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"THE LIGHTS OF THE WORLD HAVE GONE OUT":
A STUDY OF DEATH IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S FICTION

by

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ABSTRACT

At the centre of Virginia Woolf's fiction is a confrontation with death. The presence of death, particularly in *The Voyage Out*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves*, destroys the hypothesis of vital continuity with which her characters attempt to give meaningful order to their lives. Death reveals the contradiction between permanence and transience which influences Woolf's depiction of personality, and her treatment of narrative style. The exploration of death usually takes place in response to the death of one of the characters; although death is used more generally as a metaphor for destruction, disintegration, and chaos. In *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, it is associated particularly with the war.

At the start of her career Woolf's attitude towards death is ambivalent. On the one hand, she recognizes that death is a threat to human meaning and urges resistance; on the other, she uses death to provide her characters with the quiescence and unity they often seek. Each of the novels contains modes of opposition to death. The most important of these are the creation of social and artistic forms, which give life meaning by creating order; and moments of "epiphany" where the characters have a vision of wholeness and can therefore believe that order exists in the world. The four novels move progressively towards a recognition of death as an absolute end which renders all

human effort meaningless. But this recognition is accompanied by a refusal to submit to the threat of chaos which death brings to the human world. *The Waves*, which concludes this movement, contains a powerful affirmation of the value of human life and urges active resistance against death, despite the knowledge that death is ultimately the victor.

Chapter I introduces the confrontation with death, and outlines the approach which will be used in discussing the four novels. The chapters which follow treat each novel separately, but include consideration of the development between them. This development appears in the increasing complexity of response and of resistance to death, as well as in the increasing sophistication of Virginia Woolf's style. Woolf moves from the passive response to death in her first novel, to the heroic defiance of *The Waves*.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Whoever rightly understands and celebrates death, at the same time magnifies life."¹

Virginia Woolf may not always celebrate death, but her best work constitutes an attempt to understand the meaning of death in the human world. This quest for meaning culminates in *The Waves* where man recognizes that death is the sovereign power, and yet refuses to submit to it. This refusal is a powerful affirmation of the value of human life; and Bernard is left, like Camus' Sisyphus, committed to the perpetual struggle: "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy."²

I intend to examine the treatment of death in four of Virginia Woolf's novels: *The Voyage Out* (1915), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and *The Waves* (1931). While the presence of death in her books has been frequently commented upon by critics, I am not aware of any study which considers her work systematically from this perspective.³ The justification for adopting a particular critical approach to an author's work rests upon the insights and understanding it can offer. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that Woolf's persistent

struggle with death and her attitude towards death are decisive factors in shaping the vision of life she presents; and in determining solutions to the questions which recur throughout her fiction.

Bernard Blackstone uses the musical term of "counterpoint" to describe the inter-relationship between life and death in Woolf's books:

For life and death form the inexhaustible counterpoint of her work. Not death coming as the ending to a completed story, but death inexplicable, torturing, making life meaningless; yet also mysterious, fascinating, giving depth to life. From these two strands--a feeling of the richness and beauty of life, and a patient recognition of the sovereignty and cruelty of death--her supreme themes are woven.⁴

When man is faced with the knowledge of his own mortality, the beliefs, ideas and assumptions which normally sustain him are undermined. Woolf's novels, with their concentration upon individual consciousness, are particularly well suited to explore the impact of the recognition of death. The more intensely aware the individual is of his own uniqueness, the more devastating is the realization that he must die.⁵ This realization generally occurs in response to the death of one of the characters in the novels.

The search for meaning is expressed at one level as a search for order: the problem of whether the world outside the individual consciousness follows some design, or is chaotic and destructive, becomes acute when death is

present. Woolf reflects upon this in her diary: "At night L. and I talked of death again, the second time this year: how we may be like worms crushed by a motor car: what does the worm know of the car--how it is made? There may be a reason: if so not one we, as human beings, can grasp."⁶ In her fiction, death is constantly used to explore the question of whether an absolute order or pattern exists, or whether these patterns are entirely constructs of the human imagination which strives endlessly to discover completed forms.

In *The Rebel* Camus describes the human need to impose a shape upon experience, which allows the individual to believe he is master of that experience:

There is not one human being who, above a certain elementary level of consciousness, does not exhaust himself in trying to find formulas or attitudes that will give his existence the unity it lacks. . . . It is not sufficient to live, there must be a destiny that does not wait for death. It is therefore justifiable to say that man has an idea of a better world than this. But better does not mean different, it means unified. This passion which lifts the mind above the commonplaces of a dispersed world, from which it nevertheless cannot free itself, is the passion for unity. It does not result in mediocre efforts to escape, however, but in the most obstinate demands. Religion or crime, every human endeavour in fact, finally obeys this unreasonable desire and claims to give life a form it does not have. The same impulse, which can lead to the adoration of the heavens or the destruction of man, also leads to creative literature, which derives its serious content from this source.⁷

The novel is a completed form which provides the illusion

of a unified world. Within this world Woolf seeks to capture the rhythms of dispersal and unity which she feels are characteristic of life; within the novels the characters are engaged in the same task.

The human mind depends upon a hypothesis of continuity to give life meaning; death tests this hypothesis. Continuity is provided at the social level through the ideas of history and tradition;⁸ and at the natural level through the biological cycle of birth and death, renewal and decay. Woolf examines each of these as a solution to the problem of meaning, and finds them necessary but inadequate. Her alternative is to seek modes of unity which can be achieved in personal relations marked by social occasions, such as the party in *Mrs. Dalloway* or the dinner in *To the Lighthouse*, which overcome the isolation and separateness that individuality confers. Moments of "epiphany" in the novels serve the same purpose: the characters have a vision of wholeness which transcends the flux of experience and demonstrates that unity can be discovered, even if it is only temporary. Woolf's imagery, particularly in *The Waves*, where the globe and circle are constantly introduced, also suggests the possibility of such unity.

The world inhabited by Woolf's characters is an odd compound of commonplace, everyday details--taking tea, ordering flowers, knitting a stocking--and a profoundly mysterious universe which can only be known intuitively,

if at all. The symbolic unity achieved at certain social occasions provides intimations of a more embracing unity which Woolf suggests might exist in the "mysterious universe." This latter world is evoked by George Eliot in a passage from *Middlemarch*: "If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of the roar which lies on the other side of silence."⁹ Behind the facade of social conventions, middle class gentility, and intellectual control, a vast impersonal world exists; Woolf describes this world in her diary while she is writing *The Waves*:

Often down here I have entered into a sanctuary; a nunnery; had a religious retreat; of great agony once; and always some terror; so afraid one is of loneliness; of seeing to the bottom of the vessel. That is one of the experiences I have had here in some Augusts; and got then to a consciousness of what I call "reality": a thing I see before me: something abstract; but residing in the downs or sky; beside which nothing matters; in which I shall rest and continue to exist. Reality I call it. And I fancy sometimes this is the most necessary thing to me: that which I seek.¹⁰

In this "reality" man can continue to exist, not as an individual, but as part of a greater whole. However, in the novels, the transcendental notion implied here is not offered as an easy solution to the problem of death. Instead, it demonstrates one side of Woolf's dualistic attitude; in this case death offers total unification of the self with the material world of nature; a state which can never be

reached while the individual possesses consciousness, although it may be glimpsed when the rational, analytic parts of the mind are subdued and replaced by an intuitive awareness: for example, when Mrs. Ramsay feels that she has become "a wedge-shaped core of darkness"¹¹ that can go anywhere.

As a result of such experiences, Virginia Woolf cannot assert her belief in the complete absence of order in the world with the same conviction that Camus does. Instead, she implies that unity and a pattern exist in the natural world; however, this natural world which preceded man and will outlast him is, if not hostile, at least indifferent to human desires and aspirations. (When the narrator of "Time Passes" asks: "Did Nature supplement what man advanced?" [p. 201], the answer is unequivocally negative.) But in the human world, all order and systems are illusory and yet necessary:

One cannot despise these phrases laid like Roman roads across the tumult of our lives, since they compel us to walk in step like civilised people with the slow and measured tread of policemen though one may be humming any nonsense under one's breath at the same time--¹²

In her novels Woolf attempts to create these roads in order to communicate with the reader, while also presenting the "tumult" which she feels is the authentic source of life.

The opposition between order and chaos is also present in the seemingly irresolvable contradiction between permanence and transience, which permeates all of the novelist's work:

Now is life very solid or very shifting? I am haunted by the two contradictions. This has gone on for ever; will last for ever; goes down to the bottom of the world--This moment I stand on. Also it is transitory, flying, diaphanous. I shall pass like a cloud on the waves. Perhaps it may be that though we change, one flying after another, so quick, so quick, yet we are somehow successive and continuous we human beings, and show the light through. But what is the light? I am impressed by the transitoriness of human life to such an extent that I am often saying a farewell--after dining with Roger for instance; or reckoning how many more times I shall see Nessa.¹³

As this passage clearly suggests, Woolf's view of the human personality is affected by these contradictions, and determines her presentation of character.¹⁴ In order to convey this dualism, from *Mrs. Dalloway* onwards Woolf attempts to present personality as a pattern of consciousness: images, sensations, and memories are brought together within some recognizably consistent, although fluid persona. The technique used to achieve this effect involves the identification of characters by repeated sets of images, ideas, and mannerisms. This method is most fully refined in *The Waves*, where an additional problem is posed by Percival's death. Percival is known to the reader exclusively through the minds of the six speaking characters; therefore we are forced to question the way in which he can be

said to exist at all, because after his death he remains only as a powerful image in his friends' memories.

Death is rarely absent from Woolf's work, but the meaning of death varies considerably according to the perspective in which it is viewed. Although the use of perspective in Woolf's work demands a separate study in itself, I shall limit my remarks to the ways in which it affects the presentation of death. In *The Voyage Out* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, Josephine O'Brien Schaefer's concept of a "three-fold reality"¹⁵ provides a useful analytical framework in which to examine perspective. Schaefer defines the three-fold reality as individual, natural, and social. Obviously, as she points out, there is no such strict demarcation of the different levels; each depends on the other and all three are inter-related. In the later novels, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, this method of analysis is less useful because Woolf moves increasingly towards a dualistic view of the world, a view which opposes man and nature.

There are certain shortcomings in Schaefer's concept; for example, she does not discuss the fact that although the individual and nature are perceived to be separate, Woolf often uses metaphors and analogues from the natural world to describe states of consciousness. Woolf also uses anthropomorphic images to describe nature. Consequently the presentation of the natural world is ambiguous throughout the novels: on the one hand Woolf denies any correspondence between the human and natural worlds; on

the other, she invokes nature as a mirror of man's feelings, drawing on a long standing literary tradition. Nevertheless, the concept remains useful because the meaning of death is largely defined according to the perspective on reality from which it is perceived.

It is not my intention to discuss in any detail the relationship between biography and fiction. However, there can be no doubt that the death of Woolf's mother during adolescence, of her half sister Stella in 1897, and of her brother Thoby in 1906 were contributory factors both to her mental breakdowns and to her constant struggle with the opposing forces of creativity and destruction, life and death:

We may not hold Freud's doctrines sancrosant [sic] in everything, but his theory about the harmful effects of a child's reliance on, and too close relation with, the parents is proved to be true by innumerable examples taken from life. In Virginia Woolf's case, her constant preoccupation with death was partly caused by the frequent visits of death in her family during her most impressionable years, but it is not impossible that its almost morbid character had its origin in her excessive feelings towards her dead and idolized mother.¹⁶

Over thirty years after her death, Virginia Woolf immortalized her mother in the character of Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*.

Woolf's peculiarly heightened awareness of the precariousness of human life may have been the result of this frequent contact with sudden death during her early life.

Lily Briscoe, the artist who attempts to give form to a vision of the world which has lost Mrs. Ramsay, expresses her sense of life's perpetual danger:

Was there no safety? No learning by heart the ways of the world? No guide, no shelter, but all was miracle, and leaping from the pinnacle of a tower into the air? Could it be, even for elderly people, that this was life?--startling, unexpected, unknown?

[*Lighthouse*, p. 268]

The uncertainty which death brings to life is not always a harmful and destructive factor; it can also give life value. The tone of this passage is not fear but elation: "all was miracle and leaping." Woolf's struggle in her fiction with the forces of death moves increasingly towards the affirmation and celebration of life with a concomitant refusal to yield passively to death.

In some cases death provides a formal resolution where "plot" has ceased to be important and the novelist has committed herself to conveying the texture of life. Death often acts as a release mechanism, unleashing forces and emotions which are normally held under control. This is the converse of Lily Briscoe's elation: the individual must face a vision of the world devoid of all supporting frameworks:

Man, finding himself solitary, forced to live and die alone, concocts the fantastic notion of marriage, and this sharing of experience from time to time dissuades the two human beings from feeling entirely alone. But no human construction can ever hide the

stark fact: When the light of the cosmos goes out, the achievement of man will vanish; when death comes, the meaning of the daily pattern will disappear and the fact of man's absolute aloneness will descend upon him.¹⁷

The four novels which I have selected all confront this problem of man's essential "aloneness," and seek to find ways in which it can be overcome. The two methods of overcoming this isolation and meeting death's challenge, which are most consistently pursued in Woolf's novels, are love and art. S. P. Rosenbaum has pointed out that these two correspond to the supreme values of G. E. Moore's ethical system which was so influential among members of the Bloomsbury group.¹⁸

The four books, written over a period of sixteen years, offer an illuminating account of Woolf's development as a novelist; both in the maturity of the vision presented, and in the ability of her technique to convey that vision. Although there is a clear linear continuity over the four novels--a number of critics have pointed out that *The Voyage Out* contains nearly all the themes which will engage Woolf's attention as a mature novelist¹⁹--once the continuity has been recognized, it does not offer the most interesting or valuable method of approach. Instead, I would like to consider each novel from a different angle, as the different sides of a figure, which combine to make a whole shape. I wish to stress that this is a critical method designed to arrive at a statement about Woolf's attitude

towards, and treatment of death; there is no suggestion that the novels are incomplete; each exists as an autonomous piece of creative literature.

The Voyage Out, Woolf's first novel published in 1915 (although it was written and revised over a period of several years), offers a useful starting point, not only because it introduces the themes which were to characterize her later work, but also because it provides a standard of measurement against which to test the resolution present in the final section of *The Waves*. *The Voyage Out* will be considered as an offshoot of the *Bildungsroman*; it traces the formation of a single character whose development is ruptured by her sudden death. At another level the death of the heroine is seen as fulfilment, and this novel contains the simplest notion of death as an achieved unity; although this is challenged by the closing vision of the novel. After *The Voyage Out*, although the mystery and fascination of death retain a compelling hold over Woolf's imagination, the vision is more rigorously tested.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf's first successful experimental novel, death is introduced as an act of will in Septimus' suicide. Death is defiance and victory; it is also the action in the novel which completes Mrs. Dalloway's day. The fusing of the party and Septimus' death provides a synthesis of two levels of reality: the social gathering symbolising unity, and the act of extreme individualism. When Septimus flings himself out of the window, he is

isolated beyond all possibility of connection with other human beings. Yet, paradoxically, his act confirms the unity of the party, and endorses the authenticity of Clarissa's individual existence.

Septimus is often acknowledged to be Clarissa's alter ego, and the split between them allows Woolf to set two visions of the world side by side: the sane and the insane.²⁰ The splitting of the characters also provides a margin of safety in the exploration of death because Woolf is able to destroy and preserve simultaneously. As a result the world of the novel can contain both life and death, but in contrast with *The Voyage Out* life remains the dominant interest.

To the Lighthouse and *The Waves* are generally considered to be Woolf's finest achievements. They are close in the visions of life they present; in each the social world diminishes in importance giving way to the natural world of the sea and the elements. These two novels also contain the most complex dialogue between life and art: in *To the Lighthouse* this takes place through the comparison between Mrs. Ramsay, who creates forms in life, and Lily Briscoe who tries to translate her vision into a painting. In *The Waves* Woolf places her own art under scrutiny; and in her examination of Bernard, the phrase-maker, the power and the truth of language are relentlessly explored.

To the Lighthouse has been described as one of the best elegies in modern fiction;²¹ in it Virginia Woolf

draws upon the most intimate memories of her past and of her family. I shall examine this novel as a ritual sequence in which Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay exist both as fictional characters and as archetypes. An encompassing vision of the world is created in the first section; destroyed in the second, where the threat posed to human life by the natural world is unleashed; and in the third section a new vision is built out of the remnants of the old, but it is based upon the recognition that death and loss are fundamental parts of human existence. The polarity between male and female (this is always present in Woolf's work although it does not automatically correspond to gender) is rigidly adhered to in the presentation of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay as a result of the mythic status of the book. *To the Lighthouse* has about it a quality of conscious remembrance, as well as a certain distance and control, appropriate to an elegy.

It is in *The Waves*, where the process of life through childhood, adolescence and maturity is described by the characters' soliloquies, that Woolf explores most relentlessly the reality of death. *The Waves* is the most exposed and dangerous attempt to recognize the sovereignty of death, and yet find a way to oppose the meaninglessness which this recognition imposes. Bernard's final soliloquy, in the last section of the book, provides an examination of the problems present in all four novels: he achieves a resolution where death is recognized as the enemy but can

still be defied, and life affirmed.

The task of the creative artist is of immense importance in defying death. Woolf's continual use of the artist figure within her work and her exploration of the creative process is testimony to this. The artist must succeed not only in capturing the "moment of vision," but also in building a bridge between two worlds: the conscious and the unconscious, the human and the natural, and ultimately between life and death. Woolf's belief in the power of the creative imagination is stated in her diary: "Odd how the creative power at once brings the whole universe to order."²² The creative power, like the rest of life, is never constant; it ebbs and flows; only the completed form of a finished work of art can provide that desired order.

NOTES

CHAPTER I

¹ R. M. Rilke, quoted in Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1959), p. 108.

² Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus," in *The Myth of Sisyphus: and Other Essays*, trans. by Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 91.

³ James Naremore in *The World Without A Self: Virginia Woolf and the Novel* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973) is a partial exception to this. He states in the introduction to his book, pp. 2-3: "In the book that follows, I have tried to examine these idiosyncratic qualities in Virginia Woolf's fiction. . . . But instead of relating these matters to familiar critical themes such as Mrs Woolf's interest in time or psychology, I have wanted to connect them with other issues which are at least equally as important, namely the erotic and visionary character of her novels, and her fascination with death."

⁴ Bernard Blackstone, *Virginia Woolf: A Commentary* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1949), p. 10.

⁵ N. O. Brown, pp. 104-05, points out the intrinsic connection between death and individuality contained in Freud's instinct theory: "His [Freud's] identification of the life instinct with sexuality identifies it with the force that preserves the immortality of the species. By implication, therefore, it is the death instinct which constitutes the mortal individuality of the particular member of the species. . . . The principle of unification or interdependence sustains the immortal life of the species and the mortal life of the individual; the principle of separation or independence gives the individual his individuality and ensures his death."

⁶ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), p. 184. August 5, 1932. Hereafter cited as *AWD*.

⁷ Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. by Anthony Bower (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), p. 262.

⁸ N. O. Brown, p. 102, claims that Hegel was only able to develop a philosophy of history by identifying man with death: "And he [Hegel] develops the paradox that history is what man does with death, along lines almost identical with Freud's. Freud suggests that the aggression in human nature--the drive to master nature as well as the drive to master man--is the result of an extroversion of the death instinct, the desire to die being transformed into the desire to kill, destroy, or dominate. Hegel postulates a transformation of the consciousness of death into a struggle to appropriate the life of another human being at the risk of one's own life: history as class struggle."

⁹ George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1871; rpt. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books Inc., 1972), p. 226.

¹⁰ Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, p. 132. September 10, 1928.

¹¹ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., 1927), p. 95.

All further references will be to this edition and will be cited in the text in parentheses.

¹² Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1931), p. 284. All further references will be to this edition and will be cited in the text in parentheses.

¹³ Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, p. 141. January 4, 1929.

¹⁴ In her well known essay "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown," in *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1950), Virginia Woolf conducts her argument with Arnold Bennett upon the presentation of character. She claims that: "in or about December 1910, human character changed" [p. 91]. This assertion is based upon the Post-Impressionist Exhibition which took place in London in 1910, and is one of many indications that Woolf realized her view of the human personality (shared by many of her contemporaries), differed radically from the views held by her predecessors.

¹⁵ Josephine O'Brien Schaefer in *The Three-Fold Nature Of Reality In The Novels of Virginia Woolf* (London, The Hague, Paris: Mouton & Co., 1965), pp. 11-12, describes the concept as follows: "At the heart of all her novels is the same vision of a three-fold reality composed of natural phenomena, social conventions, and individual experience. Although continually altering and influencing one another, these realms never blend. In this vision nature makes life

possible; society maintains it; individual inner experience gives it value or significance."

Robert G. Collins in *Virginia Woolf's Black Arrows of Sensation: The Waves* (Ilfracombe, Devon: Arthur H. Stockwell Ltd., 1962), p. 18, suggests a similar structure in his analysis of *The Waves*. He describes it as: "(a) external, objectified reality (the tree, the earth, the actual waves); (b) the 'substantial territory' of one's isolate self; (c) the societal, the area of self merged with other selves."

¹⁶ Irma Rantavaara, *Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury* (Helsinki: The Folcroft Press Inc., 1970), p. 115.

¹⁷ J. O'Brien Schaefer, p. 36.

¹⁸ S. P. Rosenbaum, "The Philosophical Realism of Virginia Woolf" in *English Literature and British Philosophy*, ed. S. P. Rosenbaum (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 319, claims that: "G. E. Moore influenced Virginia Woolf more than anyone else, but in addition to this direct influence on her and her circle Moore's philosophy is also *representative* of the intellectual milieu in which Virginia Woolf was born and bred."

¹⁹ J. O'Brien Schaefer, p. 23, states: "Like her images, the themes of her novels show amazingly little change from first to last. *The Voyage Out* introduces almost all of them: her continuous concern with the differences between the masculine and feminine attitudes of mind; the unfair nature of society's treatment of women; the basic paradox in human relations--the need for privacy and the desire to share; the difficulties besetting any attempt by human beings to communicate with one another; the lack of a single identity and, because of this complexity of personality, the problem of getting to "know" another human being. These five themes compose the basic content of Virginia Woolf's novels."

²⁰ Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, p. 52, October 14, 1922: "*Mrs. Dalloway* has branched into a book; and I adumbrate here a study of insanity and suicide; the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side--something like that."

²¹ J. Naremore, p. 112, states: "I have said that *Mrs. Dalloway* is an elegiac novel and implied as much about *The Voyage Out*; the same term can be applied with even more

obvious justification to *To the Lighthouse*, which was not only conceived as an elegy but is one of the best in modern literature."

²² Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, p. 220, July 27, 1934.

CHAPTER II

THE VOYAGE OUT

"The immitigable tree."

The Voyage Out is at once the account of Rachel Vinrace's passage through life, and the beginning of a lifelong exploratory journey by the author. A contemporary reviewer claimed that Virginia Woolf's first novel sought to capture and give form to the "illogic of life."¹ His words provide a description of the artistic venture which followed: I have chosen to concentrate upon one aspect of this venture; the perception of human existence subject to the inescapable encounter with death.

The inability to know at what moment the individual will have to face death casts a radical uncertainty over all human life, and forces man to recognize his essential isolation.

Fear it is that separates people from each other, fear of being laughed at, giving themselves away, of thinking differently from other people. On top of those little fears is the big, looming, ubiquitous fear: the fear of death. The goodness and safety of life are only on the surface; nothing has a chance against death. In fact Virginia Woolf's novels are constructed around death as much as around life.²

Although society, human institutions and their rituals are sources of mitigation which alleviate man's plight, they

cannot protect him from death which is the basic condition of individual existence. The mastery of death is not only demonstrated by Rachel's death at the end of the novel, but is also suggested by Helen's frequent presentiments of disaster.

Fear appears not simply as a clearly defined emotion, but also as an underlying anxiety. Even love, one of the most powerful emotions and an important means of connection with other human beings, cannot assuage this fear: "Why was it so painful being in love, why was there so much pain in happiness?"³ The pain is linked to fear and death; love which unites people can also intensify their awareness of separation. Life involves a perpetual struggle, the mustering of human forces to oppose the threat of chaos brought by death. Much later in her life, after Roger Fry's funeral, Woolf wrote:

I had a notion that I could describe the tremendous feeling at R.'s funeral: but of course I can't. I mean the universal feeling; how we all fought with our brains, loves and so on; and *must* be vanquished. Then the vanquisher, this outer force became so clear; the indifferent, and we so small, fine, delicate. A fear then came to me, of death. Of course I shall lie there too before that gate and slide in; and it frightened me. But why? I mean, I felt the vainness of this perpetual fight, with our brains and loving each other, against the other thing; if Roger could die.⁴

It is a struggle, both philosophical and literary, that informs a lifetime's work. The problem is to find a way

of facing death, and also to discover a way of writing about it in a novel. Despite a continuing ambivalence towards death--at times urging resistance, on other occasions yielding passively to it--resistance becomes increasingly important as her work matures.

In *The Voyage Out* there are a number of unresolved conflicts which suggest that the author had not yet discovered a suitable form to convey her vision of life. One important area of conflict is present in the drama of Rachel's death. Clearly, as Woolf herself points out, the death is intended to show life "cut short for a moment,"⁵ and thus reveal the ruthlessness of life. However, the book has been preparing for Rachel's death from the beginning, and follows an internal logic according to which the death appears to be inevitable.⁶

During my discussion of *The Voyage Out*, I shall make fullest use of Schaefer's concept of a "three-fold reality." The possibility of distinguishing so clearly between the three realms in this novel indicates a formal weakness: it has failed to satisfactorily integrate the different levels of reality present. As I pointed out in the Introduction, death has a different significance at each level, and the conclusion of the novel which returns to the social level indicates that Rachel's sweeping rejection of society deprives her of an important means of support.⁷ In the later novels, Woolf becomes increasingly aware that the

social and individual levels are inextricably linked, and she begins to explore more thoroughly the human needs and impulses which determine social forms.

Within an ostensibly conventional narrative form⁸ *The Voyage Out* draws together a variety of sub-genres-- among them the comedy of manners and the novel of tropical adventure, for example--assimilating them within a controlling form which Avrom Fleishman describes as "a turn in the tradition of the English *Bildungsroman* . . . toward the tracing of a metaphysical education."⁹ The emphasis upon the metaphysical is accurate, and points to the ultimate direction of the journey which is Rachel's passage out of life into death.

While Mrs. Dalloway is aboard the *Euphrosyne* she enthuses about Shelley and quotes from "Adonais." A line which she does not quote provides an appropriate epitaph for Rachel: "No more let Life divide what Death can join together."¹⁰ The metaphysical quest is completed by Rachel's death: death becomes the most complete form of unity because through it the individual loses his identity and becomes part of an organic whole. It will be clear from my remarks that I intend to examine Rachel's death as a logical fulfilment of the metaphysical journey. However, I hope that by applying the concept of a three-fold reality and noting the way in which the meaning of death alters at the different levels, it will be possible

to discover the discrepancies and paradoxes which exist in Woolf's attitude.

The implications of the novel's title, *The Voyage Out*, have been discussed at length by a variety of critics; such a response is appropriate in a book where there is a "continuous shifting from the literal to the metaphorical."¹¹ There are three principal stages in the journey. The outward voyage, away from England, marks a corresponding expansion in Rachel's consciousness and perception. The inward voyage, up the river into the jungle, corresponds to Rachel's and Terence's inner exploration of love. Finally, in the voyage out of life Rachel becomes progressively more isolated within the distorted world of her delirium; the movement towards death is accompanied by a total withdrawal into the self, and denial of all other human contact.

The first stage of the voyage away from England takes place at the literal level on the *Euphrosyne* (named after one of the Graces), and involves at a metaphoric level Rachel's identification with the ship:

She was an inhabitant of the great world, which has so few inhabitants, travelling all day across an empty universe, with veils drawn before her and behind. She was more lonely than the caravan crossing the desert; she was infinitely more mysterious, moving by her own power and sustained by her own resources. The sea might give her death or some unexampled joy and none would know of it. She was a bride going forth to her husband, a virgin unknown of men; in her vigour and purity she might be likened to all beautiful things, for as a ship she had a life of her own. [p. 29]

The associations between Rachel and the *Euphrosyne* are made more explicit as the book develops; her voyage brings both "death," and "some unexampled joy." The evocative power of this description suggests the possibilities available to Rachel. Archetypal images--the ship, the caravan--are presented against the vast undifferentiated background of a natural landscape--the sea, the desert--and these stark outlines provide a point of focus for the eye and mind to rest on. A passage in Woolf's diary, written more than fifteen years later, suggests a similar quality of experience:

I get the strangest feeling now of our all being in the midst of some vast operation: of the splendour of this undertaking--life: of being capable of dying: an immensity surrounds me. No--I can't get it--shall let it brood itself into "a novel" no doubt.¹²

It is this splendour which is captured by the description; the sea which surrounds the ship is both a life-force and a source of death. Nearly all of Rachel's love experiences are associated in one way or another with images of water, and during her fever, water is the element to which she returns.¹³

The Voyage Out springs from the desire to set down "the splendour of this vast undertaking--life"; and it traces the discovery that Rachel has "a life of her own." As with the traditional *Bildungsroman*, we watch the formation of Rachel's character through a variety of contacts

with other individuals and the external world. In this novel, the most definitive experience is Rachel's recognition of sexuality. When she is struggling to understand the meaning of Richard Dalloway's kiss, which has both attracted and repulsed her, Rachel has her first acute perception of her life as distinct and individual: "her life that was the only chance she had" [p. 92]. This perception gains authority when it receives Helen's sanction:

"So now you can go ahead and be a person on your own account," she [Helen] added.

The vision of her own personality, of herself as a real everlasting thing, different from anything else, unmergeable, like the sea or the wind, flashed into Rachel's mind, and she became profoundly excited at the thought of living. [pp. 94-95]

It is interesting that Rachel should associate herself so strongly with non-human elements--the sea and the wind--in order to define her personality. Rachel deals in extremes: the vision of herself as "unmergeable" must be set against her desire for total unity: "I hate these divisions, . . . why should one be shut up all by oneself in a room?" [pp. 369-70]; a unity which she finally achieves in death.

The question of responsibility, of the obligation which life confers upon the individual, is taken up more thoroughly in *Mrs. Dalloway* where the characters look back upon what they have created in their lives. In this early novel, the theme is suggested but remains latent, for Rachel has little to look back at. Woolf's method of rendering con-

sciousness, the "tunneling process"¹⁴ which she discovers in *Mrs. Dalloway*, relies upon a store of experience and memory; and the heroines gradually get older as her work matures.

The recognition of sexuality which brings self-awareness and awakens Rachel to life, also bears within it the seeds of death:

The correlation between sex and death is stressed at every turn--in Rachel's imagination, in the events of the plot, . . . Furthermore, the experience of sex is made to resemble in many ways the experience of those hypnotic, almost self-destructive moods that repeatedly overcome Rachel and some of the other characters.¹⁵

For Virginia Woolf sexuality, like love, is an ambivalent force: although sexual experience can unite individuals at the deepest level, this unity, as Naremore points out, can also be experienced as a threat to the self because it appears to break down the barriers that normally define the personality.

The connection between sex and death is strengthened in *The Voyage Out* by the presence of a mythological framework. Rachel is set within a perspective which reaches back to the roots of human history; to achieve this framework, Woolf invokes the traditional iconography of the Fall. In the account of the Fall of man, loss of innocence entails both knowledge of sexuality and the fact of death. Death is man's punishment, and it defines the change from

a state of pre-lapsarian innocence to a "fallen" condition. In the former, man exists in harmony with his own instinctual, physical being, as well as with the natural world that surrounds him. Fallen man is alienated from both of these, and for him the knowledge of death creates an underlying anguish as the basis of his existence which stimulates the desire to re-discover, or recreate the lost unity.¹⁶

Rachel passes through two stages of sexual discovery: the first, Mr. Dalloway's kiss, shocks her into self-awareness--in particular a powerful physical awareness of herself-- and initiates a process of exploration. It does not, however, constitute a full sexual awakening; this occurs later in the book and depends heavily upon the mythological framework outlined above. Rachel is poised at the moment between innocence and experience where the sexual awakening through her love for Terence Hewet is imminent, but as yet unrealized. The morning after the dance which has strengthened Rachel's and Terence's mutual attraction, Rachel walks alone in the forest, in a state of reverie characteristic of her most crucial experiences:

So she might have walked until she had lost all knowledge of her way, had it not been for the interruption of a tree, which, although it did not grow across her path, stopped her as effectively as if the branches had struck her in the face. It was an ordinary tree, *but to her it appeared so strange that it might have been the only tree in the world.* Dark was the trunk in the middle, and the branches sprang

here and there, leaving jagged intervals of light between them as distinctly as if it had but that second risen from the ground. Having seen a sight that would last her for a lifetime, and for a lifetime would preserve that second, the tree once more sank into the ordinary ranks of trees. [pp. 204-205, my italics]

Woolf adopts the traditional Christian symbol of the two trees--the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil--and fuses them into a single image: "the only tree in the world." The Biblical reference of the passage is strengthened by the style; in particular the inversion: "Dark was the trunk." The tree appears again in *The Waves* where its associations are even more explicit, and the link with death is inescapable: "But we are doomed, all of us, . . . by the immitigable tree which we cannot pass" [p. 24].

The incident quoted above displays one of a series of shifts in perspective which occur in the novel as a means of intensifying or generalising experience. The passengers of the *Euphrosyne* watch the world shrink as they move out to sea; this concentrates the focus of interest upon the ship, but simultaneously highlights the fragility of the human enterprise when it is surrounded by such vast elemental forces. Instead of using physical distance to create perspective, the above passage employs myth and time. By invoking the traditional framework of the Fall, Woolf succeeds in making Rachel's experience representative

without detracting from its intensity. The startling quality of her awakening is suggested by the violence of the image: "as if the branches had struck her in the face." The tree is both an obstacle which bars her way, and a source of initiation which can be more fully understood when Rachel thinks of love as "the discovery of a terrible possibility in life," [p. 207] at the end of this chapter.

The tree becomes the only tree in the world because of its association with the tree of Genesis, and also because Rachel's experience unites two different time perspectives: "a sight that would last her a lifetime, and for a lifetime preserve that second." The intensity of the moment of perception is so great that the duration measured by clock time ("that second") loses all significance; the moment will be preserved intact throughout life. The relationship between foreground and distance which has previously been present only in terms of physical space (for example, at sea, or on top of the mountain) is now introduced at the more abstract level of time.

Jean Alexander has pointed to the way in which the Judeo-Christian assumption that earth is man's garden underlies certain portions of Woolf's work. Her argument supports my comments on the mythological frame of reference present in the novel:

Even though Woolf cannot make the assumption which traditionally lies behind that [the Judeo-Christian] attitude to nature--the assumption that there is a benevolent God--she begins her work as a novelist within a conception which places man in the garden of rational control. Nature is the English garden from which Rachel departs in *The Voyage Out*. It is domesticated land, cultivated land, land which is bounded; fields of corn, hedgerows, rose gardens. This is nature where man has his home and has pressed his mark. Even the wild parkland has its place in a general human order, and is thus a safe place.¹⁷

Rachel begins the novel in a world which fosters the illusion that it is possible for man to cultivate the external world according to his needs. Safety is indeed the keynote of Rachel's well-ordered life in England. But its very safety is limiting and claustrophobic; her exposure to the untamed natural world of South America is intended to provoke new depths of experience in the girl.

However, overcoming the illusion that the world is ordered to suit human ends involves a dangerous exposure of the self to chaos, which appears, at first sight, to be the only alternative to order. Helen is acutely aware of the dangers which Rachel's metaphysical journey entails: "But all the time she [Helen] blamed them for having come on this expedition, for having ventured too far and exposed themselves" [p. 350]. This exposure is an essential part of discovery, but implicit in this statement is the suggestion of necessary limits. Clearly Woolf does not subscribe to the religious notion of forbidden knowledge, but Helen's recognition of danger does alert the reader to

the ultimate destination of the voyage, which is death.

Rachel's rebellion against the conventions imposed by the Dalloways, her father, and her aunts, and against a life which is "cut into four pieces by their meals," [p. 254] combines with her search for an authentic existence to determine the presentation of her character. At first she is a vague, shadowy figure, physically indistinct and eclipsed by her Aunt Helen:

[Rachel's] face was weak rather than decided, saved from insipidity by the large enquiring eyes; denied beauty, now that she was sheltered indoors, by the lack of colour and definite outline. [p. 14]

During the course of the novel, Rachel acquires "definite outline." The emergence of her personality is monitored through the responses of the other central characters. This technique, which is more fully developed in the novels from *Jacob's Room* onwards, indicates that the seeds of Woolf's experimental methods are present in her treatment of character from her earliest work:

Woolf provides four characters who attempt to impose a world-view upon Rachel and who thereby serve as fragmentary reflectors of her consciousness: Helen and Terence as possibilities of affirmation, and Evelyn Murgatroyd and St. John Hirst as destructive forces.¹⁸

Helen and Terence offer a flexible range of responses; what is more, Helen's role as initiator is passed on to Terence after he has declared his love for Rachel: "Rachel had

passed beyond her guardianship. A voice might reach her ears, but never again would it carry as far as it had carried twenty-four hours ago" [p. 351]. There are elements of conflict between Helen and Terence: Helen is reluctant to relinquish her influence over Rachel, something which Terence resents, but both of them share the illusion that they will be able to protect Rachel.

Evelyn Murgatroyd is used to test the views offered by Helen and Terence. Her ideas--the value of individuality, of friendship--are sufficiently close to the ideas which the novel affirms, but in Evelyn's interpretation, instead of being life-enhancing they are confined and negative. Evelyn's frantic struggle for intimate personal relations--"Call me Evelyn and I'll call you St. John" [p. 149]--and her romantic yearnings for glamour and bravery are really based on a lack of self-knowledge and on egotism. She attempts to live her fantasies in order to evade the true responsibilities of friendship and love. Woolf's rejection of Evelyn's stance is an attempt to clarify the exact nature of the freedom which has been imaginatively suggested by the ship. St. John, although an early example of the divisive male intellect, moves between the poles represented by Helen and Terence on one side, and Evelyn on the other. His inability to form satisfactory personal relations is the result not of illusion, but of too penetrating an intellect. Hirst lacks the intuitive sympathy that would enable him to perceive beyond the rigid limits

which he believes are present between people: "take this hotel. You could draw circles round the whole lot of them, and they'd never stray outside" [p. 123]. Nevertheless, Hirst's friendship with Terence and his liking for Helen are redeeming factors which atone for his clumsiness with Rachel. As the book progresses, Hirst moves closer to Helen and Terence, in preparation for the conclusion where the affirmation of the novel is presented through his eyes, after his friends have failed to protect Rachel from death.

There is only a brief period in the middle of the book where Rachel emerges as a distinct personality presented directly to the reader. This emergence is marked by a very powerful awareness of her own body:

Meanwhile the steady beat of her own pulse represented the hot current of feeling that ran down beneath; beating, struggling, fretting. For the time, her own body was the source of all the life in the world, which tried to burst forth here--there--and was repressed now by Mr. Bax, now by Evelyn, now by the imposition of ponderous stupidity, the weight of the entire world. [p. 315]

Rachel experiences, at its most acute, the polarity between the individual and society; as a result she totally rejects the social level of life. This physical awareness of her own body is precipitated by a series of frustrating encounters in the hotel, but it corresponds to her awakened sexuality which has, as yet, found no outlet. In this state of obsessive self-awareness, Rachel is incapable of perceiving other human beings as individuals, and instead

they appear to her as "aimless masses of matter" [p. 315].

The techniques used to convey Rachel's personality are important because they affect the presentation of her death. The use of other characters "as fragmentary reflectors of her consciousness," not only points forward to *Jacob's Room*, but also indicates the method which will be used in *The Waves* to create Percival's character and register his death. The development of Rachel's character reveals another unresolved conflict in the novel. Although the form of *The Voyage Out*, which traces the development of her personality, suggests that Rachel is responsible for creating her own life and attempts to demonstrate the process of individuation that takes place, it is undermined by another structure present in the novel, that is, the quasi-mythical role of Helen who appears to be weaving Rachel's fate into her tapestry of the jungle.¹⁹ The contradiction between the deterministic view of life suggested by Helen's role and a life based upon individual freedom remains unsolved.

During the second stage of the voyage, where the exploration is directed inward and which culminates in the river trip into the heart of the forest,²⁰ the concept of three levels of reality--individual, social, and natural--can be most fruitfully applied. I have already indicated that Rachel experiences a serious conflict between the demands which society imposes and the expression of her individual needs. In almost all cases, society, represented

by its microcosm the hotel, appears to Rachel as a barrier which obstructs her. Although this view is supported by other characters at times, it is never on such unequivocal terms; they can also perceive the necessity for a social realm of existence. There are one or two exceptions, in particular the dance at the hotel where the figures unite in a ring and form an image of unity. Significantly, Rachel remains outside the "gigantic circle," [p. 195] even though her music provides the impetus for its creation.

Although the different levels of reality remain disparate, the novel strives to discover a principle or a mode of vision that can unite them. Helen comes closest to achieving this unification; she is both aware of, and in touch with the different levels. She maintains an active contact with each which, while it can produce a sense of foreboding, protects her from the extremes of exposure which Rachel experiences:

Aimless, trivial, meaningless, oh no--what she had seen at tea made it impossible for her to believe that. The little jokes, the chatter, the inanities of the afternoon had shrivelled up before her eyes. Underneath the likings and spites, the comings together and partings, great things were happening--terrible things, because they were so great. Her sense of safety was shaken, as if beneath twigs and dead leaves she had seen the movement of a snake. It seemed to her that a moment's respite was allowed, a moment's make-believe, and then again the profound and reasonless law asserted itself, moulding them all to its liking, making and destroying. [pp. 321-22]

Helen's vision of life at least brings together the three realms, although it does not unite them. She recognizes that the surface activities, "the chatter, the inanities," provide a form which contains "the comings together and partings." It is a frail structure, but nevertheless not to be despised. The security which society provides is "make-believe," but in its absence the individual is exposed and without any protection. The emotional energies of the individuals are described in terms which suggest a surge and flow; Helen's naturalistic metaphors link the emotional life with the natural world, and thus draw in the third level of reality.

The image of the snake reminds us again of the mythological framework; the Garden of Eden exists as an archetype of man in harmony with nature and stands as an ideal image of unity against which the reader can compare the scenes in the jungle. The simile of the snake reminds us that we are in the world of fallen man, and the connection with the Biblical snake²¹ is strengthened by Hirst's warning to the lovers before they enter the forest: "Beware of snakes" [p. 330]. Hirst also provides an amusing parody of the Eden image in his comments about the jungle: "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" [p. 336].

Rachel's passage towards death accelerates during the second stage of the voyage; again images drawn from the natural world are used to register this movement:

All these moods ran themselves into one general effect, which Helen compared to the sliding of a river, quick, quicker, quicker still, as it races to a waterfall. Her instinct was to cry out Stop! but even had there been any use in crying Stop! she would have refrained, thinking it best that things should take their way, the water racing because the earth was shaped to make it race. [p. 270]

The contrast between the flowing motion of the river, with the repetition of "quick" as it approaches the waterfall, and the abrupt monosyllabic "Stop!" unable to stem the flood, heightens our sense of Rachel's inevitable progress towards death. The imagery also suggests a level at which human life is connected with nature; it is not at the level of individual consciousness, but at an organic biological level which unites all life. The water imagery that surrounds Rachel's death reinforces this suggestion and forges thematic links with the earlier passages which describe her love experiences.

The final movement in the second stage of the journey is the trip up the river: with the echoes of Conrad's "Heart of Darkness," and the deftly woven associations between Rachel and the Elizabethan explorers,²² Woolf succeeds in fusing the literal and metaphoric levels of meaning. The jungle is that unknown and menacing territory where Rachel's and Terence's love is symbolically con-

summated; it is also the place responsible for Rachel's death.²³

As they journey further inland, the feeling of exposure increases, and is at its most acute when the travellers reach the native village. It is here that the natural and human worlds are most sharply opposed; and where Helen expresses her powerful sense of human frailty:

Helen, standing by herself in the sunny space among the native women, was exposed to pre-sentiments of disaster. The cries of the senseless beasts rang in her ears high and low in the air, as they ran from tree-trunk to tree-top. 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 them or the water drowned them. Thus thinking, she kept her eyes anxiously fixed upon the lovers, as if by doing so she could protect them from their fate.
[pp. 349-50]

The human organism is dwarfed by the massive forces poised over it: the contrast between the "great trees and deep waters" and the "delicate flesh of men and women" emphasises the frailty of human life. Paradoxically, at this point in the text where nature seems not merely indifferent to mankind, but actively hostile, a metaphor of connection is provided by the phrase: "which breaks so easily and lets the life escape." The suggestion of life trickling away links the human flesh with the deep waters. Again total unification suggests the obliteration of distinct

identity: the individual life will be annihilated as it merges with the deep flood.

If we compare the passage above with the earlier description of the ship at sea, it is possible to locate a significant shift. In the voyage out to South America the ship is the point of focus and the stress lies upon her power and beauty; by association human life appears vigorous and capable of withstanding even the chaos brought by the storm. Here the reverse is true: at the furthest point of the voyage inward, the precariousness of human life is stressed. Instead of highlighting the individual, the vast natural landscape oppresses and threatens him. Death may strike unawares at any moment, and Helen recognizes that her desire to protect the lovers is in vain.

In *The Voyage Out* there is little resistance to death; the sense of fatality increases as the novel develops, justifying Helen's use of the waterfall metaphor. Of the two antidotes to death that Woolf explores thoroughly in her later novels--art and love--only love is examined in detail (and love is an ambivalent force because, as I have indicated, it is also linked to death). It is true that Rachel's music is an artistic activity, and that Terence is an aspiring novelist; nevertheless art remains a subsidiary theme; nor is the creative process itself held up for scrutiny.

The examination of love presents another paradox in

the novel. Despite its associations with death, love is offered as a solution: "Love . . . it seems to me to explain everything" [p. 382], Hirst tells Rachel and Terence. Love can also create a pattern in life which gives meaning to emotions and experience. Rachel perceives this shortly before her illness:

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. Perhaps, then, every one really knew as she knew now where they were going; and things formed themselves into a pattern not only for her, but for them, and in that pattern lay satisfaction and meaning. [pp. 384-85]

✓ The pattern cannot protect the individual from death, but it can and does procure "satisfaction and meaning." This is emphasised in the pattern created by the procession at the end of the novel.

Love is the power which reveals this pattern, but Rachel claims it is not simply personal love:

"Love," St. John had said, "that seems to explain it all." Yes, but it was not the love of man for woman, of Terence for Rachel. Although they sat so close together, they had ceased to struggle and desire one another. There seemed to be peace between them. It might be love, but it was not the love of man for woman. [p. 385]

In this contemplative state, which is essentially impersonal (and thus linked to the "impersonality"

produced when Rachel plays the piano²⁴), Rachel describes herself as "detached and disinterested" [p. 385]. Personal love is the starting point rather than the end; Rachel and Terence achieve a "peace" that is beyond passion and which overcomes the divisions imposed by personality.

As I mentioned earlier, the inner logic of the metaphysical education demands that the last stage of the voyage be the passage out of life: "The fever and the death are the furthest points on the voyage through and out of experience."²⁵ The brief period during which Rachel appeared as a distinct individual, not dependent upon the other characters for her identity, is over. The disintegration of her personality is achieved cumulatively through the use of perception distortions (an early example of a technique Woolf develops more fully to explore madness or other states of heightened awareness in her later novels):

There was all the morning to get through, and then all the afternoon, and at intervals she made an effort to cross over into the ordinary world, but she found that her heat and discomfort had put a gulf between her world and the ordinary world which she could not bridge. [p. 401]

This gulf steadily increases as the fever progresses and Rachel is never to be reclaimed, or to find a passage back into the "ordinary world." Her death is, in part, the price which must be paid for severing the normally sanctioned bonds that are expressed through social

functions and social intercourse in her search for a "life of her own." One critic, who locates human contact as a fearful source of tension for Rachel, claims: "By the end of the novel, we know that no sacrifice was too great to safeguard that tragically helpless independence, with all its watery solitude."²⁶

A basic problem central to the whole Woolf canon can be located in Rachel's character and her fate. This problem resides in the author's need to affirm two radically different kinds of contact beyond the self. One is contact with other human individuals; the other is contact with nature. Rachel is the first of a series of female characters who are able to achieve a connection with nature through an intuitive sympathy: in order for this to take place they lose the normal awareness of self and exist in a state which Woolf describes as "impersonality." During Rachel's illness this condition of impersonality becomes so acute that she is unable to preserve the necessary core of identity which would provide a measure of stability. "Impersonality" involves loss of the social self; so that although contact with the natural world becomes easier--or at least the illusion of this contact--communication with other individuals is denied.

This dilemma reaches a crisis in Rachel's illness when her estrangement from the social world becomes complete:

All sights were something of an effort, but the sight of Terence was the greatest effort, because he forced her to join mind to body in the desire to remember something. She did not wish to remember; it troubled her when people tried to disturb her loneliness; she wished to be alone. She wished for nothing else in the world. [p. 424]

Rachel is totally isolated in her own world, and the love which could have overcome that isolation is transformed into a force that exacerbates it. In *The Voyage Out*, the contradiction in Woolf's approach lies in her inability to affirm one means of connection as superior to another. Building bridges from one world to another, from one individual to another, and from moment to moment is the task she sets herself as a creative artist; but the vision of life in her first novel is too bleak--the "gulf" is too wide for her creative powers, at this stage, to build over it.

The steady increase of tension, and the qualities of unreality and disbelief that slowly take over the daily life at the villa as Rachel's fever gets worse, prepare the scene for her death, and bring together the themes and images developed throughout the novel. Water imagery is imaginatively used to convey the other world which Rachel has entered in her illness:

While all her tormentors thought that she was dead, she was not dead, but curled up at the bottom of the sea. There she lay, sometimes seeing darkness, sometimes light, while every now and then some one turned her over at the bottom of the sea. [p. 416]

The correlations between sex and death, discussed earlier in this chapter, are strongly emphasised in the final stage of the novel. Rachel's sensation of lying at the bottom of the sea is described in terms almost identical to those used in conveying Terence's experience of love: "Here were the Flushings talking, talking somewhere high up in the air above him, and he and Rachel had dropped to the bottom of the world together" [p. 335]. The differences, however, are also crucial. Whereas Terence is rooted in the earth and is together with Rachel, Rachel is immersed in an altogether different and more alien element--the sea--and is alone.

During Rachel's illness there is an appreciable shift in Terence's view of the world, which takes him closer to Helen's position, and reinforces the idea that he and Rachel have transgressed certain limits in daring to love one another, and have exposed themselves to danger:

How did they dare to love each other, he wondered; how had he himself dared to live as he had lived, rapidly and carelessly, passing from one thing to another, loving Rachel as he had loved her? Never again would he feel secure; he would never believe in the stability of life, or forget what depths of pain lie beneath small happiness and feelings of content and safety. [p. 421]

Before Rachel's illness, Terence was able to confidently assert his belief in the existence of "an order, a pattern which made life reasonable," [p. 366] because death had

no reality for him. It existed only as an idea, not as a fact: while they are on the picnic Terence plays at being dead, and his reactions are like those of a child: "I shall never, never, never move again" [p. 170]. The reality of death remains hidden until Rachel's illness.

The different levels of reality do intermingle on the day of Rachel's death; but this does not create unity; instead the effect is almost surreal. The peculiar state of awareness induced by the delirium pervades the conventional social level of reality and culminates in the distortion of the time scale. Previously in the novel, Rachel's isolation has been contrasted, either explicitly or implicitly, with images of human beings engaged in communal activities. Nowhere does this find a more acute focus than on the day of her death, where even "Ridley found it impossible to be alone in his room" [p. 427]. The entire household, and by extension the hotel, is engaged in a corporate effort of support, against which Rachel is spotlighted, alone and separate. It is significant that on the last day of her life she is absent from the text except for the few moments before her death, which she spends with Terence. This absence, which is the prelude to her death, further highlights the gulf between Rachel's "world and the ordinary world," soon to be irrevocably severed.

Rachel's death is a fulfilment at two levels: one

in terms of the metaphysical journey which is now complete; two in terms of the ideology of romantic love which is latent in the book. Her dissolution through death is a triumph because it creates a perfect union:

So much the better--this was death. It was nothing; it was to cease to breathe. It was happiness, it was perfect happiness. They had now what they had always wanted to have, the union which had been impossible while they lived. Unconscious whether he thought the words or spoke them aloud, he said, "No two people have ever been so happy as we have been. No one has ever loved as we have loved."
[p.431]

Death concludes love at a moment of heightened intensity, providing the final, most perfect consummation.²⁷ The links between love and death are completed in Hewet's thoughts: the fulfilment he seeks--"the union which had been impossible while they lived"--is enclosed in his vision of "perfect happiness."

Virginia Woolf holds some attitudes in common with the poets of the English Romantic period: for example, her belief in the primacy of the imagination and its superiority over reason; certain attitudes towards nature; and her creation of an ideal vision of the world which is tested and often destroyed when set against the real world. This last technique determines the structure of *To the Lighthouse*, where the idyllic world of "The Window" is destroyed in "Time Passes"; and the vision of life which is recreated in the final section is strengthened because

it incorporates the knowledge of this destruction. The same process is used in Hewet's response to Rachel's death. He experiences it exclusively in terms of an achieved unity until he leaves the room:

As he saw the passage outside the room, and the table with the cups and the plates, it suddenly came over him that here was a world in which he would never see Rachel again.

"Rachel! Rachel!" he shrieked, trying to rush back to her. [p. 432]

The juxtaposition of the two responses--the romantic ideal and the factual reality of the everyday world--is both powerful and effective. Terence's anguish springs from the knowledge that his isolation is complete; he must continue to survive alone without Rachel.

There is a whole series of literary allusions which contribute to the development of the novel by adding a further dimension to the themes of love and death.²⁸ I have already mentioned Shelley's "Adonais"; of all the Romantic poets, Shelley, according to Benjamin P. Kurtz, is the poet of death *par excellence*. In his book, *The Pursuit of Death*, a study of the theme of death in Shelley's poetry and an account of the three stages--moral, aesthetic, and mystic--by which Shelley gains an imaginative victory over death, Kurtz makes a comment which helps to clarify my remarks about the process Woolf uses:

The failure of the quest for an embodied ideal is the great romantic failure. But

some romanticists pass through this failure and come out on the further side. Their dreams, modified by the experience, become visions which are contagious to the world.²⁹

In Woolf's case the embodied ideal is a unity which is constantly destroyed by death. Each time, as Lily Briscoe realizes in *To the Lighthouse*, "the vision must be perpetually remade" [p. 270]. The "remade" vision, even if it is only momentary, offers to the world an image of harmony and unity; just as the finished work of art offers to the world a completed form.

In *The Voyage Out* Rachel's death destroys the vision of a world in which order can exist. Nevertheless, despite the bleakness of Terence's view after his ideal has been shattered by a perception of the world among the cups and plates, the novel is concerned to affirm a "pattern" which makes life "reasonable," one that can sustain the individual. In order to do this, Woolf moves away from the villa to the hotel, thereby increasing emotional distance and widening the spectrum of responses to the death.

Mrs. Thornbury becomes an important figure in this movement away from individual intensity. She is described as a woman whose "long life and all these children had left her very smooth; they seemed to have rubbed away the marks of individuality and to have left only what was very old and maternal" [p. 390]. Many of the hotel guests were first introduced as caricatures--one critic describes their

presentation as "feebly satirical"³⁰--but by this stage some of them have acquired depth and resonance. In Mrs. Thornbury's reaction to Rachel's death, there is real sadness at the loss and pathos, but also great dignity. In her reflections, death is seen both as preserver and destroyer:

There was undoubtedly much suffering, much struggling, but, on the whole, surely there was a balance of happiness--surely order did prevail. Nor were the deaths of young people really the saddest things in life--they were saved so much; they kept so much. The dead--she called to mind those who had died early, accidentally--were beautiful; she often dreamt of the dead. And in time Terence himself would come to feel-- . . . [p. 439]

The novel is ambivalent: it cannot affirm positively that order prevails, nor can it wholeheartedly acknowledge only chaos. Instead it splits: at the level of individual consciousness there is no solace for this death, and Terence must continue in the world alone; but in the "old and maternal" figure of Mrs. Thornbury, who is representative rather than individual, it is possible to recognize continuity which is a type of order.

The final movement of the novel must accomplish two tasks. The first is to register the meaning of Rachel's death through the variety of responses (Mrs. Flushing's anger and refusal to submit to death are as much of an evasion as Rachel's passive acquiescence to her fate). The second task is to re-order human life by incorporating the

knowledge of death. Mrs. Thornbury's more universal perspective offers some consolation, and even the platitudes--"in time Terence would come to feel"--exist as partial truths. Continuity is also provided through memory, which preserves and in this way helps to overcome the divisiveness of death.

The movement of perspective away from the immediacy of Terence's reaction to the more universal and extensive view presented by Mrs. Thornbury concludes in St. John's view of the procession at the end of the novel:

All these voices sounded gratefully in St. John's ears as he lay half-asleep, and yet vividly conscious of everything around him. Across his eyes passed a procession of objects, black and indistinct, the figures of people picking up their books, their cards, their balls of wool, their work-baskets, and passing him one after another on their way to bed. [p. 458]

The figures have lost all individuality and have become silhouettes, symbolising the march of human destiny. Although some critics have claimed that this closing vision is a bleak reminder that all human life is moving towards death,³¹ their emphasis on death at this point is mistaken. It is not a joyful procession, but it does acknowledge a level at which human continuity exists despite death. After the internal logic of the book has been pushed to its furthest limit in Rachel's death, Woolf is still able to make a creative leap and recapture

some notion of pattern. Although, as I mentioned earlier, Woolf remains ambivalent, the archetypes and symbols that are presented in the procession convey a vision of life in which human destinies are linked to one another, and gain support from those links. This closing vision, if it is not optimistic, is at least enduring and to that extent offers a qualified affirmation of life over death.

NOTES

CHAPTER II

¹ Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin, eds., *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 50.

² Irma Rantavaara, *Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury*, p. 105. Rantavaara notes the exception of *Night and Day*.

³ Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), p. 349. All further references will be to this edition and will be cited in parentheses.

⁴ Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, pp. 224-25. September 18, 1934.

⁵ In a letter to Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf states: that she wished "to give the feeling of a vast tumult of life, as various and disorderly as possible, which should be cut short for a moment by the death, and go on again--," quoted in Nancy Topping Bazin, *Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1973), p. 47.

⁶ James Naremore, *The World Without A Self*, p. 8, states: "The full import of the story cannot be understood unless we are aware that the settings and events are rather carefully planned to illustrate a general thesis about life. Likewise, we must be aware that the fact of death, far more than simply an expedient way to end, is central to that thesis."

Avrom Fleishman in *Virginia Woolf: a Critical Reading* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), reads *The Voyage Out* as a story of initiation and heroic quest. He claims, p. 5: "The focus of the novel toward the heroine's death is not a denial of her initiation but a confirmation of it. Her death is not to be seen merely as the entry of the absurd which cuts off the steady development of the heroine but as the last and highest stage of that development itself." While I am indebted to Fleishman for his notion of a "metaphysical" journey which Rachel undergoes, his reading does not adequately stress the ambivalence of Woolf's attitude towards death.

⁷ After her engagement Rachel states, p. 377:
 "Terence says we must go to tea with Mrs. Thornbury because she's been so kind, but I don't see it; in fact, I'd rather have my right hand sawn in pieces--just imagine! the eyes of all those women!"

⁸ Hermione Lee, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1977), p. 31, remarks: "Within its deceptively traditional form, it undertakes a theme sufficiently abstract and methods sufficiently impressionistic."

⁹ Avrom Fleishman, p. 3. J. H. Buckley, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 17-18, gives an outline of "a typical Bildungsroman plot" which, despite the limitations of his definition, immediately reveals the ways in which *The Voyage Out* departs from the norm. Buckley makes no mention of *The Voyage Out* as a Bildungsroman novel in his book, although he does refer to *Jacob's Room*, claiming that it bears the "main themes and conventions of the Bildungsroman" [p. 262].

¹⁰ *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, 2nd ed., corr. by G. M. Mathews (1943; rpt. London: OUP, 1970), p. 443, l. 477.

¹¹ Hermione Lee, p. 33.

¹² Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, p. 184. August 5, 1932.

¹³ James Naremore discusses Virginia Woolf's attraction to "a watery element," p. 2. See also James Hafley, *The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as Novelist* (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), pp. 22-23 for a discussion of water symbolism.

¹⁴ Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, p. 61. October 15, 1923.

¹⁵ James Naremore, p. 39.

¹⁶ Sigmund Freud in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," outlines his theory of the "death instinct." It is based upon the premise that the origin of an instinct is a need to restore an earlier state of things. The primary instinct, therefore, is the death instinct which seeks to "return to the inanimate state" [p. 38]. To return to a state of inorganic matter is of course to achieve complete unity.

¹⁷ Jean Alexander, *The Venture Of Form In The Novels Of Virginia Woolf* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1974), pp. 9-10.

¹⁸ Jean Alexander, p. 41.

¹⁹ H. Lee, for example, pp. 32-33, claims that: "Helen appears as the designer of Rachel's fate (anticipating Mrs. Ramsay's mythic, even sinister, qualities in *To the Lighthouse*). But Helen is also a human being."

²⁰ Nancy Topping Bazin, p. 52, suggests that a comparison is being made between "going up the river and penetrating a female." This suggestion is supported by Terence's identification with the boat: "In some strange way the boat became identified with himself [Terence]" [p. 326].

²¹ Although Jean Alexander, p. 15, claims: "The snake is not the biblical one, but the world-snake which in Babylonian mythology was associated with the sea in a context which suggests a power contrary to the power man accepts: it was an emblem of chaos." I find the reading which interprets the snake as the biblical one more convincing, although it is true that the snake operates as an emblem of chaos in the novel.

²² See Nancy Topping Bazin, p. 53, who draws parallels between Rachel and the Virgin Queen Elizabeth I.

²³ Mitchell A. Leaska in "Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*: Character Deduction and the Function of Ambiguity." *Virginia Woolf Quarterly* 1 (Winter 1973), 18-41, comments upon the fact that although typhoid is constantly implied, Woolf provides no concrete reason, or explanation for Rachel's death. He continues, pp. 35-36: "and we are at liberty to speculate on why we are not able to 'give a reasonable explanation for Rachel's dying.' For this statement suggests that the novel can also be read on a different plane: a plane on which rationality has no meaning, where contradictory forces flourish and haunt the crepuscular region of dream and delirium."

²⁴ See *The Voyage Out*, p. 356: "There she [Rachel] was, swaying enthusiastically over her music, quite forgetful of him,--but he liked that quality in her. He liked the impersonality which it produced in her."

²⁵ H. Lee, p. 50.

²⁶ Mitchell A. Leaska, p. 33.

²⁷ The Romantic infatuation with death is commented upon by A. Alvarez in *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), p. 171, who says: "'the intense atom glows A moment, then is quenched in a most cold repose.' That is from 'Adonais,' the fullest and most emphatic statement of the Romantic belief that for the poet, life itself is the real corruption, and only 'the white radiance of eternity' is pure enough for his fine sensibilities."

²⁸ See A. Fleishman, pp. 15-21, for an interesting discussion of the literary allusions in the text.

²⁹ Benjamin P. Kurtz, *The Pursuit Of Death: A Study of Shelley's Poetry* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970), p. 82.

³⁰ H. Lee, p. 38.

³¹ See James Naremore, p. 54, for example.

CHAPTER III

MRS. DALLOWAY

"The moderns had never written anything
one wanted to read about death."¹

With the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* Virginia Woolf's art takes a major step forward. The techniques which were first used experimentally in *Jacob's Room* have been successfully developed, and are accompanied by a maturity of vision, and greater variety and depth of characterisation.² Woolf's approach to death in this novel differs significantly from *The Voyage Out*: death enters *Mrs. Dalloway* not as an arbitrary and inexplicable event, but as a deliberate choice in Septimus Smith's suicide.

The presence of death in the novel is not, however, limited to the single act; the whole book contains a sustained meditation upon death, and Septimus' suicide can only be fully understood within this larger context. The introduction of death as an act of will rather than circumstance indicates a new and more certain control over her material than Woolf has previously been able to accomplish. It also reveals a shift in her attitude towards death, a shift which is confirmed by an entry in her diary made less than a month after the publication of *Mrs. Dalloway*, and after the death of her friend Jacques Raverat:

Nevertheless, I do not any longer feel inclined to doff the cap to death. I like to go out of the room talking, with an unfinished casual sentence on my lips. That is the effect it had on me--no leavetakings, no submissions, but someone skipping out into the darkness. . . . More and more do I repeat my own version of Montaigne--"It's life that matters."³

This passage reflects a new tenacity in Woolf's response to death, which is also present in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Henceforth, we see an increasing stress placed upon the need to explore and create forms, both in life and art, which resist the chaos brought by death. The party in *Mrs. Dalloway* is one such form; another is the larger structure of the novel itself, which is completed only when Peter Walsh perceives Clarissa with such clarity and intensity, in the closing scene. Clarissa is poised at a moment of stability within the flux of existence, and in her figure is expressed a powerful affirmation of individual life.

The struggle between the opposing forces of life and death retains its centrality throughout Woolf's fiction, and appears to have been linked to her own personal struggle for survival.⁴ In *Mrs. Dalloway*, she distances and dramatises this struggle by using two characters--one who destroys himself, while the other survives. This provides Woolf with a measure of safety and allows for a more sophisticated technique. The strict formal control of the novel, while it permits greater freedom in her examination of death than previously, may also account for the quality of conscious artistry that Stuart Rosenberg

finds excessive.⁵

There are many valuable comparisons between Virginia Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, but I shall limit myself to three areas which have direct bearing upon my discussion. First, the fact that between these two novels the First World War took place. The impact of the war on European civilization has been well documented: Leonard Woolf points briefly, but succinctly to it, in his autobiography: "That was how I first learnt that war was inevitable and that 19th-century civilisation was ending."⁶ The war is frequently referred to in this novel, and is implicitly present throughout in the figure of Septimus Warren Smith, who is a victim of the war. Avrom Fleishman comments: "*Mrs. Dalloway*, like *Jacob's Room* and *To the Lighthouse*, is intimately tied to the England of the postwar years, not only recording the human losses and the moral atmosphere but probing at its most basic institutions."⁷ The war, which is the cause of Septimus' insanity, also operates as a symbolic presence⁸ which stands in opposition to the unity offered by Clarissa's party. It is not until *To the Lighthouse*, however, that Woolf is able to confront the total destruction and chaos represented by war. The complete disintegration of the human world in "Time Passes" is one of her finest and darkest visions, and is the more powerful for being intimately related to the specific historical event seen by many as the end of civilization.

Second, there is a comparison between the endings of the two novels. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, emphasis is placed upon the life of an individual character who has recognized and accepted the fact of death. In *The Voyage Out*, although Woolf attempts to endorse the continuity of life in the procession at the end, there are too many unresolved tensions and the most powerful point of focus remains Rachel's death. *Mrs. Dalloway* ends upon a celebratory note made possible by Peter Walsh's perception of Clarissa. Peter's final vision not only sums up Clarissa's significance in his life, but also provides the reader with a composite image of her:

In between the 'Mrs. Dalloway' of the first line of Virginia Woolf's novel, and the 'Clarissa' of the concluding lines of its last page, the reader is led to an awareness of the enormous complexity of the character in question. On a simple level we can say that we move from a view of 'Mrs. Dalloway'--the married woman bearing her husband's name and thus seen in terms of her relationship with other people--to 'Clarissa' a person in her own right. But this ignores the fact that the final extraordinarily striking view of Clarissa's 'full selfhood' is achieved through the eyes of another person, Peter Walsh.⁹

The final epiphany of the novel is prepared for by the way people and events constantly receive their significance via the filter of an external perceiver. I have already discussed the use of this technique in *The Voyage Out*, where Rachel's personality was presented through four other characters. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the technique is considerably

more experimental; even the perception of the self demands a reflecting surface such as the looking glass in which Clarissa sees the different parts of her personality drawn together: "she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing room and made a meeting-point."¹⁰

Peter Walsh and Richard Dalloway are the two characters who lay the groundwork for the conclusion of the novel. When, after visiting Clarissa, Peter meditates upon his past, he not only describes her power, but also has a vision of her as a complete person with all the different aspects of her personality assembled; in so doing he uses the words with which the novel will conclude:

With that extraordinary gift, that woman's gift, of making a world of her own wherever she happened to be. She came into a room; she stood, as he had often seen her, in a doorway with lots of people round her. But it was Clarissa one remembered. Not that she was striking; not beautiful at all; there was nothing picturesque about her; she never said anything specially clever; there she was, however; there she was.
[pp. 114-15]

The success of the conclusion depends upon the gradual accumulation of moments such as this. Richard Dalloway has a vision of similar clarity, after his luncheon with Lady Bruton: "And Clarissa--it was difficult to think of her; except in starts, as at luncheon, when he saw her quite distinctly; their whole life" [pp. 174-75]. Both

men are in love with Clarissa, and it is this love which accounts for the wholeness of their perceptions. Avrom Fleishman, who argues that Virginia Woolf was influenced by the philosopher John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart's discussion of selfhood, love, and time as categories of experience, quotes McTaggart's description of the emotion of love as: "the direct perception of another self," and goes on to say:

In answer to the question, what do selves do? McTaggart might have answered simply, they know each other. We are here close to the world of Woolf's novels, in which such moments of knowledge are the only events that count, while true self-knowledge is both rarer and less crucial.¹¹

Through love, a unity that allows genuine communication can be perceived.

The final comparison between the two novels concerns the concept of a three-fold reality outlined in the Introduction. In *The Voyage Out*, we move away from the social world into the natural world, which functions both as a new area of exploration and a symbolic correlative for Rachel's inward journey; whereas in *Mrs. Dalloway* we are always firmly placed in a given social world. London is present both as a fully realized place and as a concept through which Woolf can examine specific sets of social relations.¹² Jeremy Hawthorn, who reads *Mrs. Dalloway* as a study in alienation, has pointed to the profound

importance of the social dimension in the novel:

What I am saying is that Virginia Woolf saw important connections between social institutions and individual characteristics, and that the relationship between Clarissa and Septimus in the novel is not just metaphysical and psychological but has an important social dimension too.¹³

Hawthorn's argument provides a perspective which has all too frequently been ignored by critics, especially those eager to label Woolf simply as a Bloomsbury aesthete; he stresses Woolf's awareness of the interdependence of society and the individual.

The natural world is not, however, absent from *Mrs. Dalloway*. It appears primarily in two forms: one of these is the memories, shared by a variety of characters, of Bourton; the other is Clarissa's and Septimus' responses to the natural world which they observe in the city. Because the social level is dominant, the concept of a three-fold reality is less useful in an analysis of *Mrs. Dalloway* than it was in *The Voyage Out*. However, Josephine O'Brien Schaefer, who describes *Mrs. Dalloway* as "quite a perfect novel," sees the three realms as fully integrated:

In *Mrs. Dalloway* Virginia Woolf's whole view of reality is perfectly conveyed through the intermingling and yet distinctly separate existence of the three realms: the clocks and omnibuses of the busy London life, the shifting sun and water of the natural world, the passion of individual experience and personal relations.¹⁴

I am somewhat uneasy with the strict regularity of design suggested here because it fails to take into account the irregularities present in the book, the moments when the flow is shattered; for example, Peter Walsh's interruption of Clarissa's reverie while she is mending her dress. The novel contains a series of disruptions--the most important is Septimus' suicide,--and after each disruption takes place the fragments must be assimilated into a new unity.

One fundamental question to which any criticism of the novel must attend is the problem of whether Clarissa is the central character, or whether Clarissa and Septimus occupy parallel positions of equal importance. Woolf had originally intended the story to focus upon Mrs. Dalloway who was to die during the course of it, and the author only later evolved the idea of "splitting" the characters so that Clarissa could continue to live while Septimus died.¹⁵ This problem has particular relevance to my discussion because it affects the nature of the resolution which is made possible by Clarissa's reaction to Septimus' death.

Alex Page, who contends that Clarissa and Septimus "merge into one personality in the famous concluding scene,"¹⁶ demonstrates the parallels which are constantly invoked during the novel, between the two characters. Page argues that the plot moves by means of a gradual convergence of Clarissa and Septimus, and that Septimus provides an illustration of the dangers inherent

in Clarissa's psychic make-up; he is her character taken to extremes:

A more clinical way of putting it is this: she recognizes that he is the id to her ego. In that sense I take him as her double and see them "merge" at the end. I would not push the psychological analogy beyond her recognition in him of qualities that (she intuitively apprehends) parallel hers; they are chiefly the qualities of pure emotion and energy which, in contradistinction to her, brook no compromise. In a recent essay Keith Hollingsworth has made a persuasive case for Septimus Smith's being "the incarnation of the death-instincts, [and] Clarissa Dalloway, of the instincts of life" in fairly literal Freudian terms. My enlargement of this view consists in claiming that Septimus can also be taken as the forces, the vitality, and the perils of the id.¹⁷

To see Septimus as the "id" is to ignore the fact that his character has been formed by the "intoxication of language;"¹⁸ language is quite clearly associated with the development of the ego. There is insufficient evidence in the text to support Page's interpretation; moreover, it provides an inadequate account of Septimus' insanity. His madness is not the expression of unlimited, unrepressed energy; nor is it born of the "impulsion to obtain satisfaction for the instinctual needs, in accordance with the pleasure principle."¹⁹ Instead, libido is denied and repressed in Septimus to a pathological extent which influences his response to the outside world:

How Shakespeare loathed humanity--the putting on of clothes, the getting of children, the sordidity of the mouth and the belly! This was now

revealed to Septimus; 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. [pp. 133-34]

Although there are links between Clarissa's denial of sexuality and Septimus' repudiation of all instinctual gratification, there is no evidence to suggest the kind of split between ego and id that is outlined above. The interpretation is based on a mistaken critical premise; and while it is important that we acknowledge Woolf's expressed intentions, Clarissa is the true centre of the book which bears her name:

The work proceeds by a series of juxtapositions of the central figure [Clarissa] and those who surround her: Peter Walsh, Sally Seton, Miss Kilman, and others besides Septimus. Its form suggests the model of a center with radial links to a number of points on the circumference rather than the polar opposition described in some readings.²⁰

The model described here offers a more useful and accurate interpretation, which also accounts for the significance of Peter Walsh's closing perception: Clarissa is indeed a "meeting-point".

Clarissa's position as the central figure in the novel gains further emphasis by her intense awareness of the responsibility of individual life:

Then (she had felt it only this morning) there was the terror; the overwhelming incapacity, one's parents giving it into one's hands, this life, to be lived to the end, to be walked with serenely; there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear. [p. 281]

The fear which Clarissa experiences is the fear of death. This passage helps to clarify the meaning of Septimus' act when "he had flung it [life] away" [p. 280]. It expresses an existential attitude where responsibility for the continuity and quality of existence rests with the individual, and is defined through his actions. The most complete action in the novel is Septimus' suicide because it involves a total relinquishing of the self. Simultaneously, however, no action is entirely complete because it creates reverberations in the lives of other characters. Mrs. Dalloway's perception of Septimus' death defines its significance. In turn this perception gives her life a new unity, and completes her party by allowing her to recognize that: "It's life that matters." S. P. Rosenbaum comments "The only epistemological certainty concerning death seems to be the way that the thoughts and facts of death can alter our perceptions of external reality."²¹ In this case the external reality which is modified by Clarissa's perception of death includes not only the sum of her own life, but also the corporate life of the individuals who make up the party.

The recognition of death forces the individual to ask ethical questions concerning the nature and quality of human life. Septimus' reflections on value are aimed at the world in keeping with his messianic visions ("it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning" [p. 133]); whereas Clarissa's questioning remains rooted

at personal and individual levels, in keeping with her awareness of individual responsibility. Early in the novel Clarissa has a vision of past and present standing side by side:

For she was a child, throwing bread to the ducks, between her parents, and at the same time a grown woman coming to her parents who stood by the lake, holding her life in her arms which, as she neared them, grew larger and larger in her arms, until it became a whole life, a complete life, which she put down by them and said, "This is what I have made of it! This!" And what had she made of it? What, indeed? [pp. 63-64]

What Clarissa has "made of it" is a central question in the novel. It is a question which is not answered until the final epiphany where all the different moments are brought together.

Clarissa's perception of the external world and of other individuals is based on the premise that there are no absolute certainties: "she would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that" [p. 11]. Her refusal to accept exclusive definitions is her gift, and it rests upon her feeling, like Lily Briscoe's, that life is a precarious and unsafe process.

She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day.
[p. 11]

This danger is generally experienced as fear which, as I discussed in Chapter II, is present as an underlying

anxiety. However, when the individual has acknowledged and accepted the reality of death, fear can be countered and the danger experienced as exhilaration. Clarissa only fully overcomes her fear of death after Septimus' suicide; then she is able to celebrate the danger of life.

Clarissa and Septimus share a powerful sense of isolation, accompanied by fear and anxiety:

The terror which her [Clarissa's] life contains is overt and uncontrolled in Septimus; the entire range of fears initially analyzed is in fact demonstrated in the destruction of Septimus; the fear of the cosmos, the fear of the unknown forces in the self, and most notably the fear of others.²²

This critic neglects to mention the fear of death. However, the difference in Clarissa's and Septimus' attitudes towards death distinguishes the two characters. Septimus, who continually reflects upon death, sees it as a punishment for his inability to feel, and links it with his overpowering sense of isolation:

Besides, now that he was quite alone, condemned, deserted, as those who are about to die are alone, there was a luxury in it, an isolation full of sublimity; a freedom which the attached can never know. [p. 140]

Septimus always associates freedom with isolation ("he was free, as it was decreed that he, Septimus, the lord of men, should be free; alone" [p. 101]); and he confirms his belief in this "freedom" by the total isolation of his suicide. However, Septimus also believes that he has been

re-born, and that "there is no death" [p. 212]. Septimus' attitudes to death reflect the paradox contained in his character; he experiences simultaneously a sense of complete isolation, and a messianic vision of connection with the world. His attempt to deny the power of death as a finite end to existence, is demonstrated in a modified form in Clarissa's transcendental theory:

Did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? but that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; . . . being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself. [p. 12]

Clarissa's theory also describes the way in which the reader comes to know the characters: each character contributes fragments of shared experiences, images, and memories which combine to form a whole statement. Furthermore, images and metaphors of connection such as the mist in this passage, and a more important one, the web, recur throughout the novel and suggest links between individuals, even when they are unknown to one another.

Such connections exist between individuals, and between the individual and nature. In a passage, which contains echoes of the one quoted above, Septimus' response to external phenomena is described:

But they beckoned; leaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body, there on the seat fanned it up and down; when the branch stretched he, too, made that statement. [p. 32]

One of the essential differences between Clarissa and Septimus can be located here; he constantly experiences in a literal manner, those connections which are perceived metaphorically by Clarissa. This is one of the distinctions between the "sane" and the "insane" truth represented by the two characters. Septimus' inability to distinguish the external world as "other" results in his failure to achieve any viable relation with it.²³ A correlative to this is his inability to establish relationships with other human beings: Septimus cannot draw a circumference around the different parts which constitute his personality, so he constantly fears invasion and coercion. It is only possible to form relationships beyond the self if the individual has some idea where that self begins and ends: Clarissa's sanity, for example, is marked by a very sure sense of the boundaries of her self.

There are three important areas which must be studied in order to understand the full meaning of Septimus' suicide. First, Clarissa's thoughts about death, which are an integral part of her character and her day; and the ways in which death is associated with her. Second, Woolf's use of different kinds of time in the novel. Third, an area closely related to time, the use of perspective.

First, Clarissa's conflicting attitudes towards death are resolved by Septimus' suicide. Critical commentary upon Clarissa's attitude to death ranges from simple statements about her fear; to claiming that she "looks forward to death as rest";²⁴ to asserting that she believes in the achievement of a mystical unity;²⁵ to interpreting her attitude from an existential perspective, where Clarissa is said to hold a view of death which makes life simultaneously absurd and precious.²⁶ The limitations of much criticism on this question are the result of its failure to acknowledge the ambivalence of Clarissa's attitude which is, to some extent, a reflection of Woolf's own dualistic response to death. The criticism often fails to take into account the changes in Clarissa's attitude during the novel.

Clarissa's rejection of sexuality is associated with death early in the book: "The sheets were clean, tight stretched in a broad white band from side to side. Narrower and narrower would her bed be" [pp. 45-46]. The implicit association with the tomb marks the destructive potential of one of the dominant impulses in Clarissa's character, the need to withdraw. This is evocatively suggested in a similar image a little later:

It was all over for her. The sheet was stretched and the bed narrow. She had gone up into the tower alone and left them black-berrying in the sun. [p. 70]

The impulse to withdraw stems from the need for genuine privacy, but, as this passage demonstrates, it can also bear destructive associations with death. Withdrawal is set against the sociable side of Clarissa's personality, her need to "kindle and illuminate," to give her party.

Hawthorne sees this tension between the private world of the self, and the public world in which the individual must operate, as the essential dialectic of the novel. He relates sexuality to it in the following way:

The embrace that Septimus finds in death is sought because he cannot find it in that human contact achieved momentarily at her party that recharges Clarissa's spiritual reserves. The traditional association of sex and death surely stems from a recognition that sex involves some extinction of privacy, some breaking down of the walls of the self, that prefigures the complete extinction of the self in death.²⁷

I have already discussed the relationship between sex and death present in *The Voyage Out*; Clarissa shares with Rachel the need to protect herself:

And there is a dignity in people; a solitude; even between husband and wife a gulf; and that one must respect, thought Clarissa, watching him open the door; for one would not part with it oneself, or take it, against his will, from one's husband, without losing one's independence, one's self-respect--something, after all, priceless. [p. 181]

The solitude described here is based upon genuine privacy, a dignity that enhances the love between husband and wife. Such love is denied to Septimus because the tension between

the private and public worlds is taken to extremes in his character. His solitude imprisons him, and as a result of his insanity Septimus can only conceive of a connection that lacks any boundaries whatsoever: "Universal love: the meaning of the world" [p. 224].

Clarissa's attitude to death is also defined by the repetition of the leitmotiv: "Fear no more the heat o' the sun," the refrain from *Cymbeline*, which provides another link between Clarissa and Septimus. N. C. Thakur claims that this refrain operates as a symbol of Clarissa's conception of death, but he fails to note the shifts in its usage,²⁸ from perceiving death as rest, to asserting the self against death at the end of the novel.

The second area to consider to understand Septimus' suicide is the two forms of time present in *Mrs. Dalloway*: measured and structured clock time that reverberates throughout, punctuating the significant moments in the book;²⁹ and the subjectively apprehended time inhabited by man's consciousness where past, present, and future meet and intermingle, and where it is possible for Clarissa to believe that she exists everywhere. However, it is necessary for the characters to recognize that time does exist as an objective and absolute dimension, and that human existence is finite, encompassed by a girdle of years. Clarissa is aware that the passing of time is relentless and leads to death:

But 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 the youthful years, the colours, salts, tones of existence. . . . [p. 44]

This gradual restriction of possibilities as time passes is fittingly expressed by Clarissa's withdrawal to her attic room. It is also experienced forcibly by other characters, particularly Peter Walsh, whose reflections often connect the various strands of the novel at thematic and imagistic levels:

It is Clarissa herself, he thought, with a deep emotion, and an extraordinarily clear, yet puzzling, recollection of her, . . . Then, as the sound of St. Margaret's languished, he thought, She has been ill, and the sound expressed languor and suffering. It was her heart, he remembered; and the sudden loudness of the final stroke tolled for death that surprised in the midst of life, Clarissa falling where she stood, in her drawing-room. No! No! he cried. She is not dead! I am not old, he cried, and marched up Whitehall, as if there rolled down to him, vigorous, unending, his future. [pp. 74-75]

Peter's thoughts of death are stimulated by the sound of St. Margaret's striking the hour: the subjective time of memory is linked to the objective measurement of clock time. This passage provides another instance of the preparation, which runs throughout the novel, for the final epiphany. The diminishing years and the approach of death are powerfully experienced at a personal level

by both Clarissa and Peter, and this awareness reinforces their sense of isolation.

Third, I have mentioned that time and perspective are related. In contrast to the individual awareness of death which Clarissa and Peter experience is a long-term impersonal perspective. This is expressed in the novel in two ways; on the one hand, society with its rituals and traditions provides a continuity which transforms people and events into enduring symbols--for example, the Prime Minister who operates as a unifying symbol that represents, paradoxically, the endurance of the human enterprise and its folly. Woolf frequently insists upon this shift in perspective between an individual focus and a wider more general focus, be it history, tradition, or the rhythms of the natural world. Part of *Mrs. Dalloway*'s success lies in the fact that the concluding scene draws together and unifies the various perspectives present in the novel.

The other major perspective is provided by the novel's treatment of love. Love, sex, and death are all closely related because the possibilities of connection or separateness are highly focused in each, although they are not, as one critic suggests, interchangeable.³⁰ Love, as a universal timeless emotion expressed in the song of the flower woman outside the tube station, offers powerful possibilities of continuity, despite death:

Through all ages--when the pavement was grass,
when it was swamp, through the age of tusk and

mammoth, through the age of silent sunrise, the battered woman--for she wore a skirt--with her right hand exposed, her left clutching at her side, stood singing of love--love which has lasted a million years, she sang, love which prevails, and millions of years ago, her lover, who had been dead these centuries, had walked, she crooned, with her in May; but in the course of ages, long as summer days, and flaming, she remembered, with nothing but red asters, he had gone; death's enormous sickle had swept those tremendous hills, and when at last she laid her hoary and immensely aged head on the earth, now become a mere cinder of ice, she implored the Gods to lay by her side a bunch of purple heather, there on her high burial place which the last rays of the last sun caressed; for then the pageant of the universe would be over. [pp. 122-23]

I have quoted this passage in full because it offers a good illustration of Woolf's use of perspective to establish a timeless pattern of connection that provides a vision of ultimate unity, while still allowing for the individual and disconnected aspects of human experience. Peter Walsh's personal love experiences, which he has been meditating upon just prior to the song, are set against "love which has lasted a million years." The perspective of time is linked to love and used in an interesting way: "in the course of ages, long as summer days," the individual time unit of the day evokes the passage of ages.

Archetypal figures such as the flower woman, the solitary traveller, and the old lady who lives opposite Clarissa, all play an important part in *Mrs. Dalloway*. They form a contrast not only to the individuals, but also to the symbols of society--the Prime Minister, Sir

William Bradshaw. These archetypal figures symbolize a general truth which contains individual lives and moments of experience within "the pageant of the universe." It is a remarkable achievement that a novel, set in a specific place at a specific time, is able to successfully incorporate this quality of timelessness, embracing love, life, and death. The final epiphany is balanced against the universal perspective that has been evoked throughout.

The three areas outlined above provide the context for Septimus' suicide which, like Clarissa's attitude towards death, has received multiple interpretations. One critic, in an anthropological reading of the text, views the suicide as a ritual sacrifice which affirms the collective existence of the group;³¹ another sees it as an artistic mistake which represents an unresolved conflict in the author.³² Like other important moments in the novel, Septimus' death is not susceptible to a single interpretation; instead it brings together diverse elements of the novel's interests. Septimus commits suicide partly as a result of the war, and his death is a comment on the insanity of war; another aspect of his death concerns Woolf's repudiation of Sir William Bradshaw's doctrine of proportion. The most important feature of Septimus' suicide, however, is the deliberate nature of the act. The scene is structured so as to emphasize Septimus' conscious awareness of what is happening, and what he is choosing to do. The preceding episode of the

hat-making is a clear indication that this act is not the product of an insane impulse.

The philosophical premise upon which Septimus' act is based, has been expressed by Camus in *The Rebel*:

What is a rebel? A man who says no, but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation. He is also a man who says yes, from the moment he makes his first gesture of rebellion. . . .

In every act of rebellion, the rebel simultaneously experiences a feeling of revulsion at the infringement of his rights and a complete and spontaneous loyalty to certain aspects of himself. Thus he implicitly brings into play a standard of values so far from being gratuitous that he is prepared to support it no matter what the risks.³³

Septimus is one of a series of rebellious figures in Woolf's novels. He is committed to a vision of life which resists the conformity imposed by Holmes and Bradshaw. His last words: "I'll give it you!" [p. 226] define his action; they are born of "a complete and spontaneous loyalty to certain aspects of himself." Septimus' death, far from being cowardly as Holmes suggests, is an assertion of his belief in the value of life. He takes the ultimate risk: the only way that Septimus can preserve his vision of life, and keep his self inviolate, is through suicide. His renunciation of life is, paradoxically, an affirmation of life, which confirms Woolf's view that "It's life that matters." Later in her career Woolf will pursue the same paradox even further in the character of Bernard, in *The Waves*.

Rezia understands the meaning of her husband's suicide: "Rezia ran to the window, she saw, she understood" [p. 226]. The purity which Clarissa perceives as an essential element of Septimus' act of rebellion arises from the totality of his commitment to himself, and his vision of a better world. However, the full meaning of the suicide is not revealed until the death has been incorporated into Clarissa's party.

The party is the event towards which the novel has been moving, and it draws together the different characters in the book, as well as the themes that surround them:

The party is the outward show of the form found for life, and within its narrow range of time and space contains the affective past, the past of English society, crime, madness, despair and death. . . .³⁴

Some critics equate the creation of social forms, such as the party, with the creation of artistic forms, such as Lily Briscoe's painting.³⁵ This overlooks three factors. First, the party is a transient event; whereas the painting is a completed form that will exist independently of the artist. Second, Clarissa needs Septimus' death to complete her offering. Third, Peter Walsh's role as observer is essential at the end of the novel: he anticipates the conclusion of the book when he sees the ambulance carrying Septimus to the hospital: "a moment, in which things came together; this ambulance; and life and death" [p. 230].

✓ Because Clarissa's party is the "outward show of the form found for life," it must contain death. Her resentment against Lady Bradshaw for bringing death into her party is caused by Clarissa's desire to make the party invulnerable, but it is muted once she perceives the quality and importance of Septimus' act. Her response to his death is rendered in powerful physical, even sexual terms:

Always her body went through it first. . . .
He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. [p. 280]

The physical alliance between the two characters is completed in Clarissa's response.³⁶

Through Septimus' suicide, Clarissa is finally able to overcome her fear of death and reconcile the opposing tensions in her character--the need to withdraw and the need for outside contact--through the recognition that death is both ultimate separation and a means to unity:

Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death. [pp. 280-81]

Fleishman points out that "these perceptions of death stand in a long tradition of mystical asceticism marked by the renunciation of worldly goods and human contacts,

the movement toward death as release from the world and entry into a blessed state, the metaphoric substitution of a new order of being for earthly loves."³⁷ Clarissa's perception of death as an "embrace" is a mystic vision of perfect unity which she incorporates into "the process of living" [p. 282]. This does not refute the philosophical aspect of rebellion; instead it adds a further dimension to it. According to Camus "Rebellion . . . allows the whole being to come into play."³⁸ However, because Septimus' act of rebellion is suicide, the unity which it creates must be perceived by another character--Clarissa.

When Clarissa sees the old lady in the house across the street, her vision is complete:

The clock began striking. The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him, with all this going on. There! the old lady had put out her light! the whole house was dark now with this going on, she repeated, and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun. She must go back to them. But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like him--the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back. She must assemble. [pp. 283-84]

The clock, which has not been heard since Big Ben chimed six o'clock at Septimus' death,³⁹ acts as a unifying device bringing together time, death, and place. Clarissa's return to the party from the little room marks a resolution of the conflict between withdrawal from the world, and

immersion in it. The refrain "Fear no more the heat of the sun," no longer contains yearnings for the annihilation of the self and the oblivion of death; instead it is an exhortation to live: "He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun." Against the word "dissolved" is set Clarissa's need to "assemble"; this rhythm of dispersal and unity structures the movement of the whole novel. I mentioned earlier in this chapter that the most serious disruption to take place is Septimus' suicide; Clarissa's final appearance must integrate all the fragments of the novel, and her conscious awareness of the need to "assemble" reminds us of her activity before the mirror earlier in the day: "collecting the whole of her at one point" [p. 42].

The striving for unity, which Camus claims is the source of all human endeavour, is finally satisfied when Peter Walsh perceives Clarissa at the end of the novel: "It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was" [p. 296]. His vision gives to her existence the shape it needs to contain all the different elements--images, memories, thoughts, experiences--that constitute it. The exhilaration which Peter feels when he sees Clarissa is caused by the wholeness of his perception; it is life indeed that matters at the conclusion of *Mrs. Dalloway*.

CHAPTER III

NOTES

¹ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway's Party* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1973 [1943]), p. 23.

² Hermione Lee in *The Novels of Virginia Woolf*, p. 93, points out the similarity in techniques in *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, but distinguishes the styles: "But they [the techniques] are now more unobtrusively used for a style which is really very different from that of *Jacob's Room* in its fusion of streams of thought into a homogenous third-person, past tense narrative."

³ Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, p. 72. April 8, 1925.

⁴ Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1973), II, 112, states: "The evidence suggests (it does no more) that moments of depression were followed by moments of creativity."

⁵ Stuart Rosenberg, "The Match in the Crocus: Obtrusive Art in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*," *Modern Fiction Studies*, No. 13 (1967), pp. 211-20, comments upon Woolf's concentration on language: "It is this interest in language as *language* that lies behind what I have been calling obtrusive art. . . ."

⁶ Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Years 1911-1918* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1963), p. 145. This volume also contains an account of Leonard and Virginia Woolf's life during the 1914-18 war.

⁷ A. Fleishman, *Virginia Woolf: A Critical Reading*, p. 73.

⁸ J. Hawthorn, *Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway: A Study in Alienation* (London: Chatto & Windus [Sussex University Press], 1975), states, p. 42: "*Mrs. Dalloway* is saturated with references to the war, which remains a lingering symbolic presence throughout the novel, and is specifically associated, through Holmes and Bradshaw, with the state and the habit of separating public and private experience."

- 9 J. Hawthorn, p. 9.
- 10 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1925), p. 55. All further references will be to this edition and will be cited in the text in parentheses.
- 11 Avrom Fleishman, "Woolf and McTaggart," *ELH*, No. 35 (1969), pp. 719-38, p. 727.
- 12 Miroslav Beker, "London As A Principle Of Structure In *Mrs. Dalloway*," *Modern Fiction Studies*, No. 18 (1972), pp. 375-85, discusses the importance of London in the novel.
- 13 J. Hawthorn, p. 31.
- 14 Josephine O'Brien Schaefer, *The Three-fold Nature of Reality in the Novels of Virginia Woolf*, p. 109.
- 15 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Modern Library, Inc., 1928), p. vi, states: "Of *Mrs. Dalloway* then one can only bring to light at the moment a few scraps, of little importance or none perhaps; as that in the first version Septimus, who later is intended to be her double, had no existence; and that Mrs. Dalloway was originally to kill herself, or perhaps merely to die at the end of the party."
- 16 Alex Page, "A Dangerous Day: Mrs. Dalloway Discovers Her Double," *Modern Fiction Studies*, No. 7 (1961-62), p. 115.
- 17 Alex Page, pp. 123-24.
- 18 Avrom Fleishman, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 86, claims that: "Septimus Warren Smith has been formed by the 'intoxication of language'."
- 19 A. Page, p. 124, quotes from S. Freud's *New Introductory Lectures in Psycho-Analysis*.
- 20 A. Fleishman, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 80.
- 21 S. P. Rosenbaum, "The Philosophical Realism of Virginia Woolf," p. 330.

²² J. Alexander, *The Venture Of Form In The Novels of Virginia Woolf*, pp. 95-96.

²³ Alice van Buren Kelley, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf: Fact And Vision* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), see p. 99.

²⁴ Josephine O'Brien Schaefer, p. 94. See also p. 105.

²⁵ A. van Buren Kelley, see p. 105.

²⁶ Blanche Gelfant, "Love and Conversion in *Mrs. Dalloway*," *Criticism*, No. 8 (Summer 1966), pp. 229-45, advances this view.

²⁷ J. Hawthorn, p. 33.

²⁸ N. C. Thakur, *The Symbolism of Virginia Woolf* (London and New York: OUP, 1965), see p. 71. Alice van Buren Kelley, pp. 104-106, records some of the ways in which the meaning of the leitmotiv changes.

²⁹ Jill Morris, *Time and Timelessness in Virginia Woolf* (New York: Exposition Press, 1977), pp. 38-55, discusses this.

³⁰ A. van Buren Kelley states, p. 94: "ecstasy, solitude, love, and death are interchangeable aspects of life."

³¹ See A. Fleishman, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 89.

³² See J. Morris, p. 55.

³³ A. Camus, *The Rebel*, pp. 13-14.

³⁴ J. Alexander, p. 94.

³⁵ B. Gelfant, p. 233, for example, says: "The party is Clarissa's creation, her equivalent to a work of art."

³⁶ Josephine O'Brien Schaefer, p. 98, discusses the similarities between Clarissa and Septimus in the way

they experience the world, and says: "Naturally this way of physically experiencing the world makes ugliness, pain, evil, particularly distressing to Clarissa and Septimus."

³⁷ A. Fleishman, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 93.

³⁸ A. Camus, p. 17.

³⁹ J. Morris, p. 53, makes this point: "It is the chiming of Big Ben at six o'clock that makes the moment of Septimus' death so dramatic and outstanding. Virginia Woolf refrains from using the clock again as a device until the very end of the book, when the complete relationship between characters and meaning becomes final."

CHAPTER IV

TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

"Nothing stays; all changes; but not words, not paint."

The conquest of death through love and through art is the primary concern of *To the Lighthouse*, and determines the form upon which the novel is built. A comment in Woolf's diary points to the centrality of the theme of death: "But while I try to write, I am making up *To the Lighthouse*--the sea is to be heard all through it. I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant "novel." A new ---- by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?"¹ Woolf's use of the term "elegy" reveals the central interest of the book, and it is significant that her most explicitly autobiographical work² should contain both the most complete vision of destruction, and the most searching exploration of the creative process which produces a work of art.

The elegiac quality of the novel is not, however, related to Mrs. Ramsay alone:

In the most comprehensive sense, however, *To the Lighthouse* is about death--the death of loved ones, the death of a beloved place and time. Like *Mrs. Dalloway*, it offers some consolation for death, and this consolation is intimately related to Virginia Woolf's effort to depict what she regarded as "life itself."³

Although correct in stressing the comprehensiveness of the novel's treatment of death, this critic ignores the presence of the war expressed by the cosmic vision of death and destruction in "Time Passes."

I have chosen to discuss *To the Lighthouse* as the novel within Woolf's canon that most nearly approaches the status of myth.⁴ This reading does not depend on an attempt to reveal specific mythic or allegoric patterns in the work; such an attempt has already been made, and parallels drawn between classical myths such as Demeter and Persephone.⁵ These interpretations, while they may enrich our understanding of the novel, do not adequately account for the full range of meanings which are present. In order to define my approach more clearly it will be helpful to introduce a passage from the text which is representative of many such moments in the novel:

And suddenly the meaning which, for no reason at all, as perhaps they are stepping out of the Tube or ringing a doorbell, descends on people, making them symbolical, making them representative, came upon them, and made them in the dusk standing, looking, *the symbols of marriage*, husband and wife. Then, after an instant, the symbolical outline which transcended the real figures sank down again, and they became, as they met them, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay watching the children throwing catches.
[pp. 110-11, my italics]

It is the movement between the "real figures" or events, and the "symbolical outline," to which I am referring when I say that the novel approaches the status of myth.

This process occurs throughout the novel: the dinner party, for example, is both a literal and a symbolic event emblematic of that union between people for which Mrs. Ramsay constantly strives. Fleishman says of the dinner: "The mingling of erotic revelry and a Dionysian tragic undertone makes 'celebrating a festival' more than a metaphor; if not quite a myth."⁶ It is Mrs. Ramsay's attempt to challenge death, and overcome life's transience by creating something which "partook . . . of eternity" [p. 158].

The sense of ritual which is pervasive in *To the Lighthouse* stems from this movement between the literal and the symbolic, and from the highly patterned form of the book. Fleishman sees this form as so orderly that he identifies it as "encyclopedic":

To the Lighthouse comes closer to the encompassing status of encyclopedic form than any modern work besides Joyce's. Aside from its inclusiveness of genres and *mythoi*, this form is distinguished by its comprehensiveness in presenting an image of human life. Although *To the Lighthouse* does not follow the individual's career from birth to death, as does *The Waves*, it is as universal a symbol of family life as we possess, ranging from courtship and marriage, through child-raising and children's life at various stages, to the deaths of parents and children and the readjustment of family relations in their wake. In English literature, at least, it is hard to think of a more systematic ordering of the patterns of the generations, with the possible exception of D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*.⁷

Mrs. Ramsay is at the heart of this "symbol of family

life," her death is catastrophic, and the third section of the novel is concerned not only with the readjustment of family relations, but also with the artistic process which can recapture the essence of Mrs. Ramsay and transform her significance into a material form which endures beyond death.

Fleishman's comparison with *The Waves* is useful and can highlight some of the more distinctive features of *To the Lighthouse*. The later novel seeks to capture the texture of life, the quality of experience as it is being lived. Each character renders his sensations, perceptions, and experiences directly through the soliloquies (with the exception of Percival). By comparison, *To the Lighthouse* appears more strictly controlled from a single centre; the omniscient narrator is present depicting the consciousnesses of the characters, as well as in the middle section.⁸ The structure of the book, along with Lily Briscoe's meditations upon the creative process, make the reader continually aware of the opposition between life and art. Both novels attempt to fill an absence caused by death: in *To the Lighthouse* art is triumphant; in *The Waves* the power of art is questioned, but the novel is completed with heroic defiance of death despite the knowledge of ultimate defeat.

In order to understand the full significance of Mrs. Ramsay's death, it is necessary to consider the different roles she plays in the novel: the first of these is her

role as wife. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Ramsay possesses a Christian name and so they are always viewed in the context of their marriage. Although they exist as fully rounded characters (of Mrs. Ramsay it has been said: "There is no more living character in fiction."⁹), their representational qualities remain present throughout. It is the highly patterned form of the novel which causes Woolf to draw such strict demarcation lines between the male and female figures whose marriage offers an image of unity and completeness. S. P. Rosenbaum, who sees *To the Lighthouse* as Woolf's "most overtly philosophical novel,"¹⁰ believes that the differentiation between husband and wife operates at a variety of levels:

Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay can be viewed as embodying not only the masculine and feminine principles, but also reason and intuition, analysis and synthesis, farsightedness and nearsightedness, thought and action, truth and beauty, perhaps even realism and idealism in some sense or other. These poles are not simply positive and negative values. Mr. Ramsay's logic is a counterweight to his wife's instinct; she must yield to his truth and he pay homage to her beauty. Beneath the dichotomies is love, the fundamental value of the novel that they share and in which their differences are resolved at the end of the first part of *To the Lighthouse*.¹¹

Love may be "the fundamental value of the novel," and it is an important feature contributing to the resolution at the end of the third section, but it cannot protect Mrs. Ramsay against death. Without her the balance represented by the marriage is destroyed and can only be

replaced by the balance achieved in Lily's completed picture. Rosenbaum is correct in stressing the inclusiveness of the Ramsay's representational qualities. His remarks follow a trend in recent criticism towards seeing Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay as mutually dependent, instead of claiming that the novel endorses one point of view and condemns the other.¹²

Although Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are complementary figures, it is Mrs. Ramsay who occupies the central position in *To the Lighthouse*. Her presence dominates section one; her death is associated with the destruction of the house, which is a symbol of the human world, in section two; and it is her memory which both inspires Mr. Ramsay to make his journey to the lighthouse, and motivates Lily to finish her painting in section three. The painting must discover a way to fill the empty space caused by Mrs. Ramsay's death, and in this way she acts as the precursor of Percival in *The Waves* who lives through the minds of the other characters. The comprehensive nature of the novel's treatment of death depends on Mrs. Ramsay; through the loss of the central character, death gains an emotional impact of great force. The secondary deaths--her children, the unnamed victims of the war--gain their significance through the reader's response to Mrs. Ramsay's death, which is associated with the destruction of a whole world in "Time Passes."

The first and longest part of the novel takes place between six o'clock and bedtime, but includes within its scope the events of the whole day and culminates in a family dinner. The opening view of mother and child enclosed by the frame of the window will be represented by the triangular shape in Lily's picture at the end.¹³ The sequence with which the novel opens forms a model of the larger structure in the book. The vision of joy which James associates with the trip to the lighthouse is stimulated by his mother:

To her son these words conveyed an extraordinary joy, as if it were settled, the expedition were bound to take place, and the wonder to which he had looked forward, for years and years it seemed, was, after a night's darkness and a day's sail, within touch. [p. 9]

The images of light and dark, here embodied by day and night, recur throughout the novel and acquire considerable symbolic power; for example, light and dark also correspond to the alternating strokes of the lighthouse beam; and it is darkness that floods the house and threatens to destroy it in the middle section. At the beginning of the novel, these images refer specifically to the night which must pass before the anticipated journey. However, the elongated time sense of this paragraph, created by the unusual syntax of the sentence which splits up the phrase "was within touch," predicts the actual delayed movement

of the book. The "night's darkness" is given shape in "Time Passes," and the "day's sail" takes place ten years later in the last section, thus justifying the stress placed by "years and years."

The rupture in James' vision at the beginning of the book is caused by his father's words: "But . . . it won't be fine" [p. 10]. In five words, Mr. Ramsay destroys the vision of joy which has taken the novelist one and a half pages to create. "Time Passes" succeeds, in the space of twenty-five pages, in destroying a vision of life which seemed invulnerable, and which has taken the novelist one hundred and seventy-seven pages to create. Mrs. Ramsay cannot counter the effect of her husband's words; just as it is impossible for the novelist to duplicate what has been lost in the middle section and through Mrs. Ramsay's death.

The opposition at the beginning of the novel between husband and wife expresses two different kinds of truth, and is enforced first by James' different responses to his parents, and second by the differences in their use of language. Mr. Ramsay's speech is precise and definite; the monosyllabic words give his sentence an air of incontrovertible fact. This type of language is also used at times by the omniscient narrator to describe him: "What he said was true. It was always true. He was incapable of untruth; never tampered with a fact;" [pp. 10-11].

The novel stresses, however, that there is more than one kind of truth, and that Mr. Ramsay's "truth," relentless though it may be, is also limited. Later, there are significant links between this non-metaphoric or "factual" language and the terse parenthetical passages in "Time Passes," three of which announce the deaths of members of the Ramsay family. The linguistic connection implies both the finite nature of the factual male world, and the relationship between the male world in the novel and the war. (It is important to stress that the above description represents only one facet of Mr. Ramsay's character; he does move away from purely intellectual reasoning, and the impulses behind his journey to the lighthouse are strictly non-factual.)

In "The Window," Woolf presents the illusion of "the green world" of love, which figures prominently in the romance mythos,¹⁴ and which Woolf associates with the feminine view of life. In *To the Lighthouse*, this world is not perfect: neither death nor sorrow is absent. Marie's father is dying of cancer in Switzerland: "'At home the mountains are so beautiful,' and there was no hope, no hope whatever" [p. 48]. Mrs. Ramsay's distinctive ability is to assimilate such facts, along with the strife and division amongst her children and her guests, into a seemingly ideal world. Lily Briscoe defines Mrs. Ramsay's gift as her ability to say: "Life stand still here" [p. 241], and to make of the moment "something permanent"

[p. 241]. The result is that the reader is left with the impression that in the world of "The Window" harmony and unity prevail.

Mrs. Ramsay recognizes that death threatens the stability of her world: "There was no treachery too base for the world to commit; she knew that. No happiness lasted; she knew that" [p. 98]. But she has the courage to fight that treachery and create social forms which sustain people and, by providing unity, give meaning to life. Although she is aware of life's transience, Mrs. Ramsay works on the hypothesis that stability and coherence can be found, and she seeks to protect her family through acts which conceal the reality of death. This is clearly illustrated by her response to Cam's fear of the pig's skull, itself an emblem of death:

"Well then," said Mrs. Ramsay, "we will cover it up," . . . and not seeing anything that would do, she quickly took her own shawl off and wound it round the skull, . . . and said how lovely it looked now; how the fairies would love it; it was like a bird's nest; it was like a beautiful mountain. [p. 172]

This imaginative transformation suggests the scope of her creative powers, but without the enduring qualities of art the transformation cannot last. We are reminded of this in "Time Passes" where the shawl is gradually unwrapped revealing the skull beneath and insisting upon the reality of death.

Mrs. Ramsay is aware that life is her "adversary"

and that ultimately she must relinquish her powers. Nevertheless, life is also the medium of her art:

The intensity of the emotional aura which surrounds her [Mrs. Ramsay] and the sensuous immediacy of the pages in which she is present ("The Window"), are due in part to her awareness that life is at every moment in danger of disintegration, and to her offering a fierce energy of human meaning to net it; in part it is due to a brilliant awareness of an order of life which has no need of effort and is indeed antithetical to the content of her life as Mrs. Ramsay.¹⁵

This critic juxtaposes the human and natural worlds: human life is constantly in danger of disintegration, but the natural life present in "Time Passes" displays an order which is both alien and indifferent to human order. With or without mankind nature pursues its cyclical rhythms: "So loveliness reigned and stillness, and together made the shape of loveliness itself, a form from which life had parted" [p. 195]. Mrs. Ramsay, in her social roles, is aware that the natural rhythms are hostile to the human world which strives to maintain continuities, be they social, historic, or artistic, independent of nature. As the critic points out, however, Mrs. Ramsay possesses another level of awareness where she relinquishes the demands of the social self ("her life as Mrs. Ramsay") and experiences a sense of connection with the rhythms and patterns of nature.

Woolf exploits the opposition between male and female, and the different kinds of truth they represent, in order

to examine different responses to death, and ways in which death can be overcome: "Both Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are trying to come to terms with the fact of death; but there is a difference in the way their attempts are treated."¹⁶ Mrs. Ramsay is engaged throughout "The Window" with a struggle against death, whereas Mr. Ramsay does not confront it until the third section, after his wife's death.

We have seen Mrs. Ramsay's active modes of opposition against death; she has another, essentially passive response to death. This response is the "brilliant awareness of an order of life which has no need of effort," referred to above. I have already identified this "order of life" as the natural world. Mrs. Ramsay achieves contact with this world when she experiences herself as, what Woolf calls, a "wedge-shaped core of darkness" [p. 95]. This contact, however, is ambivalent: on the one hand, without the constraints of time, place, and her social roles, Mrs. Ramsay feels an extraordinary sense of freedom. On the other hand, this dissolution of the self contains intimations of death which makes that dissolution final and absolute:

To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others. . . . When life sank down for a moment, the range of experience seemed limitless. . . . Beneath it is all dark, it is all

spreading, it is unfathomably deep; but now and again we rise to the surface and this is what you see us by. Her horizon seemed to her limitless. [pp. 95-96]

Mrs. Ramsay achieves a different quality of consciousness which she describes as "being oneself." In the Introduction, I quoted a passage from Woolf's diary, where she describes her conception of "reality," and it is to this we must refer in order to understand the experience described in *To the Lighthouse*. Mrs. Ramsay can be said to achieve a state of mystic contemplation where the personality has been shed:

Losing personality, one lost the fret, the hurry, the stir; and there rose to her lips always some exclamation of triumph over life when things came together in this peace, this rest, this eternity; and pausing there she looked out to meet that stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of the three, which was her stroke. [p. 96]

The unity which Mrs. Ramsay seeks is most complete here. The triumph which she feels she has gained over life comes when she is closest to the experience which prefigures death: "this peace, this rest, this eternity."¹⁷ The symbolic marriage of light and dark--as the "wedge-shaped core of darkness" meets the third stroke of the lighthouse beam--implies a unity which will be captured formally in Lily's painting through the relation of light and shade.

A number of critics have associated the "wedge-shaped

core of darkness" with sexuality, among them James Naremore who comments perceptively on the sensual rhythms of Woolf's prose:

Death as Mrs. Dalloway observed, can be a kind of embrace. And the embrace of the self with the world outside and beyond, which Virginia Woolf was so anxious for modern fiction to show, is inevitably associated in her work with the feeling of death or with the loss of any active life as an individual. Obviously, an intense desire for unity, the desire to know even one other person completely (as, for example, Lily Briscoe wants to know Mrs. Ramsay), or, in a more cosmic sense, the compulsive need to relate one's life spiritually to the vast power of nature--all these things can result in the destruction of individuality.¹⁸

The embrace in death is not just the unity which I have described above; it is also the attempt to reach a "centre" which Clarissa describes as an attempt to communicate: "Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them" [*Mrs. Dalloway*, pp. 280-81]. When she loses her personality (defined largely as her social roles), Mrs. Ramsay can reach that "centre." Her "wedge-shaped core of darkness" allows an embrace with the natural world which will ultimately be fulfilled in death. This embrace suggests a mystic unity in which the human and natural worlds are in accord; separateness is overcome because individuality is destroyed. This does not contradict my argument that Woolf perceives the human and natural worlds in an antithetical relationship. At the level of the

"being and the doing," the natural world does pose a threat to human organization. Harmony is achieved only when the mind's need for an intellectually perceived order and stability, for systems based on "A-Z," ebbs away leaving the essence of the self located within the core of darkness. In such passages, and in the whole of "Time Passes," Woolf achieves some of her finest lyrical writing.

Mr. Ramsay, imprisoned by his personality, and constantly dramatizing himself, responds differently to death. He reflects compulsively upon the futility of the human endeavour: "His fame lasts perhaps two thousand years. And what are two thousand years? . . . What, indeed, if you look from a mountain top down the long wastes of the ages? The very stone one kicks with one's boot will outlast Shakespeare" [p. 56]. Again the transience of the human world, in comparison with the natural world, is stressed. Mr. Ramsay views the stark facts of life and death with a fortitude that will be shared by his son, when James perceives "that loneliness which was for both of them the truth about things" [p. 301]. The masculine vision in *To the Lighthouse* is relentlessly bleak. It sees only the skull beneath the flesh and, although courageous in facing that reality, Mr. Ramsay and James cannot ameliorate the harshness of the knowledge of death because they lack Mrs. Ramsay's imaginative and intuitive powers, and Lily's creative powers.

Mrs. Ramsay's determination to create social forms which oppose chaos is the complement to her loss of personality described above. The dinner party which takes place towards the end of "The Window" is her crowning achievement, and takes its place in Woolf's work alongside Clarissa Dalloway's party. The dinner is divided into two distinct parts separated by the lighting of the candles. During the first part, some members of the group are still missing; there are continual interruptions by the maid and each character--but particularly Mrs. Ramsay--is aware of the disparate nature of the occasion: "Nothing seemed to have merged" [p. 126]. Mrs. Ramsay is aware that, in order to forge some shape and pattern out of life, she must overcome her weariness and direct her energies towards achieving some kind of unity: "They all sat separate. And the whole effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her" [p. 126].

The action of lighting the candles, done by the children at Mrs. Ramsay's behest, marks the transition into the second half of the chapter, and unites the characters by providing a point of focus:

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 round a table, for the night was now shut off by panes of glass, which, far from giving any accurate view of the outside world,

rippled it so strangely that here, inside the room, seemed to be order and dry land; there, outside, a reflection in which things wavered and vanished waterily. [pp. 146-47]

A whole range of meanings converges upon this scene.

Lily compares the change "with that moment on the tennis lawn, when solidity suddenly vanished, and such vast spaces lay between them" [p. 147]. The problem of creating a unified group out of the individual members of the party is similar to Lily's problem of how to compose the light and shade, and connect the spaces, to create a unified whole in her picture. The answer to both lies in a moment of imaginative perception; lighting the candles creates the illusion of unity which allows each character to imaginatively identify with the group.

During the dinner, the house as a symbol of human effort appears to be unassailable. The light shining from the dining room links the house with the lighthouse,¹⁹ and the word "waterily" recalls the sea which surrounds, and at times threatens to engulf the island (just as the darkness will flood the house and threaten to annihilate it in "Time Passes").

Fleishman discusses the importance of the waves in *To the Lighthouse*, present not only in the sea, but also in the wavering quality of the light given by the candles. He associates the waves with the rhythms of reality and claims that Lily's artistic perception enables her to comprehend the "wavelike nature of reality" more fully

than any of the other characters: "For Lily can grasp the perspectival variability of objects and enter into the rhythmic flow of existence, both of which are associated with the waves."²⁰ In "The Lighthouse" perspective enables Lily to complete her painting.

Mrs. Ramsay shares Lily's artistic perception, but without the creation of material forms she, like Clarissa Dalloway, is unable to establish a unity which will endure, except perhaps in memory. Her success is based upon her ability to create an "idea" of a world while she is alive. It is not an ideal world; death and disintegration are present; but it is viable so long as Mrs. Ramsay stands at the centre and the characters remain loyal to her idea. Hence William Bankes' feeling of "treachery" when he does not comply.

Earlier I described the dinner as Mrs. Ramsay's attempt to challenge death; this will be clarified if we consider her thoughts while serving the Boeuf en Daube, a symbol of the triumphant moment:

. . . there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected lights) in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again tonight she had the feeling she had once today, already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures. [p. 158]

Both the active and the passive sides of Mrs. Ramsay's character are brought together; the moment is created

through her energy, but leads to a feeling of peace associated with the "wedge-shaped core of darkness." The unity and stability which are created challenge death; but the paradox remains: only the permanence of death brings final peace.

Mrs. Ramsay is also aware that the moment can endure in memory only; the actual event must pass. She attempts to hold that unity in her perception: "With her foot on the threshold she waited a moment longer in a scene which was vanishing even as she looked" [p. 167]. Although Lily is irritated by Mrs. Ramsay's attempt to "fix" the moment, the same impulse lies behind Lily's desire to translate her vision on to canvas and thus render it stable and permanent:

Completed forms, whether made from a social and family group, an abstract painting, or the journey to the lighthouse, create the only lasting victory over death and chaos. Such forms can only be brought into being by means of the arduous search for truth which is a necessary personal responsibility.²¹

Just as Mrs. Ramsay watches the completed form she has created becoming the past, so, at the end of the novel, Lily realizes that her vision has also passed. The two forms, however, are not identical; Lily's vision may have passed, but the painting will remain; the dinner cannot.

"Time Passes," where the "idea" of a world which Mrs. Ramsay has so carefully created, is destroyed, was experimental. Woolf refers to it as "this impersonal thing,

which I'm dared to do by my friends, the flight of time and the consequent break of unity in my design."²² This section is a radical departure from conventional prose fiction, and even as her remark suggests, from the experiments which were taking place in other modernist writing. Highly lyrical, this section is built up on a series of suggestions and evocations, rather than upon explicit statements.²³ There are ten parts, beginning with a prophetic statement from Mr. Bankes: "Well, we must wait for the future to show" [p. 189]. This sense of the human world relinquishing its control--which is reinforced by the systematic extinguishing of the lights --allows the natural world to move to the forefront. A. D. Moody sees the processes of nature as the anti-thesis to the human energies and aspirations expressed in Mrs. Ramsay's character:

They [the processes of nature] are realised directly, not through the filter of human consciousness as in the rest of the novel. In consequence the world of the mind is placed for the moment in the diminishing perspectives of the external world, and its visions are exposed to the indifference of physical nature.²⁴

While this is true, the ambiguity I pointed to in the Introduction remains; there is a characteristic tone which is not impersonal, and the natural forces are sometimes personified.

Nevertheless, in "Time Passes" the natural world is

dominant, and the human world is unable to maintain itself: "Nothing it seemed, could survive the flood, the profusion of darkness" [p. 189]. The juxtaposition of human and natural worlds is shown at its most acute when Mrs. Ramsay's death is announced:

[Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty.] [p. 194]

The significance of Mrs. Ramsay's death in the human world is expressed by her husband's response to it. His desolation is highlighted by the indifference of the natural world, and by the peculiar syntax of the sentence which inserts the clause stating her death between a repetition of the outstretched arms. As a result, the rupture of human contact is poignantly expressed, and the final "remained empty," indicates the void in Mr. Ramsay's life, and in the novel as a whole.

Just before Mrs. Ramsay's death is announced, there is a passage in which an unidentified sleeper walks on the beach:

Also the sea tosses itself and breaks itself, and should any sleeper fancying that he might find on the beach an answer to his doubts, a sharer of his solitude, throw off his bed-clothes and go down by himself to walk on the sand, no image with semblance of serving and divine promptitude comes readily to hand bringing the night to order and making the world reflect the compass of the soul. [p. 193]

Throughout "Time Passes" the human figures appear as images of mankind seeking meaning or order in the world: the sleeper (who is also associated with Mr. Ramsay), the mystic, even Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast partake of this status. In this section Woolf forces the reader to recognize that the natural world does not "reflect the compass of the soul." The contrast in style between this passage and the passage in parenthesis, heightens the irremediable separateness of the natural world with its diurnal and seasonal rhythms of time where death is part of a necessary biological process; from the human world bound by its own constructions of clock time in which death is seen only to destroy continuity and leave a void. In "Time Passes," the forces which Mrs. Ramsay feared when she saw life as her "adversary," are brought to the fore. The battle involves an attempt to stem the flood of time and the chaotic abundance of nature, in order to protect the frontiers of the human world.

The house, an integral part of Mrs. Ramsay's achievement in Part I, is seen by some critics as the structure which binds the story together. Once it is empty it stands as an image of the human world which is threatened by nature, and must be "rescued from the pool of time" by the servants.²⁵ The decay of the house is directly associated with Mrs. Ramsay's death. In the middle section of the novel only the remnants of human life are present: "What people had shed and left--a pair of shoes,

a shooting cap, some faded skirts and coats in wardrobes-- these alone kept the human shape and in the emptiness indicated how once they were filled and animated" [p. 194]. The description provides an analogue to the void created in the Ramsay family after Mrs. Ramsay's death.

"Time Passes" provides another instance of that movement towards the mythical that is characteristic of the book as a whole. The retrieval of the house is also pursued in ritual manner:²⁶

For now had come that moment, that hesitation when dawn trembles and night pauses, when if a feather alight in the scale it will be weighed down. One feather, and the house, sinking, falling, would have turned and pitched downwards to the depths of darkness. . . .

If the feather had fallen, if it had tipped the scale downwards, the whole house would have plunged to the depths to lie upon the sands of oblivion. But there was a force working; something not highly conscious. . . . [pp. 208-09]

That "force" is Mrs. McNab, the somewhat comical old woman, stemming the destructive tide of nature with her dustmops. The repetition of the feather image indicates how precarious is the balance between destruction and salvation of the house; a precariousness that is present in all human life, but ordinarily disguised. Mrs. McNab is closely associated with the house (the language used to describe her decrepitude is very close to that used in the descriptions of the decaying house). Mrs. McNab lacks Mrs. Ramsay's creative powers; instead Mrs. McNab represents the

blind force of human energies which are essentially affirmative because they oppose the chaos of nature.

The "rusty laborious birth" [p. 210] of the house, in the hands of Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast, provides the new structure where the surviving characters attempt to reassemble into a new unity, the fragments and images that have been scattered by the deaths in the family, and by the war. As Hermione Lee puts it: "Though the house may have triumphed over death; its inhabitants, returning, have yet to work out their salvation."²⁷

Some critics have claimed that "Time Passes" is a testing of Mrs. Ramsay's world by Mr. Ramsay's "facts."²⁸ This reading is mistaken; although Woolf implies that the masculine world (which "negotiated treaties, ruled India, controlled finance" [p. 13]) is responsible for the war, the human world threatened by nature in the middle section is the world of both Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. The power of the war in *To the Lighthouse* derives not from its association with the male world, but from its comprehensiveness as a symbol of chaos, and its associations with darkness, destruction, and death:

Listening (had there been any one to listen) from the upper rooms of the empty house only gigantic chaos streaked with lightning could have been heard . . . until it seemed as if the universe were battling and tumbling, in brute confusion and wanton lust aimlessly by itself. [pp. 202-03]

The violence of the imagery suggests how catastrophic is

the war. I have already discussed the presence of the war in *Mrs. Dalloway*; in *To the Lighthouse* the symbolic power of the war is far stronger. Fleishman comments:

The war is seen only as an instance of a pattern of historical experience in a vision of cosmic destruction that bears comparison with Tolstoy's or Hardy's. Part II, "Time Passes," raises the specter of a world undone by natural forces like night, winter, and death, or what we call chaos, and also by the enemies of human civilization which join the former in the universal impulse we may call barbarism.²⁹

The house loses its ordering centre when Mrs. Ramsay dies; the cosmos is plunged into chaos: "tumbling, in brute confusion," and apparently lacking any principle of harmony. The destruction of the war is envisioned as total disorder.

Even when Woolf insists most emphatically that man and nature are opposed, the ambiguity in her approach remains. In "Time Passes," nature relentlessly destroys man's world; but the turmoil and violence of the storm are also a reflection of man's own chaos created by the war. The difference between human and natural worlds is, perhaps, invoked most strongly in the aftermath. Nature regains peace and beauty after the storm, albeit an inhuman peace: "the stillness and the brightness of the day were as strange as the chaos and tumult of the night" [p. 203]; whereas in the human world, man must exert his energies to reconstruct an ordered world. Lily Briscoe perceives this on her return to the house: "Such were some of the parts, but how bring them together" [p. 220].

Bringing the parts together is the task of the last section of the novel. Art is ultimately the power that defies death in *To the Lighthouse*. James Hafley is correct when he points out that "The novel itself is comparable to Lily's painting, for its purpose too is to capture and render stable and permanent the essence of Mrs. Ramsay."³⁰ The "essence" of Mrs. Ramsay includes her symbolic value as an image of unity and order, standing at the centre of the house; an order which collapses after her death.

"The Lighthouse" pursues two parallel strands of action: Lily completing her painting, and Mr. Ramsay's journey to the lighthouse. Both activities are motivated by the same desire; to recapture and understand the significance of the past by establishing a perspective upon it. Bernard Blackstone distinguishes the two activities in the following way:

For now two divergent but contemporary lines of action are in progress: a line towards the future, across the sea to the lighthouse, and a line into the past, as constructed inside Lily Briscoe's brain under the compulsion of art.³¹

Although the past initiates the two activities, Mr. Ramsay's journey is both a literal and metaphoric movement forward in time; the completed journey solves the problem of his solitude. In another way the journey points to the future because it signifies the eclipse

of the older generation by the younger (in this context it is significant that James steers the boat, and his authority to control and lead is confirmed by his father's praise).

The last section of the novel depends upon the reader's knowledge of the first section.³² Lily Briscoe sums up the problem that confronts the characters at the beginning of "The Lighthouse": "What does it mean then, what can it all mean? . . . For really, what did she feel, come back after all these years and Mrs. Ramsay dead? Nothing, nothing--nothing that she could express at all" [p. 217]. In the Introduction, I stated that the search for meaning was expressed as a search for order: nowhere is this more evident than in Part III of *To the Lighthouse*, where meaning is ultimately contained in the formal balance of the finished work of art. The opening paragraph of "The Lighthouse" focuses upon the exploratory nature of this section. It is only after Lily has understood Mrs. Ramsay's significance that she can overcome the obstacle in her design, the empty space caused by Mrs. Ramsay's death: "For what could be more formidable than that space?" [p. 236].

Just as Mrs. Ramsay has seen life as her "adversary" which she must oppose constantly with her creative energies, so Lily Briscoe views her art as a perpetual struggle:

Other worshipful objects were content with worship; men, women, God, all let one kneel prostrate; but this form, were it only the shape of a white lamp-shade looming on a wicker table, roused one to perpetual combat, challenged one to a fight in which one was bound to be worsted. Always (it was in her nature, or in her sex, she did not know which) before she exchanged the fluidity of life for the concentration of painting she had a few moments of nakedness when she seemed like an unborn soul, a soul reft of body, hesitating on some windy pinnacle and exposed without protection to all the blasts of doubt. [pp. 236-37]

It is appropriate that Lily, who reproduces the balance of the Ramsay's marriage in her painting, should display aspects of both Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. Throughout this section a consistent analogy is pursued between Lily's creative powers and Mrs. Ramsay's creative powers. However, the image at the end of this passage resembles the descriptions of Mr. Ramsay. The artist's vision must contain and unite the two truths represented by the male and female visions in the novel. Lily, the bearer of the artistic vision, is herself a somewhat androgynous figure. When Mr. Ramsay asks her to fulfil his wife's role and provide sympathy, she is unable to do so: "It was immensely to her discredit, sexually, to stand there dumb" [p.228].

Art, as I have suggested, is the ultimate solution to the problem of meaning, and to the disorder caused by death. "The Lighthouse" examines the creative process whereby order is returned to the world: "A brush, the one dependable thing in a world of strife, ruin, chaos--"

[p. 224]. Virginia Woolf could as well have written a pen instead of a brush. Lily's creative experience is clearly akin to the author's. An entry in Woolf's diary describes "the exalted sense of being above time and death which comes from being again in a writing mood."³³ Lily Briscoe experiences this sense of freedom as a "few moments of nakedness when she seemed like an unborn soul." Woolf distinguishes between the creative vision which is associated with this feeling of immortality, and the product of the vision which is the completed work of art.

She [Lily] looked at her picture. That would have been his answer presumably--how "you" and "I" and "she" pass and vanish; nothing stays; all changes; but not words, not paint. Yet it would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be rolled up and flung under a sofa; yet even so, even of a picture like that, it was true. One might say, even of this scrawl, not of that actual picture, perhaps, but of what it attempted, that it "remained for ever."
[p. 267]

A vision of unity inspires both Mrs. Ramsay's attempts to create social forms and Lily Briscoe's attempt to create artistic forms. The vision is common to both, but art is more powerful because it creates material forms, which defy death because they endure.

I have concentrated upon the function of art in "The Lighthouse" because Mr. Ramsay's journey, although it is a parallel strand of action, remains subservient to the painting. It is Lily's vision which unites art and life, and with which the novel closes.³⁴ Both activities,

however, are linked to love. Mr. Ramsay's voyage to the lighthouse is a tribute to his wife's memory, and it satisfies the expectations aroused at the beginning of the novel, as well as fulfilling the quest theme. The more complicated activity of Lily's painting ("tunnelling her way into her picture; into her past" [p. 258]) can only be completed after her love for Mrs. Ramsay stimulates a vision of order:

The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one. . . . 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. "Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!" she repeated. She owed it all to her. [pp. 240-41, my italics]

The recognition of a pattern within the human world (as opposed to the pattern which exists independently in the natural world of "Time Passes") is fundamental in this novel. The pattern involves an awareness of stability and continuity preserved through communal human effort, through memory, and through art.

Art is necessarily selective; it cannot provide a complete representation of reality; the painting demands the squared off canvas. Nevertheless, the completed art form offers an image of an ordered and unified whole:

The principle of painting is also to make a choice. "Even genius," writes Delacroix, ruminating on his art, "is only the gift of generalizing and choosing." . . . Thus the painter arrives at a point of stabilization. The really great creative artists are those who, like Piero della Francesca, give the impression that the stabilization has only just taken place, that the projection machine has suddenly stopped dead. All their subjects give the impression that, by some miracle of art, they continue to live, while ceasing to be mortal.³⁵

The point of stabilization in both Lily's painting and the novel is the line down the centre which completes the vision.³⁶ Although the line itself is something of a paradox--it both separates and unites--it succeeds in achieving the balance for which the novel has been striving. The finished painting provides a symbol of harmony and unity through its shape and structure, and through its patterns of light and shade. In this final action, the real and symbolic converge; the "miracle of art" is accomplished; through the artistic conquest of death, the characters continue to live.

CHAPTER IV

NOTES

¹ Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, p. 80. June 27, 1925.

² See Jean Guiguet, *Virginia Woolf And Her Works* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1965), pp. 255-57, for example. Guiguet is one of a number of critics who discuss the autobiographical aspects of the novel. F. R. Leavis, a generally hostile critic, claims in his brief article, "After *To the Lighthouse*," *Scrutiny*, No. 10 (1942), pp. 295-98, that the success of the book is due to its autobiographical basis. See also Virginia Woolf's comments in *AWD*, p. 138.

³ James Naremore, *The World Without a Self*, p. 112.

⁴ Hermione Lee, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf*, says on pp. 127-28: "*To the Lighthouse* continually hovers on the edge of becoming a fairy tale, or, more ambitiously, a mythical or even Christian allegory, whose subject--a frequent subject of myth--is the conquest of death." While I disagree that the book could be seen as a "Christian allegory," the general point still holds good.

⁵ See Joseph Blotner, "Mythic Patterns in *To the Lighthouse*," *PMLA* No. 71 (1956), pp. 547-62, for a discussion of some of the underlying myths in the novel.

⁶ A. Fleishman, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 116.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-22.

⁸ For an interesting discussion on style and technique in *To the Lighthouse*, see Mitchell A. Leaska's book, *Virginia Woolf's Lighthouse: A Study in Critical Method* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1970).

⁹ Bernard Blackstone, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 128.

¹⁰ S. P. Rosenbaum, "The Philosophical Realism of Virginia Woolf," p. 338. Rosenbaum claims that *To the Lighthouse* puts into operation and tests the values of G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*. Irma Rantavaara, *Virginia Woolf And Bloomsbury*, makes a similar claim on p. 127: "*To the Lighthouse* is her great

synthesis and therefore the most satisfying of her novels; it is her practical application of *Principia Ethica*, an object lesson in its creeds. . . ." Whether or not we agree that it is a conscious application, the two primary values of *Principia Ethica*--art and love--are dominant in the novel.

¹¹ S. P. Rosenbaum, p. 340.

¹² Early criticism tended to venerate Mrs. Ramsay and condemn Mr. Ramsay. The reaction to this can be seen at its most extreme in Glenn Pederson's article, "Vision in *To the Lighthouse*," *PMLA*, No. 73 (December 1958), pp. 585-600, where he describes Mrs. Ramsay as a "negative force which usurps the lighthouse and thus prevents the integration of the family while she lives" [p. 585]. Mitchell A. Leaska presents a more balanced view but he is also highly critical of Mrs. Ramsay.

¹³ Jane Novak in *The Razor Edge of Balance: A Study Of Virginia Woolf* (Florida: University of Miami Press, 1975), claims on p. 139: "But Mrs. Ramsay's ghostly return, both in Cam's involuntary memories and as the shadow that balances Lily's painting, is the catalyst that releases the resolving sympathy of the final vision." See S. P. Rosenbaum, p. 341, for a discussion of the window as a symbol used to explore different modes of perception.

¹⁴ A. Fleishman says on p. 119: "Part I creates, for all its local embellishments and antithetical strands, a consistent picture of what Frye has called 'the green world' of love (in this case, marital love) and beauty (here largely psychic rather than physical beauty) in an appropriate natural setting. . . ."

¹⁵ Jean Alexander, *The Venture Of Form In The Novels Of Virginia Woolf*, p. 107.

¹⁶ H. Lee, p. 118.

¹⁷ James Naremore, on p. 141, refers to this section of "The Window," and says: "But in such moments of hypnotic yielding she has an intimation of eternity and a feeling of erotic ecstasy. Yet the vast world outside, which becomes her lover, is also a force of death."

¹⁸ James Naremore, p. 142.

¹⁹ See Josephine O'Brien Schaefer, *The Three-Fold Nature Of Reality In The Novels Of Virginia Woolf*, p. 124.

- 20 A. Fleishman, p. 104.
- 21 H. Lee, p. 137.
- 22 Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, p. 80. June 27, 1925.
- 23 Alice van Buren Kelley, *The Novels Of Virginia Woolf*, says on p. 31: "this section is built on suggestion rather than statement, pattern rather than proposal."
- 24 David Moody, "To the Lighthouse," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of To the Lighthouse: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Thomas A. Vogler (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 53. See also B. Blackstone who claims, on p. 119, that "Time Passes" raises the question: "How far can we take our apprehensions of beauty as apprehensions of significance, and consider them windows into reality?"
- 25 Jean Alexander claims on p. 112: "The fear of nature as it exists outside the cultivated garden is not merely a fear of the natural cycle of mortality and of the perishing of human effort at the edge of an unmastered sea; it is also a fear of moral disintegration of which the first and most generalized implication is loss of meaning."
- 26 H. Lee comments on the pseudo-biblical rhetoric used to describe the house, see p. 130. There are also echoes of T. S. Eliot's poem "Gerontion."
- 27 H. Lee, p. 126.
- 28 See James Hafley, *The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as Novelist* (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), p. 85, for example.
- 29 A. Fleishman, p. 122.
- 30 James Hafley, p. 89.
- 31 Bernard Blackstone, p. 124.
- 32 See Josephine O'Brien Schaefer, pp. 128-29, for a discussion of the interdependence between the two parts.

³³ Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, p. 225. September 18, 1934.

³⁴ Some critics, (Josephine O'Brien Schaefer, for example, on p. 134), claim that Lily Briscoe is the weak spot in the novel, and that the reader doesn't take her painting seriously; perhaps on the basis of Woolf's remarks about Lily in her diary, p. 106.

³⁵ Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, pp. 256-57.

³⁶ Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, II, 129, quotes a letter from Virginia Woolf to Roger Fry: "I meant *nothing* by *The Lighthouse*. One has to have a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together."

A. Fleishman, pp. 131-32 discusses the line in Lily's painting.

James Hafley, p. 79, gives a summary of the various critical interpretations of the lighthouse symbol.

CHAPTER V

THE WAVES

"We insist, it seems, on living."

The Waves can be seen as a literary analogue to the painting completed by Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse*. Both the painting and the novel are constructed around a central space which the artist must attempt either to fill, or to connect with the masses that surround it. In *The Waves* this space is created by Percival's death; in *To the Lighthouse* by Mrs. Ramsay's death. The task which faces the author of *The Waves* is the more formidable and complex because the structure of the whole novel is built around this empty space. Filling the space is also the task which confronts the six characters; Bernard, the novelist *manqué*, defines Percival's position in the book: "About him my feeling was: he sat there in the centre. Now I go to that spot no longer. The place is empty" [p. 166].

Camus describes life as "an impulse that endlessly pursues its form without ever finding it," and goes on to say:

Man, tortured by this, tries in vain to find the form that will impose certain limits between which he can be king. If only one single living thing had definite form, he would be reconciled!¹

Each of the characters in *The Waves* pursues this search for form. The novel seeks to capture both the "impulse" which is life; and man's attempt to contain that impulse within certain boundaries.

Percival's death challenges the validity of the vital structures which the characters create in the first half of the novel. Bernard's response brings birth and death together:

"My son is born; Percival is dead. I am upheld by pillars, shored up on either side by stark emotions; but which is sorrow, which is joy? I ask, and do not know, only that I need silence, and to be alone and to go out, and to save one hour to consider what has happened to my world, *what death has done to my world.*" [p. 165, my italics]

Virginia Woolf has met the question of what death does to the individual's world in all the novels I have discussed. *The Waves* confronts death most directly: the novel is a sustained and searching meditation upon the value and meaning of human life. Bernard describes himself as "shored up on either side by stark emotions"; Woolf has attempted to strip away all superfluous details and reveal emotions, sensations, and the life experiences in their starkest form.²

Percival's death provides the structural and thematic centre of the novel. He is the silent seventh figure, the "invisible centre,"³ who is known entirely through the minds of the six speaking characters.⁴ The relationship between Percival and Bernard is revealed by Percival's

death:

"Now, through my own infirmity I recover what he was to me: my opposite. Being naturally truthful, he did not see the point of these exaggerations, and was borne on by a natural sense of the fitting, was indeed a great master of the art of living. . . ." [p. 169]

Percival is Bernard's opposite: they represent a series of antitheses in the novel between silence and speech, life and art, and ultimately between life and death. Through Percival, the "great master of the art of living," the two social occasions which symbolise unity can take place; whereas Bernard, who dabbles "in warm soluble words" [p. 74], leaves his listeners frustrated because the stories with which he attempts to create order and sequence, constantly trail off with unfinished endings.

According to Woolf's account in *A Writer's Diary*, *The Waves* was written over a period of nearly two years. However, the genesis of the book occurred some three years before she began to write it, with the vision of the fin that was incorporated as an image of escape and revelation during Bernard's visit to Rome.⁵ When she began work on the novel Woolf wrote: "Autobiography it might be called."⁶ Curiously enough, there has been little critical commentary upon this remark. In comparison with *To the Lighthouse*, the autobiographical elements of the novel have been largely ignored. There are, of course, exceptions; most critics recognize that Percival was

inspired by Woolf's memory of her brother Thoby. Perhaps this lack of commentary is an indication of the author's success in transforming an intensely personal vision into artistic form. Recognizing that the impulses behind the book were "autobiographical" may have helped Woolf to avoid the limitations of the "personal": "this shall be childhood; but it must not be my childhood."⁷ *The Waves* was to be a universal image of human life seeking meaning and coherence in the world by facing death.

A number of critics have commented that *The Waves* is the book which Terence Hewet wishes to write in *The Voyage Out*⁸: "I want to write a novel about Silence . . . the things people don't say. But the difficulty is immense" [p. 262]. The silence at the centre of *The Waves*--in the character of Percival--is a projection of Woolf's own inner silence which she experienced as she wrote the book.⁹ The paradox the novel contains is that a novelist must use words in order to write about "Silence"; and despite its sophisticated linguistic skills, *The Waves* displays a profound unease with language, or at least with the potency of language and its ability to provide forms for experience: "What is the phrase for the moon? And the phrase for love? By what name are we to call death? I do not know" [p. 323]. In Bernard's final soliloquy, where he tries to tell the story of the book once more by repeating the sequence of childhood, youth, and maturity,

he is constantly faced with the breakdown of language; with the need to acknowledge that his mastery of words is at best a Pyrrhic victory, and to recognize that ultimately "I do not know."

Geoffrey Hartman states that language provides one form of continuity, and relates style to Woolf's interest in "space" in the novels. He claims that her art, rather than being mimetic, becomes "interpolation," the attempt by the imagination to fill the space that threatens to become the void. In *The Waves* speech must be found to fill the space which Percival represents: this method of "interpolation" is responsible for the ironic paradox at the heart of the novel:

In parts of *To the Lighthouse*, in the last chapter of *Orlando*, and in *The Waves*, the novel is brought to the limit of its capacity to show death, decay, repression, discontinuity . . . in terms of thought and speech and prose-rhythm. Irony is no longer a device; art becomes irony and the reader sees that the extreme eloquence of *The Waves* hides silence and incommunicability. . . .¹⁰

Hartman argues that there is a dialectic present in the novels between negation and affirmation; the work of art, the finished formal unity, contains its own critique because it constantly questions the continuities which it offers. The experimental style of *The Waves* strives to create an image of life; while the style is essentially affirmative in its attempt to create order, it contains its own negation in the recognition that language is

insufficient. However, the last section of *The Waves* achieves a synthesis between affirmation and negation. As I pointed out in the Introduction, Bernard is like Camus' Sisyphus: consciousness of the inadequacy of language and the victory of death are his tragedy; but this consciousness also allows him to recognize and challenge his fate: "The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory."¹¹

The novel is an especially powerful mode of opposition to chaos because it creates an imaginary world, albeit based upon the real world, in which aesthetic order provides the illusion of absolute order. Camus confirms this in his discussion of rebellion and art where he considers that the same desire for unity which prompts the act of rebellion motivates all creative activity; and therefore rebellion is essentially an act of affirmation:

[In the imaginary world of the novel] Man is finally able to give himself the alleviating form and limits which he pursues in vain in his own life. The novel creates destiny to suit any eventuality. In this way it competes with creation and, provisionally, conquers death.¹²

At the beginning of *The Waves*, Neville concludes that order prevails because language exists: "Each tense, . . . means differently. There is an order in this world; there are distinctions, there are differences in this world, upon whose verge I step" [p. 20]. Language is the

primary tool which man uses to structure his experience. Although *The Waves* explores other ways in which man tries to discover order, the major emphasis, throughout the novel, remains upon language. The recognition of the limitations of language, that sometimes "I need a howl; a cry" [p. 323], is not so much a denial of its value as a realization that beyond a certain point "There are no words" [p. 314].

If I have dwelt at length on this point, it is because the relationship between language and silence is one of the central paradoxes in the novel. Language is also the means by which both Woolf and Bernard oppose death. *The Waves* represents a point of resolution; Woolf does succeed in conquering death in this novel, even if only provisionally. The alteration of Bernard's last words from "O Solitude" to "O Death"¹³ marks Woolf's final recognition that "Death is the enemy" [p. 325], and that in this novel she must confront that enemy, and what it does to the human world, directly. Josephine O'Brien Schaefer claims that: "The experience of life and the knowledge of death cannot be harmonized."¹⁴ In *The Waves*, particularly in Bernard's last soliloquy which ends with his heroic defiance against death, the experience of life and the knowledge of death are harmonized.

The Waves has usually been described as a novel which presents life in terms of a cyclical rhythm, although at least one critic disagrees with this and considers the

development to be linear.¹⁵ These two categories are not mutually exclusive. There are two structures present in the novel; although there is some overlap, and in the last section the two structures are brought together by the image of the eclipse and Bernard's loss of self, the novel is concerned to demonstrate a real cleavage between man and nature. Death forces man to recognize this cleavage. The lyric passages, with their diurnal and seasonal rhythms, indicate the cyclical movement of all life. However, the development of the characters is linear. Individual life is unique and irreplaceable,¹⁶ and although Susan and Bernard may produce children who provide generic continuity, this will not protect them against death. Each character has a dominant motif, introduced at the beginning of the book, a motif which serves as a source of identification. However, all the images and motifs are shared; this demonstrates the existence of a common fund of images culled from human experience. The way in which a particular character adapts an image to suit his own needs reveals different aspects of the personality.

There is also some overlap between the images used in the lyric passages and those used by the characters in the prose sections:

Obviously a consistent analogy is being made between non-human growth and decay and the human lifespan. But the effect of the anthropomorphism is peculiar; the inhuman scenes seem,

because of it, to be bursting with active life, and to provide (like the activity of nature in the 'Time Passes' section of *To the Lighthouse*) a threat to the individual human consciousness.¹⁷

Nature does possess an active life of its own which is a threat to individual human life. Man has no alternative other than to submit to nature's rhythm of birth and death, but man is separated from nature by consciousness and the knowledge of death is especially painful for man. Within the human world death means an end to human consciousness. At this level, the duality between man and nature is absolute and irreconcilable.¹⁸

However, the anthropomorphism and its reverse, that is, the use of images taken from the natural world to describe states of consciousness, indicate a level at which links between man and nature may be achieved. I discussed this possibility in Chapter IV where Mrs. Ramsay experiences herself as a "wedge-shaped core of darkness." In the last section of *The Waves*, Bernard experiences a symbolic death and tries to describe "the world seen without a self" [p. 314]. The perception of the world of nature without the screens of habit, desire, or language, the solitary communion with this world that Bernard achieves, constitutes a re-birth:

"I saw but was not seen; I came unheralded. From me had dropped the old cloak, the old response; the hollowed hand that beats back sounds. Thin as a ghost, leaving no trace where I trod, perceiving merely, I walked

alone in a new world, never trodden; brushing new flowers, unable to speak save in a child's words of one syllable; without shelter from phrases. . . ." [p. 314]

Moments like this, along with some of Woolf's own remarks, sometimes give rise to her being labelled a mystic.¹⁹

Like Mrs. Ramsay, Bernard experiences a different quality of consciousness by which his vision has been cleansed. It is essentially a passive, contemplative state where the barriers between the self and the external world are minimal. An entry made in her diary, in the same year that Woolf had the vision of the fin, may help to clarify Bernard's experience:

These screens shut me out. Have no screens, for screens are made out of our own integument; and get at the thing itself, which has nothing whatever in common with a screen. The screen-making habit, though, is so universal that probably it preserves our sanity. If we had not this device for shutting people off from our sympathies we might perhaps dissolve utterly; separateness would be impossible. But the screens are in excess; not the sympathy.²⁰

Screens separate the individual not only from other people, but also from the natural world. Nevertheless, they are necessary; Septimus and Rhoda exemplify the consequences of being without them. The "thing itself," which the screens shut out, is the "reality" of the mysterious universe which I discussed in the Introduction, and which is prominent here and in *To the Lighthouse*. It is this "reality" perceived without a screen that Woolf seeks to

represent towards the end of *The Waves*. But the paradox remains: language is itself a screen, and the metaphors and analogies used to describe Bernard's experience are rich in ambiguity.

The vision of the world without a self offers the possibility of an embracing unity for which Woolf's characters often yearn. This unity would provide the ultimate solution to the problem of meaning; but, like all such moments in Woolf's fiction, it does not endure. The search for unity in *The Waves* is insistent; Bernard uses an image of wholeness when he begins to describe his own life: "This globe full of figures" [p. 260]. The numerous instances of the unifying *mandala* image in *The Waves* has been frequently commented upon and is testimony to the importance of the search.²¹ The final momentary unity between the natural world of the lyric passages and the human world of the prose passages is achieved through the image of the sun. The position of the sun corresponds to each stage of development in the characters' lives. In the last section of the novel, the eclipse of the sun links a symbolic cosmic death with Bernard's symbolic death. The return of light to a world which Bernard perceives without screens marks the achievement of unity in a visionary moment. The image of the sun is pre-figured in one of Bernard's earliest childhood perceptions, the handle of the cupboard: "I see a ring . . . hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light" [p. 7].

The main emphasis of my discussion will remain upon the two areas which form the central polarity in the novel: Percival's death and Bernard's closing soliloquy. To understand these more fully, I shall consider some of the different ways in which the characters strive to create order in their lives. The two social events where the characters assemble--one before Percival's death and one after--provide an illuminating context for this examination. These events unite the characters within a specific framework, which temporarily gives to life the form it lacks. Within the boundaries of these social occasions, the characters review and examine the different methods by which they have sought to give significance to their individual lives.

At the beginning of the novel the lyric and prose passages parallel one another, as the natural world and the human world emerge out of darkness and begin to take on a distinct shape:

The introduction of *The Waves* sketches a cosmogony. In the beginning is chaos as a reservoir of the elements of form. In the beginning of the universe of *The Waves* (as both macrocosm and microcosm), chaos is not a condition of strife, or warring of elements, but of unconscious, unknown rhythm, and of quiescence. The creative force is light, a lamp in the hand of the mythic woman at the source of creation.²²

Light as the source of life is indicated by Neville's response to Percival's death. He sees it as a withdrawal

of light from the world: "The lights of the world have gone out" [p. 163]. The phrase conveys Neville's desolation and links Percival's death with Bernard's final soliloquy.

At the beginning of *The Waves*, the series of short statements given in the present tense suggests a correspondence between the children and the world around them. This correspondence stems from the immediacy of their sensory perceptions, and also from the relative lack of differentiation between their personalities. This cohesion is ruptured by Louis' first long soliloquy where his recognition of isolation ("I am alone" [p. 10]) marks the onset of self-consciousness among the characters. Josephine O'Brien Schaefer comments: "The bird and flower exist completely in the present, but Louis, a human being with knowledge of both past and future cannot approximate that condition."²³ For the first few pages the children do exist completely in the present. Louis' soliloquy uses different tenses, particularly the past, and so introduces the dimension of time. The penalty which must be paid for individuality and consciousness is loss of innocence. Bernard later recognizes the extent and pain of this loss in his summing up: "We suffered terribly as we became separate bodies" [p. 264]. The recognition of separation and suffering thus involves ultimately the recognition of death.

Louis' soliloquy introduces one of the ways in which he will attempt to give form to his life:

"Now they have all gone," said Louis. "I am alone. . . . I am the stalk. My roots go down to the depths of the world, through veins of lead and silver. I am all fibre. All tremors shake me, and the weight of the earth is pressed to my ribs. Up here my eyes are the lidless eyes of a stone figure in a desert by the Nile." [p. 10]

Louis is beginning to be aware of himself as separate, but his identity is not yet formed, his eyes are still "un-seeing." As in *The Voyage Out*, the movement between the simple present and a mythical past adds a new perspective to the novel. Louis uses history, a temporal structure, to protect him from the knowledge of his isolation. He realizes that history is made by men, and sees himself bearing the responsibility to create history: "I should be transient as the shadow on the meadow, . . . were it not that I coerce my brain to form in my forehead; I force myself to state, if only in one line of unwritten poetry, this moment . . ." [p. 71]. History allows man to think that death is not the end; it places him in a perspective which appears to make him part of a larger human destiny. But history cannot dispel the fear of death: the threatening stamp of the chained beast continues to reverberate through Louis' consciousness.²⁴

Another way that Louis tries to give meaning to his life is through myth which, unlike history, is timeless.

Louis' awareness of a mythical past dominates his consciousness in such a powerful way that he experiences myth as a concrete reality: "My roots go down through veins of lead and silver . . . I have seen women carrying red pitchers to the banks of the Nile" [pp. 102-03]. At the farewell dinner for Percival, Louis and Rhoda add a mythic dimension to the occasion by their dialogue: "They deck the beloved with garlands and with laurel leaves. . . . And while it passes, Louis, we are aware of downfalling, we forebode decay" [p. 152]. Percival is the figure who is decked with garlands. The effect achieved here is similar to that achieved in the dinner which Mrs. Ramsay gives: the mythic echoes widen the representative quality of the event, but also contain the seeds of death and destruction.

Neville, for whom the death of Percival will be the major turning point in his life because after it he is no longer able to retain his conviction that order exists in the world, is confronted with death in the first section:

"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. . . . I shall call this stricture, this rigidity, 'death among the apple trees' for ever. There were the floating pale-grey clouds; and the immitigable tree; the implacable tree with its greaved silver bark. The ripple of my life was unavailing. I was unable to pass by. There was an obstacle. 'I cannot surmount this 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." [p. 24]

Jean Alexander sees this simply as one of a series of important experiences in the children's early lives: "The formative events are the arrest of sensation and understanding by the presence of another as obstacle, terrible because uncontrollable."²⁵ Thus she claims that Neville's perception of death is equivalent to the kiss Jinny gives to Louis. This interpretation, in failing to discriminate, fails also to recognize the full importance of this passage. Death is not simply the arrest of sensation; it is the absolute cessation of consciousness. The other children, who are not yet aware of death, are able to pass on, but lack of awareness does not defend them against death. Neville generalizes his experience of "rigidity," of death as an obstacle, by the last lines: "But we are doomed, all of us." Like the tree in *The Voyage Out*, "the immitigable tree" contains deliberate echoes of the mythical death-giving tree in Genesis, and thus reinforces the universal application of the image.²⁶

Bernard acknowledges the finality of death, in a less metaphoric way, at the end of the book:

"But now I made the contribution of maturity to childhood's intuitions--satiety and doom; the sense of what is inescapable in our lot; death; the knowledge of limitations; how life is more obdurate than one had thought it." [p. 294]

Bernard uses an image, in some ways similar to Neville's, to express the knowledge of inescapable limits. But the

obstacle is no longer "unintelligible"; instead it is named as "death." I have said that Percival is the silent space at the centre of the novel; the tree, which is a concrete symbol of death, inhabits that same space. Neville's childhood experiences are repeated when he associates the tree with Percival's death. The mythical associations of the tree justify Louis' comment that "all deaths are one death" [p. 184]. All the characters attempt to escape the limitations death imposes. Louis through history and myth, and through his attempt to lace the world together with his ships. Bernard and Neville through language. Jinny and Susan through the life of the body: Jinny demanding continual sensual gratification; Susan "demanding that life shall sheathe its claws" [p.187], as she asserts her maternal instinct to protect her children. Only Rhoda is consistently unable to discover a form that will give stability to her life: paradoxically, Percival's death provides her with the knowledge of limitations which help to sustain her existence.

Percival has been subjected to numerous interpretations and is often identified, as his name suggests, with the hero of the Grail Legends. His presentation is a fulfilment of the experiments first made in *Jacob's Room*; he remains at a distance both from the reader and from the six characters: "He sees nothing, he hears nothing. He is remote from us all . . ." [p. 37]. Susan Gorsky

claims that Percival is one example of the loss of the traditional hero: "In this novel, the only possible traditional hero is twice destroyed, first through mockery of form and substance in his inability to speak or to fulfill his potential and then through his absurd death."²⁷ And yet Percival simultaneously functions as a symbol of wholeness, the complete man, the "God" [p. 148] who enables the six speaking characters to create order out of chaos. Harvena Richter offers a useful image of Percival as a "giant reflector" in which each of the characters perceives and can measure himself; in this sense Percival creates the "outer boundary of their world" which provides the illusion of a final unity.²⁸

Before his death, Percival is presented mainly through Neville's eyes. Like Richard Dalloway and Peter Walsh in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Neville has the most complete perception of Percival because he loves him. Bernard indicates the way in which love can assemble the parts of a whole personality: "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" [p. 96]. Love is also the emotion that draws the characters together at Percival's farewell dinner and makes them believe in their endurance.

Each character is aware that Percival fulfills their need for order and form. His function is explored in the two social gatherings: "Now is our festival; now we are

together. But without Percival there is no solidity. We are silhouettes, hollow phantoms moving mistily without a background" [p. 132]. Percival provides the "solidity" in their existence because he is the figure who enables the six characters to join together and form a composite whole (in a similar way, Peter Walsh perceives the assembled parts of Clarissa's personality as a whole). Neville defines Percival's role: "All oppression is relieved. All impediment is removed. The reign of chaos is over. He has imposed order" [p. 133].

During the dinner in the fourth section, a series of unions takes place, imaged by circles and rings, followed by their dispersal: "Now once more . . . the circle in our blood, broken so often, so sharply, for we are so different, closes in a ring" [p. 157]. After Percival's arrival, when the characters create their first union, their response is to tell the story of their lives over again in an attempt to understand the nature and quality of their communion. This is a process which occurs repeatedly throughout the novel and culminates in the story Bernard tells in the last section:

"We have come together . . . to make one thing, not enduring--for what endures?--but seen by many eyes simultaneously. There is a red carnation in that vase. A single flower as we sat here waiting, but now a seven-sided flower, many-petalled, red, puce, purple-shaded, stiff with silver-tinted leaves--a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution."
[p. 137]

This passage provides a key both to the union between the characters at the dinner and to Percival's "wholeness." Percival maintains unity of personality because he is always perceived as an object, an external image seen at a distance; "every eye brings its own contribution" to his character.

At this stage in the novel it is still possible for the characters to believe that "We are creators" [p. 158]. Bernard's recognition that nothing endures is an intellectual formulation that lacks emotional substance until after Percival's death. Only Rhoda, perhaps, whose existence is ephemeral, has any real awareness of the transience of all experience and of life itself. The characters engage in a corporate effort to preserve the unity between them before it vanishes, and to state all the elements it contains; just as they attempted earlier in this section to recount the process by which they have arrived at this point:

"Let us hold it for one moment," said Jinny; "love, hatred, by whatever name we call it, this globe whose walls are made of Percival, of youth and beauty, and something so deep sunk within us that we shall perhaps never make this moment out of one man again."
[p. 157]

Past, present and future, all time and all experience are contained within this "globe" whose walls are made of Percival. Jinny is prophetic: after Percival's death the characters must make their own boundaries.

During the reunion at Hampton Court, where the sun is sinking, the seasons drawing on, and life is on the wane, the characters attempt to define what they have made of their lives. Like Clarissa, each of the six characters is responsible for the burden of individual life. The flexibility of youth is past: "Change is no longer possible. We are committed. . . . We have chosen now, or sometimes it seems the choice was made for us" [p. 233]. In each character there is a conflict between the outward form of life and the inward. Neville, for example, carries credentials in his pocket to prove his success in the world's eyes, but is disturbed by Susan's penetrating glance. Louis, a respected man of business, must protect his hungry shivering soul. Each senses failure and defeat, and realizes that time has passed by and something escaped them: "there was another glory once, when we watched for the door to open, and Percival came" [p. 234]. The loss of Percival symbolizes the loss of youth, and the loss of the possibilities and promises youth contains.

Nevertheless, resistance still remains; the need to oppose the "whirling abysses of infinite space" [p. 248]; to once again assemble human energies in an attempt to give order to life:

"I [Bernard] rise; 'Fight,' I cry, 'fight!' remembering the shape of my own nose, and strike with this spoon upon this table pugnaciously."

"Oppose ourselves to this illimitable chaos," said Neville, "this formless

imbecility. Making love to a nursemaid behind a tree, that soldier is more admirable than all the stars." [pp. 246-47]

Their refusal to submit is made with the mature knowledge that life does not respond to their control, that each choice limits because it precludes other possibilities. The resolve to oppose "this illimitable chaos" is essentially affirmative and acts as a prelude to Bernard's struggle with meaning in the following section.

Opposition is necessary to give meaning to life; the corporate exertion of human energies allows the six characters to achieve union without Percival. This unity is no longer dependent on his presence; its boundaries have been created by the six individual lives. Percival is no longer necessary although he still exists as a memory, both of what was and of what was lost by his death.

"The flower," said Bernard, "the red carnation that stood in the vase on the table of the restaurant when we dined together with Percival, is become a six-sided flower; made of six lives."

"A mysterious illumination," said Louis, "visible against those yew trees."

"Let us stop for a moment; let us behold what we have made. Let it blaze against the yew trees. One life. There. It is over. Gone out." [p. 250]

The union that is symbolic of life, the "mysterious illumination," is set against the yew trees which symbolise death. The moment is all; life blazes

triumphant, then fades. The images of light and dark which represent life and death, form and chaos, link this description to the lyric preludes, and point forward to Bernard's defiance of death in the next section. On this occasion, although Bernard wants to stop and "behold" their mutual creation, there is no attempt (as there was at the farewell dinner) to prolong its existence. The moment is enough; the unity they achieve is a defiance of death. Louis states: "I cannot hear death anywhere tonight" [p. 252].

Earlier in this chapter I described Percival's death and Bernard's last soliloquy as opposite poles in the novel. Before discussing the last section of *The Waves*, I shall return to the middle section and consider the different responses to Percival's death. All of the responses constitute an attempt first to understand the nature of the loss; second to understand the implications of Percival's death both in the lives of the individual characters and in their response to the outside world. The meaning of Percival's death will help to clarify the differences between the two social gatherings and will assist in interpreting the resolution of the final section.

There is a remorseless quality about the sun at mid-day; it exposes every detail of the world in stark outline. Standing in opposition to the relentless brightness of the

sun is the house, sunk in darkness and shadow that point to Percival's death:

The sun struck straight upon the house, making the white walls glare between the dark windows. Their panes, woven thickly with green branches, held circles of impenetrable darkness. . . . Behind their conglomeration hung a zone of shadow in which might a further shape be disencumbered of shadow or still denser depths of darkness.
[p. 162]

The house, which represents the human world inhabited by the characters, is shown in antithetical relation to nature. While the natural world is at its most vibrant and fertile, the human world is unknowable, in a condition of "impenetrable darkness." Death separates the two worlds: man cannot accept death as an integral part of his life because he conceives of himself as unique and individual, not as part of the natural cycle. At this point in the novel, the human and natural worlds are diametrically opposed; death destroys the illusion that man and nature co-exist harmoniously. The violence of the rupture which death causes is suggested by Bernard in section nine: "Into this crashed death" [p. 288].

Only three characters, Neville, Bernard and Rhoda, respond directly to Percival's death in the middle section; the other characters respond later in the book when the death has been emotionally distanced. Neville, who loved Percival, is the first to respond:

"He is dead," said Neville. "He fell. His horse tripped. He was thrown. The sails of the world have swung round and caught me on the head. All is over. The lights of the world have gone out. There stands the tree which I cannot pass. . . .

"Barns and summer days in the country, rooms where we sat--all now lie in the unreal world which is gone. My past is cut from me."

[p. 163]

Neville experiences at its most acute the severance caused by death. This passage provides an imagistic focus: Percival's death, the immitigable tree, and the lights of the world. The reference to light links both the dark house in the lyric preface to this section, and the eclipse of the sun in the last section, to Percival's death. Neville sees his past cut away from him; that past occupies the first half of the novel where the characters build up their lives without the knowledge of death. Neville's contact with death in the first section makes him aware of an insurmountable obstacle but he does not fully recognize what this obstacle is until Percival's death.

Jack F. Stewart sees Percival's death as a paradox:

The paradox of Percival's death (as of Mrs. Ramsay's in *To the Lighthouse*) is that his physical *absence* is so strongly felt as a spiritual *presence* in the minds of the others. . . . His existence takes on a symbolic value that connects the dead with the living, the universal with the personal, monumental form with formless flux, and the lighthouse with the waves. It is in realizing the absolute loss of Percival's death that Bernard is forced to realize the cruelty of chance, the uncertainty of existence, and the unbridgeable gap between words and feelings.²⁹

Not only Bernard, but all the characters (with the exception of Rhoda) are forced to realize that death has destroyed a part of their world. The paradox that surrounds Percival's death is also true of the novel as a whole. Percival only exists through the consciousnesses of the six characters; after his death he remains as a powerful memory. For the reader it appears that nothing has changed, but we are also forced to recognize the "uncertainty of existence" through the emotional responses of the characters.

The symbolic value of Percival's existence provides meaning where at first sight there would seem to be none. Bernard realizes that Percival's death does not simply deprive him:

"Yet something is added to my interpretation. Something lies deeply buried. For one moment I thought to grasp it. But bury it, bury it; let it breed, hidden in the depths of my mind some day to fructify. After a long lifetime, loosely, in a moment of revelation, I may lay hands on it, but now the idea breaks in my hand. Ideas break a thousand times for once they globe themselves entire. They break; they fall over me." [p. 170]

Bernard's "moment of revelation" will occur in the last section; it concerns both his vision of the world without a self, and his recognition that "Death is the enemy." The wave-like rhythm and image of the last line of this passage point forward to the last line in the novel and indicate the centrality of the theme of death, as well as

the links between the lyric and prose passages.

Percival's death offers something positive to Rhoda, a permanence which her own rootless existence is forever unable to obtain. At first her response seems to be parallel to Neville's: both involve arrest and immobility. In fact the two responses are directly opposed. Neville experiences death as a concrete, tangible obstacle figured by the image of the apple tree which was engraved on his consciousness in early childhood. For Rhoda, on the other hand, her inability to cross the puddle and so face death, is due to the complete absence of physical forms that could support her: "All palpable forms of life have failed me" [p. 172]. Rhoda experiences a dilemma similar to that of Septimus: she is unable to define herself clearly because she lacks the boundaries--where the self meets the outside world--which would make this possible. Like Septimus, Rhoda cannot establish a satisfactory relationship between her awareness of herself, and her awareness of the external world. As a result she fears contact with other people because they threaten to invade her; she also fears the outside world because she cannot define her place in it. Rhoda's existence is so ephemeral that she experiences acute terror at the thought of "being blown for ever outside the loop of time!" [p. 21].

Peter and Margaret Havard-Williams have argued interestingly that Rhoda is the artist *manqué* in the novel

(departing from the more usual assumption that Bernard occupies this position). They believe that in Rhoda's character, Woolf explores the workings of the imagination; or at least one facet of the imagination, that is, phantasy:

In this world of utter phantasy, the inventive and abstracting powers of the mind are given free rein, image follows image with delightful exhilarating rapidity; nevertheless, this very freedom brings, paradoxically, chaos and death to the life of the imagination.³⁰

Even the free-ranging imagination needs form to give it meaning. Rhoda, who lives almost entirely in an imaginative world, is alienated from the outside world and other individuals because she cannot connect the different parts of her existence together:

"I perceived, from your coats and umbrellas, even at a distance, how you stand embedded in a substance made of repeated moments run together; are committed, have an attitude, with children, authority, fame, love, society; where I have nothing. I have no face." [p. 243]

Percival's death gives stability to her existence because it reveals the existence of absolute limits. His death also reveals to Rhoda the need for active resistance against the formlessness of life. She recognizes the importance of form in the much discussed image of the square and the oblong:

"Now that lightning has gashed the tree and the flowering branch has fallen and Percival,

by his death, has made me this gift, let me see the thing. There is a square; there is an oblong. The players take the square and place it on the oblong. They place it very accurately; they make a perfect dwelling place. Very little is left outside. The structure is now visible; what is inchoate is here stated; we are not so various or so mean; we have made our oblongs and stood them upon squares. This is our triumph; this is our consolation." [pp. 176-77]

The image recurs and is used by different characters in the remainder of the book. The geometric images are the most abstract of forms: her recognition of these forms is stimulated by music, the supreme temporal art. The arrangement of sounds in sequence through time to create musical structures protects Rhoda from her fear of being blown outside the loop of time. Ultimately the forms represented by the square and the oblong do not sustain her and Rhoda commits suicide. But the rigid precision of the forms she selects indicates her awareness of the need for forms which can contain the chaotic life of the imagination; even if these forms are arbitrarily imposed and of necessity always leave something out. On at least one level, the square can be seen as a representation of the house that offers an image of the continuing human endeavour to create order within certain boundaries, throughout the lyric passages.³¹

Bernard's "summing up" is the last attempt to tell the story which makes up the novel; the image he offers of his life--"this globe full of figures" [p. 260]--is

also an appropriate description of the novel. In order to tell the story Bernard adopts the technique suggested by Neville in the seventh section, to: "let down one's net deeper and deeper and gently draw in and bring to the surface what he said and she said and make poetry" [p. 217]. Bernard draws the characters of his friends out of the pool to make his story, but he is aware that his activity depends upon a false hypothesis: "Of story, of design, I do not see a trace then" [p. 261].

The whole of the last section of *The Waves* addresses itself to the problems that are present throughout the book. It explores the central paradoxes, and the ironic tension between the need to make stories and the recognition that they do not correspond to reality: "Life comes; Life goes; we make life. So you say" [p. 191]. Bernard examines this proposition of Jinny's. Is the process of life, day following day, enough to sustain man, or must there be a destiny that does not wait for death? Are the characters creators, as they believed in the first part of the novel, or are they merely victims of death?

Bernard's soliloquy is the most sustained meditation on the problems of language and meaning in Woolf's work. During the novel, Bernard offers two diametrically opposed views of language. One is that his words and phrases "draw the veil off things . . . " [p. 90]; two, that: "My mind hums hither and thither with its veil of words for everything" [p. 127]. Does language reveal or

obscure? Earlier in this chapter, I referred to language as a screen which suggests an impediment of some kind. But language is, by its very nature, paradoxical; it functions in both the ways Bernard describes. Language provides a structure which gives form and unity to life and allows man to obtain the coherence he craves through the creation of sequence and stories out of life, and through the creation of artistic forms. However, Barnard's dissatisfaction with words, phrases, and stories reveals the limitations of language. He knows that for certain experiences words are inadequate: "But for pain words are lacking. There should be cries, cracks, fissures, whiteness passing over chintz covers; interference with the sense of time, of space . . ."

[p. 288]. The violence and tumult of experience cannot always be accommodated by the ordered sequence of language. There are no words for death. Nevertheless, Bernard continues in his attempt to create verbal structures which convey the meaning of his life and his friends' lives, and Percival's death; just as the novel, which recognizes the limitations of words, does not break down linguistically, but instead rises at the end with the arch of the wave in a complex symbolic structure.

At the end of *The Waves*, the lyric and prose passages correspond up to a certain point, but they do not both return to the undifferentiated formlessness that characterized both nature and the children at the beginning.

Bernard raises his "song of glory" at the end of the novel and is highlighted single and alone against the crashing of the waves. The lyric at the beginning of the ninth section marks both the time of day and the season; the sun is setting; autumn is drawing to a close. The mention of the spot where the leaves "would await dissolution" [p. 258], indicates the organic decay of matter, and points to the approaching death of the characters. Colour is no longer present; instead black, white, and grey dominate the scene. Darkness washes over everything and, in a way that recalls "Time Passes," objects lose distinct shape and begin to merge. The final line of the lyric passage asserts the triumph of darkness: "Them, too, darkness covered" [p. 259]. The movement in the lyric section is directed back towards the state from which the sun kindled life in the first section, a return to quiescence. By comparison, the human activity in the prose section is directly opposed to this: it is an attempt to understand the meaning of life; to continue to create forms that resist chaos; to refuse to yield to quiescence.

The activity of creating form in this section-- Bernard's attempt to tell the stories that make up the characters' lives--is carried out despite the sure knowledge that any structure, like Rhoda's square placed upon the oblong, cannot contain all:

"But it is a mistake, this extreme precision, this orderly and military progress; a convenience, a lie. There is always deep below it, even when we arrive punctually at the appointed time with our white waistcoats and polite formalities, a rushing stream of broken dreams, nursery rhymes, street cries, half finished sentences and sights-- elm trees, willow trees . . ." [pp. 279-80]

Artistic form (whether it be Bernard's stories, Lily Briscoe's painting, or the wider net of the novel itself) involves a selective attempt to create structures flexible enough to contain all the diverse elements of thought, sensation, memory, and desire which constitute the individual's self and experience of reality. In this last section Bernard justifies Mitchell A. Leaska's comment: "His is the struggle which, in the existential sense, makes human destiny a human matter."³² The eternal flux of life from which man must create his destiny is always opposed by the rigidity and fixity of death: "The tree alone resisted our eternal flux" [p. 273]. Life and death may be simply a part of the biological process in the natural world, but they are always opposed in the human world. Death is absolute destruction; it brings the threat of chaos to man's world. The resistance that Bernard asserts in his "song of glory" is ultimately the only resort left to man. He must recognize defeat and yet defy it: "There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn."³³

Before he can come to a full understanding of death, Bernard must experience the symbolic death of loss of the

self, which I discussed earlier in this chapter. This is described by an analogy with the eclipse of the sun (an event Virginia Woolf had witnessed in 1927³⁴): "The scene beneath me withered. It was like the eclipse when the sun went out and left the earth, flourishing in full summer foliage, withered brittle false. . . . What a litter--what a confusion; with here birth, here death; succulence and sweetness; effort and anguish; and myself running hither and thither. Now it was done with" [pp. 311-12]. The imagistic fusion of the two worlds is reinforced in Bernard's vision of the world without a self. The visionary moment ("I walked alone in a new world . . . solitary" [p. 314] passes, but the discovery of the meaning of death endures:

Death is discovered afresh, for the first time one might say, by every man. It is the artist who elevates it to value. Life gains its intensity by the dark shadow that billows loosely around it. That man who persists in looking steadily at life is compelled toward a consciousness of death--which is the true tragic sense. Not simply tragedy, which may be more dramatic but by itself remains individual, but the tragic sense--the realization of generic identity in death, that necessary recognition, until which life itself remains unknown and undefined.³⁵

Throughout her fiction Virginia Woolf has persisted in looking steadily at life, and the consciousness of death pervades all the novels I have discussed. This critic picks up on the images of light and dark used to represent life and death in *The Waves*. The true recognition

of death is present in the last section of this novel, both by Bernard and the author.

The return of light to the world symbolizes a recognition of the value of life which blazes for a moment against the dark tree of death. The novel ends with a heroic celebration of life in defiance of death.

"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. Now 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." [p. 322]

Solitude and the recognition of death bring with them a kind of freedom, a stability within the flux of existence that provides a sure sense of identity. Bernard's song of glory, which begins with this recognition, rises to heights of lyric eloquence. For Bernard, the mere process of life is not enough, but the active struggle to give the formless flux of existence a shape defies death and defines man's position in the universe: Bernard is a rebel:

One of the only coherent philosophical positions is thus revolt. It is a constant confrontation between man and his own obscurity. It is an insistence upon an impossible transparency. It challenges the world anew every second. Just as danger provided man the unique opportunity

of seizing awareness, so metaphysical revolt extends awareness to the whole of experience. It is that constant presence of man in his own eyes. It is not aspiration, for it is devoid of hope. That revolt is the certainty of a crushing fate without the resignation that ought to accompany it.³⁶

Bernard will not resign himself to death. Finally he rebels, and asserts the value of life over death, of language over silence, and of order over chaos. But his rebellion is made in the full knowledge that: "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" [p. 325]. Percival was a great master of the art of living, the complete man, because he challenged death anew in every action. The extravagant rhetoric of the final paragraph, where Bernard flings himself "unvanquished and unyielding" [p. 325] against death, marks his rebellion, but it is neither victory, nor defeat. It is a recognition of the human condition; of the need to gather human energies, despite the "certainty of a crushing fate," and to fight against the unceasing breaking of the waves upon the shore.

CHAPTER V

NOTES

¹ A. Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 262..

² Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, November 28, 1928, p. 139, states: "I mean to eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity: to give the moment whole; whatever it includes. Say that the moment is a combination of thought; sensation; the voice of the sea. Waste, deadness, come from the inclusion of things that don't belong to the moment; . . ."

³ Mitchell A. Leaska, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf: From Beginning to End* (New York: The John Jay Press, 1977), p. 164.

⁴ I use the terms "character" and "novel" advisedly in my discussion of *The Waves*, bearing in mind Virginia Woolf's unease with the terms, and her sense that the fiction she was developing overflowed the limits imposed by the traditional view of each. An interesting discussion of characterization in *The Waves* can be found in Susan Gorsky's article, "'The Central Shadow': Characterization in *The Waves*," *Modern Fiction Studies*, No. 18 (Autumn 1972), pp. 449-66.

⁵ See Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, p. 101. September 30, 1926.

⁶ Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, p. 143. May 28, 1929. I believe this comment may have influenced critics who consider that the six voices make up one personality which belongs to the author.

⁷ Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, p. 144. June 23, 1929. See also p. 146, September 25, 1929.

⁸ See Bernard Blackstone, *Virginia Woolf: A Commentary*, p. 168, for example.

⁹ See Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, p. 147. October 11, 1929. Jack F. Stewart in "Existence and Symbol in *The Waves*," *Modern Fiction Studies*, No. 18 (Autumn 1972), pp. 433-47 discusses the relationship between Woolf's experience of

"inner loneliness" while she was writing *The Waves* and the silence at the centre of the novel.

¹⁰ Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Virginia's Web," *Chicago Review*, 14, no. 4 (Spring 1961), 30.

¹¹ A. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 90.

¹² A. Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 264.

¹³ See Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, p. 162, December 22, 1930, and p. 169, February 7, 1931.

¹⁴ Josephine O'Brien Schaefer, *The Three-Fold Nature Of Reality In The Novels Of Virginia Woolf*, p. 142.

¹⁵ Avrom Fleishman, *Virginia Woolf: A Critical Reading*, p. 155, disagrees with the general consensus of critical opinion and claims: "The thrust of all sequences in this work is linear." According to Fleishman, p. 163: ". . . life is conceived here as a process of individuation. The process is dialectical: the self is made out of experience, and experience includes others, so that the loss of the initial unreflective unity is compensated by a return of the differentiated others in an internalized form, a process by which they constitute the created self."

¹⁶ Some critics, Jill Morris, for example, *Time and Timelessness in Virginia Woolf*, p. 74, suggest that the six characters equal one person. Hermione Lee, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf*, pp. 164-65, claims: "This brings the novel dangerously close to a play of humours in which bits of the human personality are parcelled out among the different characters." While I disagree with these interpretations, I think it is a legitimate response to see the six characters forming some kind of "gestalt."

¹⁷ H. Lee, p. 167.

¹⁸ Josephine O'Brien Schaefer, p. 163, relates Woolf's view of the human dilemma to the Renaissance conception of man: "born to one world to another bound." The dilemma is particularly acute for modern man who lacks the traditional religious framework in which the duality can be at least partially reconciled.

¹⁹ See Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, p. 137, November 7, 1928, where Woolf describes *The Waves* (then *The Moths*) as "an abstract mystical eyeless book: a playpoem," and goes on to say: "I must come to terms with these mystical feelings." Frank D. McConnell's article 'Death Among the Apple Trees': *The Waves* and the World of Things," in *Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Claire Sprague (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), discusses the way in which Woolf came to terms with her mystical feelings in *The Waves*.

²⁰ Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, p. 97. Rodmell 1926.

²¹ Harvena Richter, *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 60, points to the variations of the *mandala* present in *The Waves*. She points out that the *mandala* is a symbol of "wholeness" or unity of personality. C. G. Jung, "Dream Symbolism in Relation to Alchemy," in *The Portable Jung*, ed. Joseph Campbell (Ontario: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 360, when discussing the *mandala* describes an important aspect of the symbol pointed out to him by a Lamaic *rimpoche*: "The true mandala is always an inner image, which is gradually built up through (active) imagination, at such times when psychic equilibrium is disturbed or when a thought cannot be found and must be sought for, because it is not contained in holy doctrine." The emphasis upon the active imaginative effort needed to construct the symbol accords well with the task which confronts the characters in *The Waves* in their attempt to create unity.

²² Jean Alexander, *The Venture Of Form In The Novels Of Virginia Woolf*, p. 163. A. Fleishman, p. 154, draws an interesting analogy between the beginning of *The Waves* and Genesis; and between the end of the novel and the Apocalypse.

²³ Josephine O'Brien Schaefer, p. 140.

²⁴ The stamp of the beast is associated with the sound of the waves breaking on the shore, p. 30: "Meanwhile the concussion of the waves breaking fell with muffled thuds."

²⁵ Jean Alexander, p. 152.

- ²⁶ Irma Rantavaara, "On Romantic Imagery in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* with Special Reference to Antithesis," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, No. 60 (1959), p. 79, relates the tree to Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode*. This article draws interesting comparisons between *The Waves* and some of the Romantic poets.
- ²⁷ S. Gorsky, p. 453.
- ²⁸ H. Richter, p. 110.
- ²⁹ Jack F. Stewart, p. 439.
- ³⁰ Peter and Margaret Havard-Williams, "Perceptive Contemplation in the Work of Virginia Woolf," *English Studies*, No. 35 (1954), p. 103. They also discuss Rhoda in another interesting article, "Bateau Ivre: The Symbol of the Sea in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*," *English Studies*, No. 34 (1953), pp. 9-17.
- ³¹ James Naremore, *The World Without a Self*, pp. 182-83, discusses the image and sees a bitter irony in it. Mitchell A. Leaska, pp. 174-75, interprets the image as a symbol of tombstone and coffin; an interpretation which, I believe, misplaces the importance of the image.
- ³² Mitchell A. Leaska, p. 188.
- ³³ A. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 90.
- ³⁴ See Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, pp. 109-113. June 30, 1927. Woolf's insistence upon the death of the world is significant: "We had fallen. It was extinct. There was no colour. The earth was dead."
- ³⁵ Robert G. Collins, *Virginia Woolf's Black Arrows of Sensation: The Waves*, p. 46.
- ³⁶ A. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 40.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

"Art disputes reality, but does not hide from it."¹

Virginia Woolf concludes *The Waves* with an assertion of defiance against death, made in the full knowledge that the human world is subject to forces that destroy it. Bernard's final soliloquy completes the affirmation towards which the author has been moving since her first novel. In an essay on Montaigne first published in 1925, Woolf stresses her belief that it is life, not death, which matters:

We should start without any fixed idea where we are going to spend the night, or when we propose to come back; *the journey is everything*. . . . So in the name of health and sanity, let us not dwell on the end of the journey. Let death come upon us planting our cabbages, or on horseback, or let us steal away to some cottage and there let strangers close our eyes, for a servant sobbing or the touch of a hand would break us down. Best of all let death find us at our usual occupations among girls and good fellows who make no protests, no lamentations, let him find us "parmy [sic] les jeux, les festins, faceties, entretiens communs et populaires, et la musique, et des vers amoureux." But enough of death; it is life that matters.²

The solitary traveller in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the sleeper pacing the beach in "Time Passes" [*To the Lighthouse*] are symbols of mankind engaged in a search for meaning. As

they emphasize "the journey" through life cannot be made in her fiction without a struggle: it is not enough merely to lose oneself "in the process of living" [*Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 282]. The presence of death cannot be met with the equanimity suggested here until after Bernard has stood face to face with death at the end of *The Waves*.

The final section of *The Waves* completes the search for meaning begun in *The Voyage Out*. Bernard, the storyteller, offers a formulation of Woolf's own artistic credo: "But in order to make you understand . . . I must tell you a story" [p. 260]. He recognizes that these stories are never complete; that he will never discover *the* story (just as Lily Briscoe realizes that "the great revelation never did come . . ." [p. 240]); but the need for these stories, which give form to human life, remains. E. M. Forster expresses a similar idea:

One must behave as if one is immortal and as if civilization is eternal. Both statements are false--I shall not survive, no more will the great globe itself--both of them must be assumed to be true if we are to go on eating, and working, and travelling, and keep open a few breathing holes for the human spirit.³

He might have added, and writing novels. In order to make the reader understand, the novelist selects one story from the many that could be told; he assumes a continuity and stability in experience that can be achieved only in art.

The distance which Woolf has travelled between her

first novel and *The Waves*, can be measured if we compare the respective endings of the two books. They are completed in ways that are diametrically opposed. *The Voyage Out* resorts to a symbolic procession where individual life is given meaning in the presence of death only by an impersonal vision of continuity. At the conclusion of *The Waves*, the individual stands alone to face his destiny; society has been stripped away as a source of support and nature offers only oblivion, not comfort. It is in this sense then that Virginia Woolf's art "disputes reality": the novel recognizes, through Bernard, that man is subject to death and is therefore a victim not a master of his own destiny. Despite this recognition, however, Bernard challenges this knowledge, and in this challenge refuses to submit to his condition.

I have tried to point out the complexity of Woolf's attitude towards death in the four novels which have been discussed, as well as the many ambiguities. There is a conflict in her approach between the desire to fight and the desire to yield, but ultimately it is a conflict which is faced and overcome; the "fight" and the "journey" are vindicated. Irma Rantavaara is correct in seeing courage as one of Virginia Woolf's outstanding qualities:

Courage is indeed one of the most characteristic traits in Virginia Woolf. The will to face facts and to defy the lords of the unconscious by turning them into servants. . . .⁴

Nowhere is this courage more evident than in her struggle against death and in her search for forms which can create order out of chaos, which can sustain life while facing the knowledge of death. At the end of *To the Lighthouse*, Cam describes the task that faced Virginia Woolf: "Would the provisions last? she asked herself, telling herself a story but knowing at the same time what was the truth" [p. 304].

The truth for Virginia Woolf is the "rushing stream" [*Waves*, p. 297], the "incessant shower of innumerable atoms"⁵ that bombards human consciousness. Art is the great synthesis: the stories which the novelist creates, and the stories which her characters make up within the novels, provide a necessary continuity, while simultaneously capturing the fragmentary stream of experience which exists as chaos if it is not given form.

Let us turn to Bernard for the final time, whose statement summarizes both Woolf's beliefs and her creative endeavour:

"Fight! Fight!" I repeated. It is the effort and the struggle, it is the perpetual warfare, it is the shattering and piecing together--that is the daily battle, defeat or victory, the absorbing pursuit. 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. [p. 295]

Language creates order: words provide form. For Virginia

Woolf the creative power was a means to defy death: "the exalted sense of being above time and death which comes from being again in a writing mood."⁶ In writing she redeems her life from formlessness and brings "order and speed"⁷ into her world.

If the creative process is one way of defying death, then the completed work of art gains an immortality to which the individual can only aspire. In *The Rebel* Camus claims that: "Art is an impossible demand given expression and form."⁸ The impossible demand is the unity which life can never give and the immortality which man craves. If *The Waves* ends with ambiguity, with the tension between man's creative, rebellious energies which oppose his destiny, and the mute force of nature which will annihilate him; it also closes with a paradox; speech has been found to convey "the roar which lies on the other side of silence."⁹ An impossible demand has been fulfilled.

CHAPTER VI

NOTES

¹ A. Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 258.

² Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1967), III, 24-25.

³ E. M. Forster's address to the International Congress of Writers at Paris in 1935, quoted in Josephine O'Brien Schaefer, *The Three-Fold Nature Of Reality In The Novels Of Virginia Woolf*, pp. 36-37.

⁴ Irma Rantavaara, *Virginia Woolf And Bloomsbury*, pp. 115-16.

⁵ Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays*, II, 106.

⁶ Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, p. 225.

⁷ Virginia Woolf, *AWD*, p. 181. May 25, 1932.
"I saw all the violence and unreason crossing in the air: ourselves small; a tumult outside: something terrifying: unreason--shall I make a book out of this? It would be a way of bringing order and speed again into my world."

⁸ A. Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 271.

⁹ G. Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 226.

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