On the day when she walked down into the river, even the most determined optimist could not have seen a cheerful option open to her . . . and Virginia Woolf could never have been described as a determined optimist. She had too vivid an apprehension of all pain and suffering for that. But that is not what we remember her for; we remember her joyous perception of life; for her quickening our senses to the passing moment; for her celebration of life.

Her moments of triumph are remarkable because there is no shadow of anguish when her characters seize

the moment in a burst of ecstasy, when they let themselves be carried on the crest of joy. It is true that each knows the nature of "nothingness" and their triumphs are more dazzling because it is in the individual's free gift of himself to the living moment that he triumphs over his finitude and his end. It is in having the courage to let go of everything and fall free that the being soars, in spite of his miserable end, in spite of his clay, in spite of his pain and torment, and fear and loneliness.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

1. Woolf, Virginia. The Voyage Out. 1915; rpt.
New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1948.
2. _____. Jacob's Room. 1922; rpt.
New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1959.
3. _____. Mrs. Dalloway. 1925; rpt.
New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1953.
4. _____. To The Lighthouse. 1927; rpt.
New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1955.
5. _____. The Waves. 1931; rpt.
New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1959.
6. _____. The Moment and Other Essays.
New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1948.
7. _____. A Writer's Diary. Edited by Leonard Woolf.
New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1954.
8. Woolf, Virginia and Strachey, Lytton. Virginia Woolf & Lytton Strachey: Letters. Edited by Leonard Woolf and James Strachey. Hogarth Press/Chatto & Windus, 1956; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957.
9. _____. Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings. Edited & with Intro. by Jeanne Schulkind. New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976.
10. _____. The Letters of Virginia Woolf. Vol. I: 1888-1912 (Virginia Stephen). Edited by Nigel Nicholson and Joanne Trautmann. New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975.
11. _____. The Letters of Virginia Woolf. Vol. II: 1912-1922. Edited by Nigel Nicholson and Joanne Trautmann. New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976.

12. _____. The Letters of Virginia Woolf. Vol. III:
1923-1928. Edited by Nigel Nicholson and
Joanne Trautmann. New York and London:
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977.

Secondary Sources

1. Auerbach, Eric. Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature. Translated by Willard R. Trask. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1953.
2. Bell, Quentin. Virginia Woolf: A Biography. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972.
3. De Beauvoir, Simone. The Second Sex. 1949. Translated by H. M. Parshley. New York: Knopf, 1953.
4. Guiget, Jean. Virginia Woolf and Her Works. Translated by Jean Stewart. New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1966.
5. Kamiya, Miyeko. "Virginia Woolf: An Outline of a Study on her Personality, Illness, and Work." Confinia Psychiatrica. (Tsuda College, Kodaira, Tokyo), 8 (1965), 189-205.
6. Love, Jean O. Virginia Woolf: Sources of Madness and Art. Berkeley, Los Angeles London: University of California Press, 1977.
7. Poole, Roger. The Unknown Virginia Woolf. London New York Melbourne: The Cambridge University Press, 1978.
8. Rose, Phyllis. Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf. New York: The Oxford University Press, 1978.
9. Spater, George and Ian Parsons. A Marriage of True Minds: An Intimate Portrait of Leonard and Virginia Woolf. New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977.

ENDNOTES

ENDNOTES

Introduction

- ¹Moments of Being, p. 118.
- ²The Voyage Out, p. 224.
- ³Mrs. Dalloway, p. 86.
- ⁴Moments of Being, p. 67.
- ⁵A Writer's Dairy, p. 70.
- ⁶Woman of Letters, p. xiii
- ⁷Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. I, p. 414.
- ⁸Jean Love. Virginia Woolf, p. 220.
- ⁹Ibid.
- ¹⁰Bell, Quentin. Virginia Woolf, Vol. II, p. 6.
- ¹¹The Unknown Virginia Woolf, p. 182.
- ¹²op. cit., pp. 182-183.
- ¹³Confinia Psychiatrica, p. 198.
- ¹⁴op. cit., p. 202.
- ¹⁵Bell, Quentin. Virginia Woolf, Vol. II, p. 42.

Chapter I

The Voyage Out

¹The Heart of Darkness, p. 84.

²Ibid.

³The Voyage Out, p. 272.

⁴op. cit., p. 286.

⁵op. cit., p. 216.

⁶op. cit., p. 326.

⁷op. cit., p. 267.

⁸op. cit., p. 33.

⁹op. cit., p. 277.

¹⁰op. cit., p. 275.

¹¹op. cit., p. 86.

¹²op. cit., pp. 131-132.

¹³op. cit., p. 59.

¹⁴op. cit., p. 91.

¹⁵op. cit., p. 326.

¹⁶op. cit., p. 91.

¹⁷op. cit., p. 31.

¹⁸op. cit., p. 264.

¹⁹op. cit., pp. 210-211.

²⁰op. cit., p. 89.

²¹op. cit., p. 87.

²²op. cit., p. 141.

²³op. cit., p. 270.

²⁴op. cit., p. 267.

²⁵op. cit., p. 211.

²⁶op. cit., p. 82.

²⁷op. cit., p. 81.

²⁸op. cit., p. 328.

Chapter 2 .

Jacob's Room

- ¹Jacob's Room, p. 7.
- ²op. cit., p. 7.
- ³op. cit., p. 13.
- ⁴Ibid.
- ⁵Ibid.
- ⁶op. cit., p. 12.
- ⁷op. cit., p. 132.
- ⁸op. cit., p. 52.
- ⁹op. cit., p. 11.
- ¹⁰op. cit., p. 87.
- ¹¹op. cit., p. 38.
- ¹²op. cit., p. 141.
- ¹³op. cit., p. 98.
- ¹⁴op. cit., p. 42.
- ¹⁵op. cit., pp. 17-18.
- ¹⁶op. cit., p. 118.
- ¹⁷op. cit., p. 148.

¹⁸op. cit., p. 67.

¹⁹op. cit. p. 65.

²⁰op. cit., pp. 118-119.

²¹op. cit., p. 19.

²²Ibid.

²³op. cit., pp. 31-32.

²⁴op. cit., p. 173.

Chapter 3

Mrs. Dalloway

- ¹Mrs. Dalloway, p. 32.
- ²op. cit., pp. 102-103.
- ³op. cit., p. 64.
- ⁴op. cit., p. 99.
- ⁵op. cit., pp. 168-169.
- ⁶op. cit., p. 186.
- ⁷op. cit., p. 44.
- ⁸op. cit., p. 170.
- ⁹op. cit., p. 62.
- ¹⁰op. cit., p. 69.
- ¹¹op. cit., p. 171.
- ¹²op. cit., p. 45.
- ¹³op. cit., p. 43.
- ¹⁴op. cit., p. 44.
- ¹⁵op. cit., pp. 85-87.
- ¹⁶op. cit., p. 54.
- ¹⁷op. cit., p. 44.

¹⁸op. cit., p. 18.

¹⁹op. cit., p. 45.

²⁰op. cit., p. 46.

Chapter 4

To The Lighthouse

¹To the Lighthouse, p. 23.

²A Writer's Dairy, p. 82.

³To The Lighthouse, p. 192.

⁴Ibid.

⁵op. cit., pp. 151-158.

⁶op. cit., p. 160.

⁷op. cit., pp. 33-34.

⁸op. cit., p. 146.

⁹op. cit., p. 191.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³op. cit., p. 192.

¹⁴op. cit. p. 193.

¹⁵op. cit., pp. 192-193.

¹⁶op. cit., p. 199.

¹⁷op. cit., p. 203.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹op. cit., p. 199.

²⁰op. cit., pp. 201-202.

²¹The Moment and Other Essays, p. 15.

²²op. cit., p. 16.

²³To The Lighthouse, p. 241.

²⁴op. cit., p. 279.

²⁵op. cit., pp. 270-271.

²⁶op. cit., p. 256.

²⁷op. cit., p. 255.

²⁸op. cit., p. 284.

²⁹op. cit., pp. 266-267.

³⁰op. cit., pp. 287-288.

³¹op. cit., p. 32.

³²op. cit., p. 81.

Chapter 5

The Waves

¹To The Lighthouse, p. 147.

²A Writer's Diary, p. 143.

³The Waves, p. 332.

⁴op. cit., p. 362.

⁵op. cit., p. 225.

⁶op. cit., p. 226.

⁷A Writer's Dairy, p. 150.

⁸The Waves, p. 225.

⁹op. cit., p. 278.

¹⁰op. cit., p. 194.

¹¹op. cit., p. 227.

¹²op. cit., p. 258.

¹³op. cit., pp. 203-204.

¹⁴op. cit., p. 249.

¹⁵op. cit., p. 269.

¹⁶op. cit., p. 232.

¹⁷op. cit., p. 236.

¹⁸op. cit., p. 245.

¹⁹op. cit., p. 350.

²⁰op. cit., p. 330.

²¹op. cit., p. 184.

²²To The Lighthouse, pp. 97-98.

²³The Waves, p. 182.

²⁴op. cit., pp. 242-243.

²⁵op. cit., p. 219.

²⁶op. cit., p. 224.

²⁷op. cit., p. 266.

²⁸op. cit., p. 267.

²⁹op. cit., p. 377.

³⁰op. cit., p. 306.

³¹op. cit., p. 279.

Part II: Character

Chapter 6

The Voyage Out

¹Virginia Woolf & Lytton Strachey: Letters, p.

²The Voyage Out, pp. 228-229.

³op. cit., pp. 134-135.

⁴op. cit., p. 87.

⁵op. cit., p. 183.

⁶op. cit., p. 101.

⁷op. cit., p. 177.

⁸op. cit., p. 160.

⁹op. cit., p. 105.

¹⁰op. cit., p. 152.

¹¹op. cit., p. 145.

¹²op. cit., p. 309.

¹³Mrs. Dalloway, p. 139.

¹⁴The Voyage Out, p. 309.

¹⁵op. cit., p. 285.

¹⁶op. cit., p. 285.

¹⁷op. cit., pp. 337-338.

¹⁸op. cit., pp. 106-107.

¹⁹op. cit., pp. 154-155.

²⁰op. cit., pp. 108-109.

²¹op. cit., p. 271.

²²Ibid.

²³op. cit., p. 290.

²⁴op. cit., 291.

²⁵op. cit., p. 292.

²⁶Bell, Quentin. Virginia Woolf, Vol. I, p. 209.

²⁷op. cit., p. 211.

²⁸The Voyage Out, p. 302.

²⁹op. cit., p. 216.

³⁰op. cit., p. 242.

³¹op. cit., p. 302.

³²op. cit., p. 303.

³³Ibid.

³⁴op. cit., p. 314.

³⁵Bell, Quentin. Virginia Woolf, Vol. I, p. 143.

³⁶The Voyage Out, p. 320.

³⁷The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. I, p. 394.

³⁸Bell, Quentin. Virginia Woolf, Vol. I, pp. 185-186.

Part II: Character

Chapter 7

Jacob's Room

- ¹A Writer's Diary, p. 22.
- ²Bell, Quentin. Virginia Woolf, Vol. 2, p. 205.
- ³op. cit., p. 160.
- ⁴Ibid.
- ⁵Ibid.
- ⁶Jacob's Room, p. 172.
- ⁷op. cit., pp. 10-11.
- ⁸op. cit., p. 49.
- ⁹op. cit., p. 154.
- ¹⁰op. cit., pp. 72-73.
- ¹¹Mimesis, p. 535.
- ¹²Jacob's Room, pp. 71-72.
- ¹³op. cit., pp. 101-102.
- ¹⁴op. cit., pp. 107-109.
- ¹⁵op. cit., p. 75-76.
- ¹⁶op. cit., p. 107.

¹⁷op. cit., p. 111.

¹⁸op. cit., p. 145.

¹⁹op. cit., p. 170.

²⁰op. cit., pp. 32-33

²¹op. cit., p. 151.

²²op. cit., p. 117.

²³op. cit., p. 152.

²⁴op. cit., pp. 81-82.

²⁵op. cit., p. 105.

Chapter 8

Mrs. Dalloway

¹Mrs. Dalloway, p. 5.

²op. cit., p. 70.

³For a complete exposition of this theory, I found provocative but not entirely convincing, see Roger Poole's recent work, The Unknown Virginia Woolf.

⁴Moments of Being, pp. 68-69.

⁵The Second Sex, p. 316.

⁶op. cit., p. 317.

⁷Moments of Being, pp. 68-69.

⁸Mrs. Dalloway, p. 259.

⁹Love, Jean. Virginia Woolf, p. 214.

¹⁰Moments of Being, p. 69.

¹¹op. cit., p. 130.

¹²The Unknown Virginia Woolf, p. 33.

¹³Moments of Being, pp. 91-92.

¹⁴Mrs. Dalloway, p. 46.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶op. cit., pp. 254-255.

¹⁷op. cit., pp. 46-47.

¹⁸The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. II, p. 6.

¹⁹Mrs. Dalloway, pp. 558-559.

²⁰op. cit., p. 211.

²¹op. cit., pp. 137-138.

²²op. cit., pp. 133-134.

Chapter 9

To The Lighthouse

¹To The Lighthouse, p. 79.

²Moments of Being, p. 2.

³op. cit., p. 40.

⁴op. cit., p. 42. (The answer that Woolf had written was, "She replied that it might be true; she was hard on Stella because she felt Stella 'part of myself'"). P. 96.

⁵op. cit., pp. 29-30.

⁶op. cit., p. 83.

⁷op. cit., pp. 107-108.

⁸op. cit., p. 82.

⁹op. cit., p. 36.

¹⁰op. cit., p. 39.

¹¹op. cit., p. 86.

¹²op. cit., p. 36.

¹³Recollections of Virginia Woolf, p. 73.

¹⁴Moments of Being, p. 81.

¹⁵op. cit., pp. 81-82.

¹⁶To The Lighthouse, p. 86.

¹⁷op. cit., pp. 60-61.

¹⁸op. cit., p. 77.

¹⁹op. cit., p. 78.

²⁰op. cit., pp. 156-157.

²¹op. cit., p. 241.

²²op. cit., p. 170.

²³op. cit., pp. 69-70.

²⁴op. cit., p. 106.

²⁵op. cit., p. 56.

²⁶op. cit., pp. 68-69.

²⁷op. cit., p. 66.

²⁸op. cit., pp. 305-306.

²⁹op. cit., p. 307.

³⁰op. cit., p. 308.

³¹Moments of Being, pp. 124-125.

³²op. cit., p. 126.

³³op. cit., p. 116.

Chapter 10

The Waves

- ¹Virginia Woolf & Her World, pp. 285-286.
- ²The Waves, pp. 343-344.
- ³op. cit., p. 304.
- ⁴Ibid.
- ⁵op. cit., p. 364.
- ⁶op. cit., pp. 311-312.
- ⁷op. cit., p. 265.
- ⁸op. cit., p. 317.
- ⁹op. cit., p. 265.
- ¹⁰op. cit., p. 219.
- ¹¹Moments of Being, p. 78.
- ¹²op. cit., p. 331.
- ¹³The Voyage Out, pp. 108-109.
- ¹⁴The Waves, p. 180.
- ¹⁵op. cit., p. 191.
- ¹⁶op. cit., p. 182.

¹⁷op. cit., p. 265.

¹⁸op. cit., p. 281.

¹⁹op. cit., p. 257.

²⁰Virginia Woolf & Her World, p. 46.

²¹Woolf, Virginia. The Waves, p. 220.

²²op. cit., p. 221.

²³op. cit., p. 241.

²⁴op. cit., p. 292.

²⁵op. cit., p. 266.

²⁶op. cit., p. 377.

²⁷op. cit., pp. 296-297.

²⁸op. cit., p. 298.

²⁹op. cit., pp. 310-312.

³⁰op. cit., p. 115.

³¹op. cit., p. 343.

³²op. cit., p. 232.

³³op. cit., p. 236.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵op. cit., p. 263.

³⁶op. cit., p. 270.

Part III: Ethos

Chapter 11

Did Virginia Woolf Have a
"Philosophy of Life?"

¹The Voyage Out, p. 109.

²The Waves, p. 331.

³op. cit., p. 338.

Chapter 12

The Voyage Out

¹The Voyage Out, p. 221.

²Moments of Being, p. 118.

³The Voyage Out, pp. 26-27.

⁴op. cit., p. 232.

⁵op. cit., p. 127.

⁶The Waves, p. 304.

⁷The Voyage Out, p. 373.

Chapter 13

Jacob's Room

¹Jacob's Room, p. 93.

²op. cit., p. 162.

³op. cit., p. 163.

⁴op. cit., pp. 155-156.

⁵op. cit., p. 56.

⁶op. cit., p. 155.

Chapter 14

Mrs. Dalloway

¹The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. II, pp. 598-599.

²Mrs. Dalloway, p. 139.

³op. cit., p. 31.

⁴op. cit., p. 5.

⁵op. cit., pp. 5-6.

⁶A Writer's Diary, p. 56.

Chapter 15

To The Lighthouse

¹To The Lighthouse, pp. 27-28.

²op. cit., pp. 146-147.

³The Birth of Architecture, p. 1.

⁴To The Lighthouse, p. 100.

⁵op. cit., p. 202.

⁶op. cit., p. 38.

⁷Moments of Being, p. 72.

Chapter 16

The Waves

¹The Waves, p. 377.

²op. cit., p. 381.

³op. cit., p. 382.

⁴Ibid.

⁵op. cit., p. 383.

Conclusion

¹A Marriage of The Minds, p. 181.

²op. cit., p. 183.

³Bell, Quentin. Virginia Woolf, Vol. II, p. 226.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIV. LIBRARIES



31293103903088