

TIME AND PERSONALITY  
IN  
THE NOVELS OF  
VIRGINIA WOOLF

**CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES**

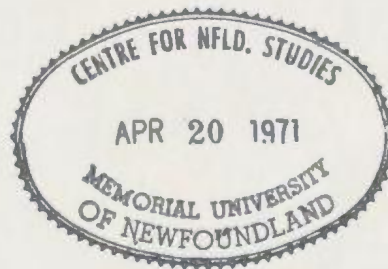
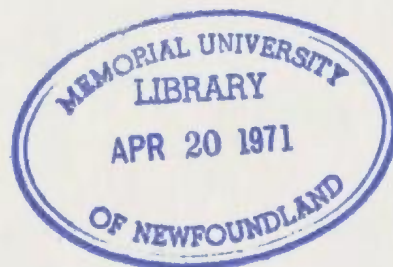
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JOHN L. CONNORS

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TIME AND PERSONALITY

IN

THE NOVELS OF

VIRGINIA WOOLF

by

John L. Connors

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Arts, Memorial University of Newfoundland,  
April 1970.

This thesis is written in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Examined and approved by:

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To George and Edith Stacey

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank Dr. E. R. Scary, Head of the Department of English Language and Literature of Memorial University, for his assistance and encouragement; and Dr. C. J. Francis whose critical insight and valuable suggestions directed my attention to weaknesses and required me constantly to examine my conclusions.

I should like to express my gratitude to the Provincial Government and the University for their financial assistance; and to the University librarians who, though their patience was often severely taxed, were exceptionally co-operative.

I am particularly grateful to my wife whose concern for practical matters was largely responsible for my conscientious application to my research; and to Mrs. Bruce Hummel who so assiduously typed this thesis from the original manuscript.

J. L. C.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The clock on the mantelpiece  
Has nothing to recommend,  
Nor does the face in the glass  
Appear nobler than our own  
As darkness and snow descend  
On all personality.

(W. H. Auden, "For The Time  
Being")

Virginia Woolf was one of the very few novelists of this century who presented a consistent and comprehensive treatment of time. Time with her was "almost a mode of perception",<sup>1</sup> a filter which separated the individual personality and its social counterpart so that they could be apprehended in their true significance and relationship. Her great preoccupation with time is accountable in terms of the integral relationship between time and personality.

Before exploring this relationship, however, it will be necessary to discuss Mrs. Woolf's treatment of time per se. The second chapter of this thesis, therefore, will deal with her treatment of clock time, that is, time as a succession of chronologically arranged events. Chapter three will attempt to analyze her treatment of psychological duration, or time as the rate of succession of ideas in the mind, and how this "mind time" came to replace clock time in her novels. The "extraordinary discrepancy between time on the clock and time in the mind" (Orlando. P. 69) served, for Mrs. Woolf, to emphasize the unreality of clock time and the supreme importance of "the unlimited time of the mind which stretches in a flash from Shakespeare to ourselves" (The Waves. P. 235).

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<sup>1</sup>Shiv K. Kumar, Bergson and The Stream of Consciousness Novel, New York: New York University Press, 1963. P. 68.

The fourth chapter will discuss the "Past as present" element of Mrs. Woolf's concept of time, her contention that the past does not exist in its own right but exists as a part of memory and hence is part of the character's present. This relates to the problem of personal identity, which is a question of more than the immediate self. Personal identity is merely partial, depending for completion upon past "selves" and upon other present "selves". Much of the individual's past experience is forgotten or deadened by the years and is jerked back to his consciousness by some event or sensation. This the individual now reconstitutes, re-assessing significances in the light of intervening years, switching from past to present or merging the two in eternity. Mrs. Woolf recognized that the individual is subjected to clock time; he must regulate his life; he must age and die, but his role in society is permanent, just as the wave which sinks back into the ocean continues to exist as part of the ocean. It is this dissolution into impersonality of the personal identity that will be discussed in chapter five.

The sixth chapter will explore the attempt in the later novels, notably The Waves and Between The Acts, to reconcile "the extraordinary discrepancy between time on the clock and time in the mind". Virginia Woolf realized, finally, that the inner life of the individual is inseparable from

the life of ~~society~~. She recognized that man's innermost need was for a social order in which he might function as a complete being. Her later writings stressed the need to reconcile the idealism of the inner life with the reality of the social life.

Time, wrote Henry James, is "that side of the novelist's effort -- the side of most difficulty and thereby of most dignity -- which consists in giving the sense of duration, of the lapse and accumulation of time. This is altogether to my view the stiffest problem that the artist in fiction has to tackle".<sup>1</sup> It was to the problem of time, particularly as it related to personality, that Virginia Woolf devoted the major part of her effort as a novelist. The importance of time in the life of the individual and its relative importance in the total reality of living was a problem which intrigued her and commanded her attention to the end of her life.

Critics of the novel have generally attempted to clarify Virginia Woolf's concept of time by terming it Bergsonian, Proustian, Joycean, or by the label of some other "school of thought". This method, however, is not clarification; it is gross simplification. A clear understanding of the treatment of time in her novels does not encourage this injudicious application of labels. The fact is that all three labels used together, let alone used singly, fail to include within their composite boundaries the nuances of Mrs. Woolf's time.

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<sup>1</sup>Henry James, "London Notes", Notes on Novelists, London, 1914. P. 349.

It is not, however, that her concept of time is necessarily more complex than Bergson's, Proust's, or Joyce's. It is simply that her concept is different from all of theirs. The usefulness of labels is at most that they may indicate what Virginia Woolf found helpful in formulating her sense of time and reality. They do not explain or account for it. It can be, and has been, shown that Mrs. Woolf was influenced by Bergson, Proust, and Joyce, as well as by many others including De Quincey, Sterne, Roger Fry, Henry James, and Thomas Hardy. Neither, however, was a great enough influence to override her own personal concept of time.

There is in Virginia Woolf something of the mystic, something of the Bergsonian, something of the rationalist, something of the Platonist... Her emphasis on the moment of recall is Proustian; her emphasis on the unifying quality of the moment is Joycean. Her re-creation of the past is Proustian; her sense of return is Joycean. Her sense of an arrested instant is mystical; her sense of the persistence of past ages is Joycean... 2

All of these influences undoubtedly helped to enlarge and enrich her concept of time, but they did not replace it.

From the beginning of her writing career, Virginia Woolf was greatly dissatisfied with the conventional method

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<sup>2</sup>Margaret Church, Time and Reality: Studies in Contemporary Fiction, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1957. Pp. 100-01.

of narration in which events were presented in straightforward chronological sequence. Even though her first two novels, The Voyage Out and Night and Day conform to the traditional method in form, they nevertheless show evidence of a mind greatly displeased with the framework within which it had to work. Already the sensitive mind of Virginia Woolf was reaching outward beyond the conventional form of the novel in search of a more adequate form in which to express the great truths of life as it perceived them. To the end of her life, she continued to experiment with the novel form in an effort to mould it into a more effective means of communicating her vision to life. To the end of her life she was never satisfied that she had completely achieved an adequate form. Every one of her novels is a further refinement on the conventional form, each seeking to evaluate the relative importance of the facts of the external world of society and the truths of the inner world of the individual's mind, and each seeking a means of uniting these two levels of experience in a single vision.

As a "stream of consciousness" novelist, Virginia Woolf was particularly interested in psychic fluidity - the flow of thoughts, ideas, fragments of speech, fragmentary recollections of the past and hopes and apprehensions for the future through the human mind - and in the effect the makeup of this stream has on the individual personality. The fact that man regulates his social life according to an arbitrary mechanical scale based on chronology while possessing at the same time this fluid mind time in which chronological

sequence is all but non-existent is a condition which greatly intrigued her.

Consequently, the question of time became the question of reality. What is the nature of time? What is the meaning of life? Who am I? What is truth? All of these questions eventually became for Mrs. Woolf one question: What is reality? For earlier writers such as George Moore, George Gissing, Arnold Bennett and the French "naturalists", reality was the process of carrying on the daily experiences peculiar to man and the facts of the external, physical world composed the real life. For later novelists such as Henry James, James Joyce and Dorothy Richardson external reality was insignificant and the individual's inner life, his most intense and personal experiences, composed the real life.

Virginia Woolf, however, recognized the value and limitations of each of these views of reality and accorded her unqualified commitment to neither. For her, both levels of reality were mutually interdependent. The fulfilment of life depended on bringing the outer world of chronology and the inner world of psychological duration together. Her novels became a study of reality on two levels - the inner, subjective level of the personal consciousness and the outer, objective level of a chronologically regulated social world - and an attempt to unify these two levels of experience in a total reality. She realized that personal relations as well as the inner life are part of the reality of life; individual inner experience must be united with social experience



if one is to attain complete fulfilment as a human being.

In To The Lighthouse, Mr. Ramsay is identified by Mrs. Woolf with the outer reality of objective facts. Mrs. Ramsay, on the other hand, is identified with the inner, subjective reality of the mind. The novel is complete only when the two become united at the end. Lily Briscoe's final stroke on her canvas signified the connection between clock time and mind time, between the external reality of Mr. Ramsay and the inner reality of Mrs. Ramsay. Mrs. Woolf explained the necessity of such a union in A Room of One's Own:

in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female; and in the man's brain the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually cooperating. If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman must also have intercourse with the man in her. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. <sup>3</sup>

Mrs. Woolf's goal was not appreciation, but understanding, of reality. Hers was not an attempt merely to experience life but to determine what life, or reality, is. The fact

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<sup>3</sup>Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1967. P. 97.

that her understanding of reality was heightened by contact with the thought of Bergson, Proust, Joyce and others is relatively insignificant. The importance of her concept of time, and of reality, lies not in its origin but, rather, in its use. This thesis is an attempt to analyze critically the meaning and worth of the view of time and reality expressed in the novels of Virginia Woolf and to reconstruct the steps by which she formulated a unified vision of external and inner reality.

## CHAPTER TWO

CHRONOLOGICAL TIME: "TIME ON THE CLOCK"

"Proportion, divine proportion, Sir William's goddess, was acquired by Sir William walking hospitals, catching salmon, begetting one son in Harley Street by Lady Bradshaw,... Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalized despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion..."

(Mrs. Dalloway. P. 110)

Many of the characters in the novels of Virginia Woolf appear to be overly concerned, almost obsessed, with time - at least with time as pontificated by the clock. The "leaden circles" of Big Ben's chimes dissolve in the air over and over in Mrs. Dalloway; the clock frequently announces the hour in Jacob's Room and in Between The Acts; the waves thud with solemn regularity on the shore in The Waves; and the beam of the lighthouse strokes the Ramsays' summer house with the regularity of a clock in To The Lighthouse. And this passing of time is generally brought to the reader's attention by one or more of Virginia Woolf's time-conscious characters.

In Jacob's Room,<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Flanders is so much aware of the passage of time she notes that the church clock is "ten or thirteen minutes fast" (P. 10). The following passage from the same novel emphasizes even more strongly, through its frequent and specific time references, the clock-watching which characterizes so much of Mrs. Woolf's writing:

By six o'clock a breeze blew in off an icefield; and by seven the water was more purple than blue; and by half past seven there was a patch of rough goldbeater's skin round the Scilly Isles, ...

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<sup>1</sup>Virginia Woolf, Jacob's Room, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1965. Further references will be to this edition. Pagination will be included in the text.

By nine all the fire and confusion had gone out of the sky, leaving wedges of apple-green and plates of pale yellow; and by ten the lanterns on the boat were making twisted colours upon the waves, elongated or squab, as the waves stretched or humped themselves. The beam from the lighthouse strode rapidly across the water. Infinite millions of miles away powdered stars twinkled; but the waves slapped the boat, and crashed, with regular and appalling solemnity, against the rocks.  
(P. 49)

At the same time Mrs. Pascoe, alone in her house, can "hear the cheap clock on the mantel-piece, tick, tick, tick ... tick, tick, tick" (P. 49).

The rapid flash of the lighthouse beam and the "regular" crash of the waves are allied with the clock, that most obvious symbol of chronological time, in suggesting the passing of the seconds. These two images anticipate To The Lighthouse and The Waves, where they largely replace the clock as a means of indicating time's passage.

The pivotal significance of Jacob's Room lies in its anticipation of certain aspects of the later novels. Because it marks Virginia Woolf's first significant insights into the nature of time, it is important primarily as a beginning. At this time in her career Mrs. Woolf is beginning to formulate her theories about time, and each of the aspects with which she experiments superficially in Jacob's Room receive more comprehensive treatment in later novels.

In To The Lighthouse, for example, Mrs. Woolf depends very little upon the clock as a means of expressing her sense

of chronology. Her treatment of time is much more sophisticated, and more subtle, than in the novels up to and including Mrs. Dalloway. This refinement is achieved through the highly skilful employment of imagery. Mrs. Woolf wishes to create here the feeling that time is passing, and to involve the reader emotionally in the perception of time's passage. The clock, besides being a blunt statement of chronological time, had already been greatly overused in novels, and by Virginia Woolf herself. Mrs. Woolf realized that the clock fails to evoke an adequate sense of time passing.

Much more effective in suggesting the passage of time are the less obvious images of the gradual decaying of the Ramsays' old summer house and the peeling away of the old wallpaper. These are two of the images employed in "Time Passes", the middle section of To The Lighthouse,<sup>2</sup> to suggest change and the passage of ten years. Stray airs, darting about in the old, deserted and dilapidated house,

entered the drawing room questioning and wondering, toying with the flap of hanging wall-paper, asking, would it hang much longer, when would it fall? Then smoothly brushing the walls, they passed on musingly as if asking the red and yellow roses on the wall-paper whether they would fade, and questioning (gently, for there was time at their

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<sup>2</sup>Virginia Woolf, To The Lighthouse, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963. Further references will be to this edition. Pagination will be included in the text.

disposal) the torn letters in the waste-paper basket, the flowers, the books, all of which were now open to them and asking, Were they allies? Were they enemies? How long would they endure?

(Pp. 190-91)

The decay here, early in the ten year period covered by the "Time Passes" section, is not very far advanced; the wall-paper is hanging, but the roses on it have not yet faded and the torn letters are still in the wastepaper basket.

Later, however, the decay has progressed further and the stray winds meet "nothing that wholly resisted them but only hangings that flapped, wood that creaked, the bare legs of tables, saucepans and china already furred, tarnished, cracked" (P. 194). Later still, near the end of this section,

the books and things were mouldy ... All those books needed to be laid out on the grass in the sun; there was plaster fallen in the hall; the rain-pipe had blocked over the study window and let the water in; the carpet was ruined quite ... they had left clothes in all the bedrooms.... They had the moth in them - Mrs. Ramsay's things.

(Pp. 203-04)

The falling plaster effectively evokes a feeling of the final stages of decay, a feeling that a long time has passed. Moreover, the intervals between the various fallings suggest the actual present passing of time, just as does the interval between the hours of two and three o'clock, for example. Each time the plaster falls marks the end of such an interval, just as the chimes of the clock mark the end of another hour. The only difference is that whereas the intervals on the clock are regular, the plaster falls at

irregular intervals.

The swinging to and fro of the shawl, with which Mrs. Ramsay had covered the animal skull on the wall of the nursery, suggests a pendulum and reinforces the sense of passing time by conveying the impression of a clock ticking - "... one fold of the shawl loosened and swung to and fro" (P. 196). Then, "another fold of the shawl loosened; there it hung and swayed.... the long streamer waved gently, swayed aimlessly..." (P. 200). "Idly, aimlessly, the swaying shawl swung to and fro.... The plaster fell in shovelfuls..." (P. 207).

Closely associated with the falling plaster and this swinging pendulum is the regular stroke of the lighthouse beam, suggesting also the ticking away of the seconds.

When darkness fell, the stroke of the Lighthouse, which had laid itself with such authority upon the carpet in the darkness, tracing its pattern, came now in the softer light of spring mixed with moonlight gliding gently as if it laid its caress and lingered stealthily and looked and came lovingly again.

(Pp. 199-200)

The coming and going of the lighthouse beam suggests, in addition to the passing of the seconds, the indifference of time to the activities of humans. Human beings may use the clock for social expediency, but when they are not around, time does not stop with the clock; it continues its work of ageing and decaying. No one lives in the old house any more; there is no need here for hours; there is no dinner



to attend, no appointment to keep. Nevertheless, time, as the swaying of the shawl and the flashing of the lighthouse beam suggest, continues to advance.

However, since time is irrelevant except as it relates to character, its passage here is important partly because it relates indirectly to those characters who will be affected by the changes which time causes in the old house during their absence. For the Ramsays, undoubtedly, the house remains much the same. It is fixed in their memories as they had last seen it. In reality, however,

The place was gone to rack and ruin.  
Only the Lighthouse beam entered the rooms  
for a moment, sent its sudden stare over  
bed and wall in the darkness of winter,  
looked with equanimity at the thistle  
and the swallow, the rat and the straw.  
Nothing now withstood them; nothing  
said no to them.

(Pp. 207-08)

Even the "measured" exploding of artillery shells and bombs during the First World War is used to suggest the passing of time in To The Lighthouse. In the distance can be heard

ominous sounds like the measured blows  
of hammers dulled on felt, which, with  
their repeated shocks still further  
loosened the shawl and cracked the tea-  
cups.... Then again silence fell; and  
then, night after night, and sometimes  
in plain mid-day when the roses were  
bright and light turned on the wall its  
shape clearly there seemed to drop into  
this silence, this indifference, this  
integrity, the thud of something falling.

(Pp. 200-01)

Immediately following this, we are reminded that the time whose passage has so gradually, so silently wrought change upon the old house can also cause radical and abrupt change:

A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous.

(P. 201)

In Mrs. Dalloway,<sup>3</sup> which was written immediately before To The Lighthouse, Virginia Woolf uses the characters themselves as overt representatives of clock time and, for the first time, the integral relationship between time and personality is emphasized. Clarissa Dalloway has, as she preferred to phrase it, "just broken into her fifty-second year" (P. 41). Peter Walsh, who is just six months older than Clarissa and two years older than Hugh Whitbread, is fifty-three (P. 83). These characters are all measurements of chronological time, all ticking away at the same rate, and each one a few minutes away from the complete hour. Here, undoubtedly, lies a part of the significance of Virginia Woolf's original title for this novel - The Hours.<sup>4</sup>

It seems certain that Mrs. Woolf meant that some of her characters should be personally identified with the hours. Some of the personalities of the novel even share

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<sup>3</sup>Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1964. Further references will be to this edition. Pagination will be included in the text.

<sup>4</sup>See A Writer's Diary. Entry for June 19, 1923, and subsequent entries.

certain characteristics of the clock. To Peter Walsh, for example, Clarissa, punctual as a clock, resembles St. Margaret's. The resemblance is accentuated by having the comparison inverted so that Peter likens the clock to Clarissa. The clock is personified and Mrs. Dalloway is, to a certain extent, mechanized - to a greater extent, certainly, as one notes the use of the word "bell":

Ah, said St. Margaret's, like a hostess who comes into her drawing room on the very stroke of the hour and finds her guests there already. I am not late. No, it is precisely half-past eleven,... It is half-past eleven, she says, and the sound of St. Margaret's glides into the recesses of the heart and buries itself in ring after ring of sound, like something alive which wants to confide itself, to disperse itself, to be, with a tremor of delight, at rest - like Clarissa herself, thought Peter Walsh, coming downstairs on the stroke of the hour in white. It is Clarissa herself, he thought, with a deep emotion, and an extraordinarily clear, yet puzzling, recollection of her, as if this bell had come into the room years ago ... why had he been so profoundly happy when the clock was striking? 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, ...

(Pp. 55-56)

Clarissa's actions are superficially like those of the clock, and vice versa; her life is but an hour and the final stroke of the clock marks the end of that hour. It is a reminder

to Peter that he is growing old. He must convince himself that her hour has not passed, for if it has, then his has also passed since he is older than Clarissa.

Mrs. Dalloway is, herself, constantly afraid of losing her life. She has not yet completely recovered from a recent illness; she is more than a little jealous when her husband goes by himself to lunch with Lady Bruton; above all is she aware of ageing, of being old.

No vulgar jealousy could separate her from Richard. But she feared time itself, and read on Lady Bruton's fact, 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. 34)

Like Peter, Clarissa must constantly reassure herself by searching for evidence that she is not yet grown old. Before she discovers that Peter has returned from India, she wonders what he will think when he does return:

That she had grown older? Would he say that, or would she see him thinking when he came back, that she had grown older? It was true. Since her illness she had turned almost white.

Laying her brooch on the table, she had a sudden spasm, as if, while she mused, the icy claws had had the chance to fix in her. She was not old yet. She had just broken into her fifty-second year. Months and months of it were still untouched. June, July, August! Each still remained almost whole, ...

(P. 41)

This fear of chronological time runs through the entire novel, emphasizing the impact of time upon the individual personality.

Sir William Bradshaw, like Clarissa, appears to have much in common with the clock. He drives a grey car, with grey furs and silver grey rugs (P. 104); his hair (P. 105), and even his office (P. 112), are grey. The implication is that his personality is metallic; he lacks warmth and is insensitive to human suffering.

Sir William, however, is a much more sinister representative of chronology than Clarissa. He represents the tyranny of clock time, and is probably meant to indicate what Clarissa might have become, but for her sympathetic union with Septimus Smith, whose death she recognizes as a release from the clutch of clock time. Bradshaw's goddess, the object of his worship, is "proportion, divine proportion" (P. 110):

To his patients he gave three-quarters of an hour; and if in this exacting science which has to do with what, after all, we know nothing about - the nervous system, the human brain - a doctor loses his sense of proportion, as a doctor he fails. Health we must have; and health is proportion ...

(P. 109)

Sir William, in believing that life can be ordered, can be measured according to a social norm, performs, in a sense, the same function as Big Ben, in attempting to regulate life's endless stream. Thus:

Naked, defenceless, the exhausted, the friendless received the impress of Sir William's will. He swooped; he devoured. He shut people up.... Rezia Warren Smith cried, walking down Harley Street, that she did not like that man.

Shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing, the clocks of Harley Street nibbled at the June day, counselled submission, upheld authority, and pointed out in chorus the supreme advantages of a sense of proportion,

(P. 113)

Dr. Holmes, the general practitioner, is also a proponent of clock time and the restrictions of this time. Dr. Holmes comes "quite regularly every day" (P. 102) to see Septimus, and Septimus hates the way in which Holmes attempts to regulate life. "If Dr. Holmes found himself even half a pound below eleven stone six, he asked his wife for another plate of porridge at breakfast" (P. 101). Like Sir William Bradshaw, Holmes is obsessed with maintaining his sense of proportion, mental and physical. If his mental proportion were threatened, Holmes says, he "took a day off with his wife and played golf" (P. 101). One needs an outside interest, a hobby, to maintain one's balance, Holmes urges, "for did he not owe his own excellent... to the fact that he could always switch off from his patients on to old furniture?" (P. 101-02). Sir William Bradshaw and Dr. Holmes in league with "the clocks of Harley Street" uphold the tyranny of external time over the inner stream of experience. Septimus, however, despises their attempt to regulate and control thought and health; he despises the restrictions they place on the freedom of his mind; he despises the "must" of Holmes and Bradshaw.

However. "Proportion has a sister, less smiling, more formidable ... Conversion is her name and she feasts on the wills of the weakly, loving to impress, to impose, adoring her own features stamped on the face of the populace" (P. 111). This goddess, too, "had her dwelling in Sir William's heart, though concealed, as she mostly is, under some plausible disguise..." (P. 111). Bradshaw shuts people up in his homes until they are converted to his point of view.

The chief disciple of Conversion, however, is Miss Doris Kilman who tries to dominate people and thus force them to see from her point of view. Looking at Mrs. Dalloway, Miss Kilman feels

an overmastering desire to overcome her; to unmask her. If she could have felled her it would have eased her.... If only she could make her weep; could ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to her knees crying, You are right!  
(P. 138)

Inherent in both Proportion and Conversion is that most odious sin of possessiveness, of desiring to possess another's soul. It is their attempt to possess him that makes Holmes and Bradshaw so repulsive to Septimus Smith. Similarly, it is Miss Kilman's possessiveness which finally alienates Elizabeth Dalloway. Elizabeth and Miss Kilman have been having tea in the Army and Navy Stores. Elizabeth looks for her gloves, indicating that she is ready to leave:

Ah, but she must not go! Miss Kilman could not let her go!... Her large hand opened and shut on the table.... If she could grasp her, if she could clasp

her, if she could make her hers absolutely and forever and then die; that was all she wanted.... The thick fingers curled inwards....

Like some dumb creature who has been brought up to a gate for an unknown purpose, and stands there longing to gallop away, Elizabeth Dalloway sat silent. Was Miss Kilman going to say anything more?

"Don't quite forget me," said Doris Kilman; he voice quivered. Right away to the end of the field the dumb creature galloped in terror.

The great hand opened and shut.  
(Pp. 145-147)

Elizabeth, however, makes her escape from the cramped, stuffy evilness of Miss Kilman's religion which she has been using only as a means of dominating others. Elizabeth "was delighted to be free. The fresh air was so delicious. It had been so stuffy in the Army and Navy Stores" (P. 150).

It was this dominating, controlling aspect of the clock which Mrs. Woolf most despised, this slicing and regulating of the psychic stream which led to the destruction of personality. Virginia Woolf

saw as the great evil in human conduct the sin of possessiveness, the grasping after that which is not in the true nature of things a man's own, but which is by inalienable right another's. True to herself and her own experience she felt that this one inviolable possession was the individual personality; this is what she was afraid for... This is why Doris Kilman is hateful and evil, - because, having denied her own personality, she would lay her ugly hands on another's, and swathe it and smother it beneath the drab shapelessness of her green mackintosh coat.... So Septimus Warren



Smith is not just a case of war-neurosis, mishandled by his doctors, but a cringing, fugitive human soul, escaping from Holmes and Bradshaw, who wish to possess what is not their own, to violate the one inviolable right. <sup>5</sup>

The clock, then, plays a major role in Mrs. Dalloway, just as it had done in Jacob's Room. In Mrs. Dalloway, however, Virginia Woolf has enlarged her means of expressing her sense of the passage of time by making the actions and appearance of some of her characters suggest certain characteristics of the clock. Of course the chronological age of a person is always a measurement of external time, and that person is, in a sense, a clock by which one can note the passage of time and estimate reasonably accurately how much has passed since that person's birth. However, a writer does not generally go to such lengths to make this analogy explicit, unless for a very specific purpose. Virginia Woolf's purpose here, as will be shown later in this thesis, is to repudiate the validity of chronological time as an accurate measurement of inner experience, and at the same time to establish a relationship between time and the personalities of some of the main characters. We can estimate the length of a person's life in years, but to estimate the length of his life in experiences is a much more difficult

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<sup>5</sup>R.L. Chambers, The Novels of Virginia Woolf, London and Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd Ltd., 1947. Pp. 3-4.

task. A person such as Sir William Bradshaw who regulates his life by the mechanically superimposed notation of the clock is disregarding the continuity and the heterogeneity of the psychic stream, and grossly oversimplifying the human personality.

So far we have discussed such images of chronological time as the clock, the flash of a lighthouse beam, a swaying shawl and the personalities of certain characters. However, the most frequently employed of Mrs. Woolf's images for time is the sea. Early in To The Lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay muses upon the sea. Sometimes, "the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach ... beat a measured and soothing tattoo" to her thoughts; at other times, the sea "like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life" (Pp. 27-28). Both in beating the measure of life and in thudding regularly and monotonously on the beach, the sea suggests the passing of time.

As a symbol of the passage of time, however, the sea functions most effectively in The Waves.<sup>6</sup> In the vignette preceding each of the nine chapters of this most poetic of Virginia Woolf's novels, the crashing of the waves on the shore signifies the passing of the minutes, while the position of the sun in the sky naturally signifies the time of day.

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<sup>6</sup>Virginia Woolf, The Waves, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1964. Further references will be to this edition. Pagination will be included in the text.

The rising and falling tides, the rising and setting sun, and the continuous advance of the waves on the shore accentuate the passage of time; but the nine positions of the sun also indicate the various stages in the lives of the six friends, for an entire lifetime from birth to death is encompassed between sunrise and sunset, and there is a life in every wave. These two images, therefore, function on two different levels at the same time. In the vignette preceding the first chapter:

The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky, except that the sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it. Gradually as the sky whitened a dark line lay on the horizon dividing the sea from the sky and the grey cloth became barred with thick strokes... As they neared the shore each bar rose, heaped itself, broke and swept a thin veil of white water across the sand. The wave paused, and then drew out again... Slowly ... (the sun rose) ... higher and then higher until a broad flame became visible; an arc of fire burnt on the rim of the horizon, and all round it the sea blazed gold.

(Pp. 5-6)

In the first chapter, while the sea is "indistinguishable from the sky," and the waves are small and the sun just rising, the six friends are young children at primary school together.

During the course of the second chapter, the friends separate for the first time, the three boys going to a boys' school, the girls to a school for young ladies.

The sun rose higher. Blue waves, green waves swept a quick fan over the beach, circling the spike of sea-holly and

leaving shallow pools of light here  
 and there on the sand... The sun laid  
 broader blades upon the house...  
 touched something green in the window  
 corner and made it a lump of emerald...  
 As the light increased a bud here and  
 there split asunder and shook out  
 flowers, green veined and quivering...  
 Meanwhile the concussion of the  
 waves breaking fell with muffled  
 thuds, like logs falling, on the shore.  
 (P. 24)

Everything in this passage indicates youth and the beginning  
 of life. The children are beginning to grow up; the buds  
 are becoming flowers. The sun is rising; the children's  
 wings are frail but they are beginning to learn to fly.  
 Time is bringing all this about; and the muffled thud of  
 the waves on the shore is a constant reminder of this.

By the time of the fifth chapter, the central figures  
 have reached the prime of life, have reached or passed the  
 half-way mark. The sun has reached the point of rising where  
 it begins to fall. Percival, the centre of attention of the  
 six, is dead, having fallen from a horse while riding in  
 India. The friends begin to realize that life is not al-  
 ways logical; things happen for no reason, senseless things  
 like Percival's death; life can be cruel. They begin to  
 understand the harsh reality of life:

The sun had risen to its full height.  
 It was no longer half seen and guessed  
 at... Now the sun burnt uncompromising,  
 undeniable... It gave to everything its  
 exact measure of colour...

The waves broke and spread their  
 waters swiftly over the shore. One after

another they massed themselves and  
fell; ... The waves fell; withdrew  
and fell again...

(Pp. 126-28)

Time continues to advance; the waves break on the shore. Older, more mature, the central characters begin to encounter reality. When they were young, adolescent, everything seemed "softly amorphous, as if the china of the plate flowed and the steel of the knife were liquid" (P. 24). They were seeing through the incorrupt eyes, and from the unhardened hearts of youth then. Now they must face life as it really is. Percival is dead; there is no reason, no explanation, no logical cause for his death. But "the sun burnt uncompromising, undeniable." Reality is harsh, but maturity is the ability to live with reality, to see in "everything its exact measure of colour." Some do not mature. Rhoda can not face reality; Louis distorts his reality, so that he evades rather than faces it. Bernard, probably, is the only one who really sees, and accepts, life as it is; he alone rides against the enemy.

In the final chapter of The Waves, Rhoda is dead and the others have grown old. Their lives have reached their closes. In some ways, they have failed in life, in some ways they have succeeded. But the end is optimistic; Bernard becomes one with Percival, and spurs his horse against the enemy, death. The ending is a return to the beginning, as the waves sink back into the ocean and the sun sets much as it had risen, in its eternal cycle. This cyclical

movement is strongly reinforced by the fact that the terminology of the vignette preceding the ninth chapter largely echoes that of the one preceding the first chapter.

Now the sun had sunk. Sky and sea were indistinguishable. The waves breaking spread their white fans far out over the shore, sent white shadows into the recesses of sonorous caves and then rolled back sighing over the shingle... Darkness rolled its waves along grassy rides and over the wrinkled skin of the surf, enveloping the solitary thorn tree and the empty snail shells at its foot. Mounting higher, darkness blew along the bare upland slopes, and met the fretted and abraded pinnacles of the mountain where the snow lodges forever on the hard rock even when the valleys are full of running streams and yellow vine leaves, and girls, sitting on verandas, look up at the snow, shading their faces with their fans. Them, too, darkness covered.

(Pp. 202-03)

The novel ends as "The waves broke on the shore" (P. 256). The novel has ended but time goes on. Time is supreme; time overcomes us all, the darkness covers us all. But some things are eternal. The snow lodges in the mountains "forever". The sun's cycle is eternal. The sun rises out of the sea and sets back into it again, and rises and sets again. So too, the sea goes on. It spreads its "white fans" over the shingles at the end of life much the same as it had at the beginning. These are eternal.

In The Waves, as has been noted, the sun functions on two levels at once: it represents the time of day and also the various stages in the lives of the six central

characters. By performing these two functions it also performs a third; that of creating an analogy between the chronological duration of the individual lifetime and the chronological duration of a day. Just as Clarissa Dalloway's lifetime is but an hour in the lifetime of the human race, so also in The Waves a lifetime is but a day, and less, for it is gone even as a wave breaks on the shore. However, Mrs. Woolf is suggesting that the individual lifetime is also part of a larger time, just as the individual wave is part of a greater ocean. The juxtaposition of the day and the lifetime in The Waves emphasizes the shortness of life, but at the same time the permanence of the process of life. Although he dies, the individual continues to exist, just as the wave which sinks back into the ocean continues to exist as part of the ocean for as long as the ocean endures. This view of time will be given more detailed treatment in the fifth chapter of this thesis.

In her treatment of chronological time, then, Virginia Woolf progresses, in the course of the novels discussed in this chapter, from the blunt statement of the clock to the subtle, refined suggestion of time passing, of life ticking away, of things growing old, of the shortness of life. This refinement is accomplished primarily through the skilful employment of imagery. In the novels from Jacob's Room to The Waves Mrs. Woolf was learning to handle images, such as the thudding of waves on the shore, the swinging of a shawl,

and the falling of plaster, which suggest the passage of time, rather than to continue using allegorical figures such as the clock, which merely make a statement of the hour.



CHAPTER THREE

PSYCHOLOGICAL DURATION: "TIME IN THE MIND"

It was late, late in the evening,  
The lovers they were gone;  
The clocks had ceased their chiming,  
And the deep river ran on.

(W.H. Auden, "As I Walked  
Out One Evening")

Virginia Woolf was not, however, concerned primarily with chronology. As has been suggested, her treatment of chronology was thorough largely so that its repudiation by the immeasurable flow of inner time would be the more effective and complete. Life, she contended, is not merely a chronological arrangement of events:

Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? <sup>1</sup>

Although she recognized the social necessity of the clock, Mrs. Woolf wished to emphasize that it had no intellectual validity whatsoever. It was, she felt, the task of the novelist to convey, not chronology, but life - that "unknown and uncircumscribed spirit," and to do so "with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible." For, as one critic has said:

human life pulsates simultaneously at many levels, each corresponding to a particular ebb or flow of the psychic stream. To believe that these complex aspects of the psyche can lend themselves to a mechanically

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<sup>1</sup>Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction," The Common Reader, 1st series, 1923.

superimposed notation - the clock -  
would be a complete misrepresentation  
of reality. <sup>2</sup>

The human being regulates his social life by the clock; it largely determines when he works, eats, and so on. The animal and vegetable worlds, however, are supremely indifferent to the regularity of clock time. Virginia Woolf was keenly aware of Nature's indifference to the mechanical slicing of time into bits, and converted this indifference to her own use in developing her theory of time.

Nature's disregard for the clock is first encountered in Jacob's Room:

The church clock struck ten. Did  
the strokes reach the furze bush,  
or did the thorn tree hear them?  
(P. 125)

The clock struck the quarter. The  
frail waves of sound broke among  
the stiff gorse and the hawthorn  
twigs as the church clock divided  
time into quarters.

Motionless and broad-backed the  
moors received the statement 'It is  
fifteen minutes past the hour', but  
made no answer, unless a bramble stirred.  
(P. 126)

Mrs. Woolf's design here is simple enough. By demonstrating the impotence of clock time as a means of regulating nature, she would have an advantageous position from which to argue the inadequacy of the clock as a means of proportioning the succession of ideas in the mind. In Jacob's Room,

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<sup>2</sup>Kumar, Bergson and The Stream of Consciousness Novel,  
p. 81.

however, Mrs. Woolf is beginning to experiment and the theory is here left at the level of suggestion.

The first thing one becomes aware of in reading Mrs. Dalloway, however, is the great discrepancy between the time of the surface narrative, which is one day, and the time involved in the basic drama within the minds of the characters, which covers approximately twenty years.<sup>3</sup> The clock divides the flow of inner experience unequally. As Shiv Kumar has pointed out,

the operations of Big Ben in slicing the day into regular bits are limited only to external phenomena. The inner time ... yields to no such arbitrary divisions. The interval, for instance, between eleven o'clock and eleven-thirty is rich in intensity, unfolding the entire panorama of Mrs. Dalloway's past life at Bourton within the brief space of half an hour, whereas the much longer interval between three-thirty and six o'clock is comparatively not as important.<sup>4</sup>

The persistent chiming of Big Ben represents chronological time; but in addition to announcing the hour, it also serves to emphasize this contrast between the rate of time in the mind and that on the clock.

The first novelist to express the discrepancy between clock time and mind time, or psychological duration, was

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<sup>3</sup>See Robert Humphrey, Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965. P. 100.

<sup>4</sup>Kumar, p. 75.

Laurence Sterne, one of the eighteenth century innovators of the new literary form. In Tristram Shandy,<sup>5</sup> Sterne expresses, through Tristram's father, his conviction

that in our computations of time, we are so used to minutes, hours, weeks, and months - and of clocks (I wish there was not a clock in the kingdom) to measure out their several portions to us, and to those who belong to us - that 'twill be well, if in time to come, the succession of our ideas be of any use or service to us at all.

Now, whether we observe it or no, continued my father, in every sound man's head, there is a regular succession of ideas of one sort or other, which follow each other in train.

(Pp. 195-96)

Sterne was aware, of course, that his unconventional treatment of time as the rate of the succession of ideas in the mind would be questioned by many writers and critics. Through Tristram he defends himself against those who might take him to task for toying with the "probability of time":

It is about an hour and a half's tolerable good reading since my uncle Toby rung the bell, when Obadiah was ordered to saddle a horse, and go for Dr. Slop, the man-midwife; - so that no one can say, with reason, that I have not allowed Obadiah time enough, poetically speaking, and considering the emergency too, both to go and come; - though, morally and truly speaking, the man perhaps has scarce had time to get on his boots.

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<sup>5</sup>Laurence Sterne, Tristram Shandy, New York: Modern Library, 1950. Further references will be to this edition. Pagination will be included in the text.

If the hypercritic will go upon this; and is resolved after all to take a pendulum, and measure the true distance betwixt the ringing of the bell, and the rap at the door; - and after finding it to be no more than two minutes, thirteen seconds, and three fifths, - should take upon him to insult me for such a breach in the unity, or rather probability of time; - I would remind him, that the idea of duration, and of its simple modes, is got merely from the train and succession of our ideas, - and this is the true scholastic pendulum, - and by which, as a scholar, I will be tried in this matter...

(Pp. 104-05)

And if the succession of ideas in the mind is time then a great deal more of time than an hour and a half has passed since Obadiah left. Tristram would remind the hypercritic that, during the time Obadiah has been going the eight miles to Dr. Slop's, and back,

I have brought my uncle Toby from Namur, quite across all Flanders, into England: - that I have had him ill upon my hands near four years; and have since travelled him and Corporal Trim in a chariot-and-four, a journey of near two hundred miles down into Yorkshire, - all which put together, must have prepared the reader's imagination for the entrance of Dr. Slop upon the stage, - as much, at least (I hope) as a dance, a song, or a concerto between the acts.

(P. 105)

Nevertheless, if the hypercritic were "intractable, alleging that two minutes and thirteen seconds are no more than two minutes and thirteen seconds" (P. 105), then Tristram would "put an end to the whole objection and controversy about

it all at once, - by acquainting him, that Obadiah had not got above three-score yards from the stable-yard before he met with Dr. Slop..." (Pp. 105-06). In actuality, then, the two minutes and thirteen seconds are sufficient for Obadiah to have gone this far and back; he has not, in fact, traveled the eight miles to Dr. Slop's.

The whole point of this disquisition by Tristram is to indicate that the clock time by which we regulate and co-ordinate our social activities has no validity at the level of the imagination. Four years of events can pass through the mind in minutes; and a journey of two hundred miles may occupy in the mind just a few seconds. The conversation between the time of Obadiah's departure and his return with Dr. Slop serves, Sterne maintains, to indicate the passage of a period of chronological time just as effectively as "a dance, a song, or a concerto between the acts" of a play serves to indicate the passage of perhaps years.

In her mock-serious preface to Orlando,<sup>6</sup> Virginia Woolf, in naming those authors who most influenced her, mentioned Sterne as one of "the first that come to mind". As A.A. Mendilow has pointed out, "the family likeness

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<sup>6</sup>Virginia Woolf, Orlando, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1963. Further references will be to this edition. Pagination will be included in the text.

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comes out very clearly" in Orlando: "Like Sterne, the author is at pains to emphasize the psychological as contrasted with the chronological values of duration, and to bring out the difference between the two by the adroit use of one as a yardstick to measure the other."<sup>7</sup> In the following passage from Orlando, the discrepancy between the two concepts of time is clearly illustrated by this method:

An hour, once it lodges in the queer element of the human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its clock length; on the other hand, an hour may be accurately represented on the timepiece of the mind by one second. This extraordinary discrepancy between time on the clock and time in the mind is less known than it should be and deserves fuller investigation.

(P. 69)

Orlando's sense of time's irregular passing is also demonstrated by his varying awareness of its passage:

when a man has reached the age of thirty, as Orlando now had, time when he is thinking becomes inordinately long; time when he is doing becomes inordinately short. Thus Orlando gave his orders and did the business of his vast estates in a flash; but directly he was alone on the mound under the oak tree, the seconds began to round and fill until it seemed as if they would never fall.

(P. 69)

He feels that these hours under the oak tree add years to his life; "he would go out after breakfast a man of thirty

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<sup>7</sup>A.A. Mendilow, Time and The Novel, London: Peter Nevill, 1952. P. 228.



and come home to dinner a man of fifty-five at least" (P. 70). Orlando recognizes the continuous nature of time and the unequal divisions of clock time. "Some weeks added a century to his age, others no more than three seconds at most" (P. 70).

This refusal to accept calendar time as a standard is the explanation of the unconventional treatment of the lapse of centuries in the biography. It also explains the rejection of temporal sequence and continuity. The biographer switches from one discriminated occasion into the heart of another without warning; seconds expand into years, as when she falls in love and marries in the course of three and a half seconds; years under the oak tree pass like seconds; separate durations telescope and proceed simultaneously.<sup>8</sup>

The expansion of time in the mind is merely the process of memory, for the most part. We think of past events, or we anticipate future events and these events expand our present thought. Time seems short generally when we think of things we would like to have lasted longer; we would like to relish them longer; and this contracted memory of the past in turn makes the present seem longer. The poet Shelley, borrowing from Sterne, expressed this more simply and more comprehensively in his notes on Queen Mab:

Time is our consciousness of the succession of ideas in our mind.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid. Pp. 228-29.

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Vivid sensation, of either pain or pleasure, makes the time seem long, as the common phrase is, because it renders us more acutely conscious of our ideas ... Perhaps the perishing ephemeron enjoys a longer life than the tortoise. <sup>9</sup>

Thus, Orlando, longing for her husband who is at sea, feels acutely conscious of the longevity of the present. As a result, the time she spent with her husband in the past is greatly contracted and seems to have been merely three seconds and a half. (Orlando, p. 186)

If time is then, as we have suggested, a highly personal, private flow which cannot be regulated by the highly artificial, public values of the clock, it becomes evident that

objective time, the very chimes of the clock, at the level of reverie, leave their mark not as standards of measurement but as impressions. They cut off unequal segments of psychological or inner time ... they divide the flow artificially; it immediately closes again over the cut, like water behind a ship's keel. <sup>10</sup>

The continuous flow of mind time, the succession of ideas in the mind, is divided into unequal segments by the hours. The true length of an hour varies according to its importance. As has been noted, the half hour from eleven to eleven-thirty in Mrs. Dalloway is much richer in experience,

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<sup>9</sup>Percy Bysshe Shelley, Notes on Queen Mab. Note 16. Mendilow quotes more fully in Time and the Novel, p. 120.

<sup>10</sup>Mendilow, Time and the Novel, p. 214.

hence comprises a longer succession of ideas, than the two and a half hours from three-thirty to six o'clock. The number of years a person lives therefore does not accurately represent the length of that person's life. This is piquantly demonstrated by the fact that one day for Mrs. Dalloway contains twenty years of chronological time; and in the course of three hundred and fifty years Orlando ages only twenty years.

In Orlando, particularly, Virginia Woolf inserts numerous comments to emphasize the fluidity and the variety of psychological duration. Orlando's "whole past, which seemed to him of extreme length and variety" is contained within "the falling second" which is itself swelled "a dozen times its natural size" (P. 70). Time is elastic; it can be stretched backward and forward, expanded and compressed. Therefore life can seem to Orlando "of prodigious length. Yet even so, it went like a flash" (P. 70). "Altogether", Orlando concludes, "the task of estimating the length of human life ... is beyond our capacity, for directly we say that it is ages long, we are reminded that it is briefer than the fall of a rose leaf to the ground" (P. 70). And yet, on another occasion we are shown that "if a leaf fell, it fell .. so slowly that one could watch it for half an hour fluttering and falling till it came to rest at last, on Orlando's foot" (P. 181).

This expanding and compressing of time prepares us

for the statement that there is not merely one flow of time within the durational stream of the individual's mind, but many, many different times progressing simultaneously. And

if there are (at a venture) seventy-six different times all ticking in the mind at once, how many different people are there not - Heaven help us - all having lodgement at one time or another in the human spirit? Some say two thousand and fifty-two.  
(P. 217)

This great variety of times, or "selves", within the psychological stream allows for memories of many different past times, anticipations of the future, grapplings with present situations, various personal moods, and so on; all of which proceed simultaneously within the mind. Near the end of the novel, Orlando recounts, as she drives home, many of the "selves" which compose the totality of what she now is. When the novel began, during the Elizabethan period, Orlando was a boy of sixteen. Now, in 1928 she is a woman of thirty-six. What this novel-biography does is to show Orlando living through all the stages of her family's ancestors. The history of her family is summed up in what Orlando now is, so that, as the fictitious biographer notes,

it is the most usual thing in the world for a person to call, directly they are alone, Orlando? (if that is one's name) meaning by that, Come, come! I'm sick to death of this particular self. I want another. Hence the astonishing changes we see in our friends.... still the Orlando she needs may not

come; these selves of which we are built up, one on top of another, as plates are piled on a waiter's hand, have attachments elsewhere, sympathies...  
(Pp. 217-18)

Each of these selves represents a different time within the general stream; and just as all of Orlando's selves are really one self, so all these different times are one time - all coalescing to form the psychic stream of mind time. And thus a person's true age must be measured by the rate of succession of ideas in the mind which, in turn, is dependent upon the individual's experiences. There are those, of course, who

somehow contrive to synchronize the sixty or seventy different times which beat simultaneously in every normal human system so that when eleven strikes, all the rest chime in unison... Of them we can justly say that they live precisely the sixty-eight or seventy-two years allotted them on the tombstone.... others are hundreds of years old though they call themselves thirty-six. The true length of a person's life, whatever the Dictionary of National Biography may say, is always a matter of dispute. For it is a difficult business - this timekeeping...

(Pp. 215-16)

Therefore, although some individuals succeed in regulating their lives, in living by clock time, many more "are hundreds of years old though they call themselves thirty-six."

This elasticity of mind time, and the "extraordinary discrepancy" between psychological duration and chronology, "between time on the clock and time in the mind" (Orlando,

P. 69), are also treated in Between the Acts,<sup>11</sup> Virginia Woolf's last novel. As in Mrs. Dalloway, the surface narrative of this novel covers one day, beginning on one night in June, 1939, and ending on the following night after the performance of a village pageant at Pointz Hall. The pageant, on the other hand, depicts the history of England, and the underlying drama of the novel stretches back to the dawn of civilization.

Mrs. Swithin, the chief personality of the novel, is, we are told, "given to increasing the bounds of the moment by flights into past or future." An Outline of History, which is her favourite reading, aids in extending the boundaries of the present moment while serving, at the same time, as a symbol of historical time. Reading the Outline, Mrs. Swithin has been

thinking of rhododendron forests in Piccadilly; ... It took her five seconds in actual time, in mind time ever so much longer, to separate Grace herself, with blue china on a tray, from the leather-covered grunting monster who was about ... to demolish a whole tree in ... the primeval forest.

(Pp. 13-14)

To The Lighthouse also illustrates the discrepancy between chronology and inner duration. "The Window", the opening section of this novel, is similar to the period

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<sup>11</sup>Virginia Woolf, Between The Acts, London: The Hogarth Press, 1941. Further references will be to this edition. Pagination will be included in the text.

between eleven and eleven-thirty in Mrs. Dalloway. In this section of To The Lighthouse,

Virginia Woolf describes an intense human experience in a mere cross section of a September evening from six o'clock to supper time. Therefore, whereas the<sup>12</sup> clock covers only a couple of hours,

we are "enabled to participate in the inner experience of various characters."<sup>12</sup>

Kumar also feels that Lily Briscoe's "definitive stroke" near the centre of her canvas "symbolizes a sudden intuitive realization of the qualitative blending into each other of the mechanically separated segments of time."<sup>13</sup> This is Lily's vision, that past, present and future are not separate segments of a linear progress, but rather arbitrary divisions developed for social expediency. In actuality these divisions do not, and cannot, cause any break in the durational flow of mind time. Lily's painting "seems to be designed on a durational pattern, since it derives its aesthetic validity from a qualitative interpenetration of the past, present, and future."<sup>14</sup>

The best that the clock can hope to do, in the face of the external flow of mind time, is to awaken for a moment "the subconscious mind to the awareness of externals

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<sup>12</sup>Kumar, Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel, p. 77.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid. P. 78.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

and hence of the conventional measurements of time."<sup>15</sup> This is precisely what the clock does for Isa in Between the Acts. Musing that she is wandering in a field where there is no change, "nor greetings nor partings", where the rose is "unblowing, ungrowing" (P. 180), she looks up and sees the stable clock about to strike, its hands at two minutes to the hour. The sight of the clock shatters her vision of a timeless, unchanging world, and awakens her to an awareness of the world of material possessions.

Similarly, in Mrs. Dalloway, Clarissa is in her room, having heard of Septimus Smith's suicide:

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 ... she felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. But she must go back ... And she came in from the little room.

(Pp. 205-06)

The striking of the clock recalls Clarissa from her reverie beyond external time, back to the time of the clock, the time in which her party guests move.

It is in The Waves, however, that this contraction of the mind from the vast eternal to the narrow world of the present moment is best expressed. At Hampton Court, the

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<sup>15</sup>Mendilow, Time and the Novel, p. 214.

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minds of the six friends wander away from the present moment into "the abysses of time" where their "separate drops are dissolved" (P. 193) and where they achieve communion for a time. They enter "the still mood, the disembodied mood ... when the walls of the mind become transparent" (P. 196), time is abolished and union is achieved.

Later, when Bernard is with Neville, the same mood of eternal timelessness prevails:

Yes, but suddenly one hears a clock tick. We who had been immersed in this world became aware of another. It is painful. It was Neville who changed our time. He, who had been thinking with the unlimited time of the mind, which stretches in a flash from Shakespeare to ourselves, poked the fire and began to live by that other clock which marks the approach of a particular person. The wide and dignified sweep of his mind contracted. He became on the alert.... From the myriads of mankind and all time past he had chosen one person, one moment in particular.

(P. 235)

Neville is recalled from "the unlimited time of the mind" to the material world by the clock which reminds him that he is expecting a visitor. "The link with 'all time past' is broken, the mind shrinks, is impoverished of its infinite richness and assumes the threadbare vesture of the present moment, a mathematical instant in the ceaseless flow of time."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Kumar, p. 85.

However, the clock which contracts our inner expansion and arrests the backward and forward motion of time also emphasizes an awareness of the true nature of time. The very fact of the clock's existence accentuates the contrast between clock time and mind time. Isa Oliver, for example, in Between The Acts, would not have recognized so acutely this contrast but for the presence of the stable clock (P. 181).

Clarissa Dalloway, contemplating the death of Septimus Smith, realizes, as the clock strikes the hour, that his suicide was not only a revolt against humanity, against Holmes and Bradshaw, but also a rejection of the clock time which they represent. Therefore,

she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him, with all this going on ... She felt somehow very like him - the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living. The clock was striking.

(P. 206)

By his suicide, Septimus allies himself with psychological duration, with mind time, rather than with the social regulation which the clock represents. Clarissa, therefore, does not pity him because she realizes that he has rejected the tyranny of clock time and united himself with the psychic flow of mind time. Her recognition of the significance of Septimus's death causes her to realize the contrast between clock time and mind time, and the value of the latter. For, as James Hafley has pointed out,

Mrs. Dalloway represents the conflict, not between person and person, but between duration and false time. On twenty occasions during the course of the novel, clocks strike - 'shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing, the clocks ... nibbled at the June day, counselled submission, upheld authority, and pointed out in chorus the advantages of a sense of proportion' - and against the materiality of this spatialized day in London is placed the spirituality, the true duration, of Mrs. Dalloway's consciousness, the continuity of which denies that 'dividing and subdividing.' 17

In The Waves, Bernard's recognition of the validity of "the unlimited time of the mind, which stretches in a flash from Shakespeare to ourselves" (P. 235) is strongly reinforced by the very fact that Neville relinquishes his involvement in mind time and begins to live by clock time. Bernard understands that Neville has sacrificed something very precious when he begins to live by the time of the clock. He realizes that

it is a mistake, this extreme precision, this orderly and military progress; a convenience, a lie. There is always below it ... a rushing stream of broken dreams, nursery rhymes, street cries, half-finished sentences and sights - elm trees, willow trees, gardeners sweeping, women writing - that rise and sink even as we hand a lady down to dinner.... There is nothing one can fish up in a spoon; nothing one can call an event. Yet it is alive too and deep, this stream.

(P. 219)

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<sup>17</sup>James Hafley, The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as Novelist, New York: Russell and Russell, 1963. P. 62.

There is "nothing one can call an event" in the endless flow of mind time. Events run together in this stream. There is, therefore, no need for a clock in the realm of mind time; there are no events to record, nothing to regulate. And yet, "it is alive too and deep, this stream"; the stream of psychological duration is alive, moving, exciting and profound. It stretches far, far into the past, and into the future too. These mechanical segments - past, present and future - do not, however, exist in mind time; there is only the general stream, and all times merge in this fluidity so that the time of Shakespeare is also the time of Neville, and Shakespeare lives within Neville's "unlimited time of the mind" (P. 235).

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CHAPTER FOUR

PAST AS PRESENT: "MY TUNNELLING PROCESS"

Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future,  
And time future contained in time past....  
What might have been and what has been  
Point to one end, which is always present.  
Footfalls echo in the memory  
Down the passage which we did not take  
Towards the door we never opened  
Into the rose-gardern.

(T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton")

"Although as for things past, whenever true stories are related, out of the memory are drawn not the things themselves which are past, but such words as... they, in their passing through our senses, have, as their footsteps, left imprinted in our minds."

(St. Augustine, Confessions, XI, xviii)

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A. A. Mendilow pointed out in Time and The Novel that the modern novelists have endeavoured to "enter the character's mind and see life filtered through his perception. Trying to follow faithfully his mental processes, they note how flashes of the past jerk in and out of his present consciousness, telescoping, coalescing, disintegrating, breaking out of sequence, starting off chains of unpredictable and sometimes untraceable associations."<sup>1</sup> In the late years of his life Tolstoi also commented on the recurrence of certain past "scenes" in the present:

... there are times in my long life which are clearly preserved in my memory, and other times which have completely disappeared, they no longer exist. The moments which remain are most frequently the moments when the spirit in me woke... Spiritual life is a recollection. A recollection is not the past, it is always the present ... there can be no progress for the spirit, for it is not in time. What the life in time is for, we do not know; it is only a transitory phenomenon.<sup>2</sup>

These remarks summarize rather aptly some of the major aspects of Virginia Woolf's treatment of the past as an

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<sup>1</sup>Mendilow. P. 221

<sup>2</sup>Gold'enveizer, Talks With Tolstoi. Quoted in Hafley, The Glass Roof, p. 77. Hafley points out that Virginia Woolf herself translated these remarks of Tolstoi's.

element of the present. From Jacob's Room onward, Mrs. Woolf was very much concerned with entering the minds of her characters and seeing life filtered through their perceptions. She could not, of course, have been unaware of the tremendous effect which memory has upon the present consciousness, bringing to bear upon the present moment a myriad elements of past experiences. For a long time she grappled with this problem of recollection, that strange faculty of the human memory whereby certain past situations are "clearly preserved" whereas others "have completely disappeared, they no longer exist."

The problem had to be dealt with sensibly for the novelist could not merely introduce "flashbacks" whenever it was helpful to know something of a character's background; not, at any rate, without seriously disrupting the sequence of the psychic stream. Those elements of the past which were essential to the development of the character must arise logically out of the character's present consciousness; for Tolstoi was obviously correct in assuming that the only elements of the past which exist at all are those which remain in the memory. And these, ironically, no longer belong to the past. They are not events which occurred in the past and belong to the past; they belong to the present of the memory - "A recollection is not the past, it is always the present." The recollection of an event is not that actual past event; it is a new event with an existence of its own in the flow of

mind time. The recalled event, in fact, is not even the same as the past event, for, as Virginia Woolf noted, "the accent falls differently from of old";<sup>3</sup> the recalled event is changed and coloured by the biases of the personality which recalls it. The remembered past is not, therefore, the actual past, but the present. The past does not exist; the remembered past exists as part of the present moment.

This much was straightforward. The problem lay in working these "flashes of the past" which "jerk in and out of the present consciousness" into a novel without making it jerky, without interrupting the fluidity of psychological duration. It was not without a great deal of searching and struggling that Virginia Woolf was finally able to achieve this goal. It was not until late 1923 that a solution to the problem began to take shape. "It took me a year's groping", she wrote in October, 1923, while working on Mrs. Dalloway (then titled The Hours),

to discover what I call my tunnelling process, by which I tell the past by instalments, as I have need of it. This is my prime discovery so far;... But lor' love me! I've not re-read my great discovery, and it may be nothing important whatsoever.<sup>4</sup>

The bulk of Mrs. Woolf's fiction after Mrs. Dalloway illustrates

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<sup>3</sup>Virginia Woolf, The Common Reader, p. 189.

<sup>4</sup>A Writer's Diary, October 15, 1923.



the importance, and the gradual refinement, of this "prime discovery so far", this ability to revitalize the past into the present "as I have need of it."

In Mrs. Dalloway the recollected past becomes part of the present on the opening page. Musing upon the freshness of the summer morning, "fresh as if issued to children on a beach", Clarissa Dalloway returns in thought to the time of her own childhood when, on a similar morning,

she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn...

(Mrs. Dalloway. P. 5)

Then she thinks of Peter Walsh, her first love, whom she had forsaken to marry Richard Dalloway, a member of Parliament. Peter "would be back from India one of these days, June or July, she forgot which, for his letters were awfully dull..." (P.5).

Nevertheless, despite her preoccupation with the past Clarissa asserts that:

In people's eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June.

(P. 6)

And yet, almost immediately her thoughts desert London and "this moment of June" and return to the recollection of her youth and Peter Walsh.

For they might be parted for hundreds of years, she and Peter; she never wrote a letter and his were dry as sticks; but suddenly it would come over her, if he were with me now what would he say? - some days, some sights bringing him back to her calmly, without the old bitterness; which perhaps was the reward of having cared for people; they came back in the middle of St. James's Park on a fine morning - indeed they did.

(P. 9)

Peter Walsh and their courtship at Bourton have become part of this fine morning in St. James's Park. This is accomplished very smoothly and effectively by having a specific morning from Clarissa's youth suggested to her consciousness by the freshness of the present morning. The recollection of this morning then leads naturally into thoughts of her youth and of Peter Walsh, so that an essential part of Clarissa's background is presented without the necessity of disrupting the flow of her present thoughts.

"Never should she forget all that," she continues, referring to the quarrel which had ruptured her affair with Peter. "Cold, heartless, a prude, he called her. Never could she understand how he cared" (P. 10). It still angers her to recall how Peter had called her the perfect hostess: "the perfect hostess he called her (she had cried over it

in her bedroom), she had the makings of the perfect hostess, he said" (P. 10).

And when Peter does return from India, that very morning, his unexpected visit to Clarissa causes a sudden flood of past memories into the present moment:

"Do you remember", she said, "how the blinds used to flap at Bourton?"

"They did", he said; and he remembered breakfasting alone very awkwardly, with her father...

"I often wish I'd got on better with your father", he said.

"But he never liked anyone who - our friends", said Clarissa; and could have bitten her tongue for thus reminding Peter that he had wanted to marry her.

Of course I did, thought Peter; it almost broke my heart too, he thought; and was overcome with his own grief, which rose like a moon looked at from a terrace, ghastly beautiful with light from the sunken day. I was more unhappy than I've ever been since, he thought. And as if in truth he were sitting there on the terrace he edged a little towards Clarissa; put his hand out; raised it; let it fall. There above them it hung, that moon. She too seemed to be sitting with him on the terrace, in the moonlight.

(Pp. 47-48)

Peter realizes the emotional strain of this dwelling upon the past and makes an effort to break the spell and return to the present.

For why go back like this to the past? he thought. Why make him think of it again? Why make him suffer, when she had tortured him so infernally? Why?

(P. 48)

However, for Peter Walsh and Clarissa Dalloway there is no present except the remembered past. Everything between them, everything they share belongs to that past.

They can not communicate in the thin atmosphere of the present, and Clarissa immediately plunges back into the past, taking Peter with her; but this time they go their different ways, each contemplating a portion of his life with which the other is not directly concerned.

"Do you remember the lake?" she said, in an abrupt voice, under the pressure of an emotion which caught her heart, made the muscles of her throat stiff, and contracted her lips in a spasm as she said "lake". 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 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? sitting there sewing this morning with Peter.

(P. 48)

Peter, viewing the daily routine of Clarissa's life in London, finds it terribly difficult to comprehend her continuing routine existence without his physical presence:

And this had been going on all the time! he thought: week after week; Clarissa's life; while I - he thought; and at once everything seemed to radiate from him; journeys; rides; quarrels; adventure; bridge parties; love affairs; work; work, work! and he took out his knife quite openly, his old horn-handled knife which Clarissa could swear he had had these thirty years - and clenched his fist upon it.

(P. 49)

Peter's amazement upon recognizing the existence of a time duration progressing outside his mind and without his

having been influenced by it, of change outside his consciousness and beyond his influence, is echoed in Mrs. Ramsay's reaction, in To The Lighthouse, to hearing of some of her old friends, the Mannings, who are living at Marlow. During dinner Mr. Bankes, a guest of the Ramsays, has been telling Mrs. Ramsay about the Mannings, that they are building a new billiard room:

And it was still going on, Mrs. Ramsay mused, gliding like a ghost among the chairs and tables of that drawing-room on the banks of the Thames where she had been so very, very cold twenty years ago; but now she went among them like a ghost; and it fascinated her, as if, while she had changed, that particular day, now become very still and beautiful; had remained there, all these years.... but she did not know this Carrie who built a new billiard room. But how strange, she repeated, to Mr. Bankes's amusement, that they should be going on there still. For it was extraordinary to think that they had been capable of going on living all these years when she had not thought of them more than once all that time.

(Pp. 132-33)

This rush of time past, and of static character, into the present of Mrs. Ramsay's consciousness is, in turn, repeated in more dramatic form in the third section of the novel when the memory of the now dead Mrs. Ramsay floods in upon Lily Briscoe's consciousness causing for her a recreation of Mrs. Ramsay and of the past. Standing on the lawn attempting to finish the painting she had begun there ten years ago, before Mrs. Ramsay's death, Lily allows

her thoughts to drift back to that time. "And as she dipped into the blue paint, she dipped too into the past there" (P. 256). Painting on the lawn, "she seemed to be sitting beside Mrs. Ramsay on the beach" (P. 255), and she continues on "tunnelling her way into her picture, into the past" (P. 258). Now as she turns over in her mind the events which have transpired since Mrs. Ramsay's death, Lily attempts to assert her independence of the past and of Mrs. Ramsay:

But the dead, thought Lily, encountering some obstacle in her design which made her pause and ponder, stepping back a foot or so, oh, the dead! she murmured, one pitied them, one brushed them aside, one had even a little contempt for them. They are at our mercy. Mrs. Ramsay had faded and gone, she thought. We can over-ride her wishes, improve away her limited, old-fashioned ideas. She recedes further and further from us.  
(P. 260)

The irony of Lily's thoughts becomes explicit shortly afterward, however, for as she nears her moment of illumination, as the elements of her painting begin to fall into place - "The problem might be solved after all" - she begins to recognize a tremendous need for Mrs. Ramsay:

"Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!" she cried, feeling the old horror come back - to want and want and not to have. Could she inflict that still? And then, quietly, as if she refrained, that too became part of ordinary experience, was on a level with the chair, with the table. Mrs. Ramsay - it was part of her perfect goodness - sat there quite simply, in the chair, flicked her needles to and fro, knitted her reddish-brown stocking, cast her shadow on the step. There she sat.

(P. 300)

Lily expresses a need for Mrs. Ramsay and immediately the memory of Mrs. Ramsay as part of her painting ten years ago rushes back upon her with such force that she actually experiences her presence. The spiritual presence is so strong as almost to constitute a physical resurrection. And it is because of her mental re-creation of Mrs. Ramsay that the nature of Lily's vision becomes clear to her. The physically dead, she realizes, are not, as she had earlier asserted, at our mercy: one can not brush them aside.

Mrs. Ramsay has not faded and gone; it is not true that "she recedes further and further from us." On the contrary, she has become dramatically present. Mrs. Ramsay is very much alive, and remains a powerful influence upon Lily Briscoe. The painting leads Lily back into and through the past because it represents the permanency of art; it invokes for Lily the past in the present and Mrs. Ramsay.

Mrs. Ramsay, however, has not been physically alive beyond Lily's consciousness during these ten years, as Mrs. Dalloway had been for Peter Walsh and the Mannings for Mrs. Ramsay. In fact, the opposite is true. Mrs. Ramsay is physically dead; she will never speak another word, think another thought. And yet she survives within Lily's consciousness, and with Mr. Ramsay's.

It is this sharing of the memory of Mrs. Ramsay that finally unites Lily and Mr. Ramsay. And it is the need to unite her portion of the memory with his that creates,

for the first time in the novel, within Lily, a need, and a sympathy, for Mr. Ramsay:

And as if she had something she must share, yet could hardly leave her easel, so full her mind was of what she was thinking, of what she was seeing, Lily went past Mr. Carmichael holding her brush to the edge of the lawn. Where was that beat now? And Mr. Ramsay? She wanted him.

(P. 300)

Mr. Ramsay of course, along with James and Cam, has been sailing to the lighthouse, thus completing the journey initiated ten years earlier, the plans for which comprised the opening scene of the novel. For Mr. Ramsay this trip to the lighthouse commemorates, and fulfills, the plans, in which Mrs. Ramsay had shared, for the earlier expedition. The completion of the trip to the lighthouse, therefore, represents the completion of Mr. Ramsay's journey into the past in search of Mrs. Ramsay, who has been closely associated with the lighthouse throughout the novel. In finally reaching the lighthouse Mr. Ramsay succeeds in re-creating, and becoming united with, the spirit of Mrs. Ramsay. Therefore, Lily's achievement in finishing her painting and Mr. Ramsay's in completing the journey to the lighthouse are both symbolic of their union with the spirit of Mrs. Ramsay, and both appropriately occur simultaneously at the climax of the novel:

"He must have reached it", said Lily Briscoe aloud, feeling suddenly completely tired out. For the lighthouse had become almost invisible, had



melted into a blue haze.... Ah, but she was relieved. Whatever she had wanted to give him, when he left her that morning, she had given him at last.

"He has landed", she said aloud. "It is finished." ...

Quickly, as if she were recalled by something over there, she turned to her canvas. There it was - her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. It would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? she asked herself, taking up her brush again. She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.

(Pp. 308-310)

Lily's painting represents her vision and just as her painting is a re-creation of the past, her vision is that the reanimated past of the memory is, indeed, not the past but rather an integral part of the present - "Symbolically, the past returns and shapes the present."<sup>5</sup>

Orlando, which followed To The Lighthouse, is, despite its ostensibly humorous intent, a serious attempt to evaluate the contents of a specific moment in the life of an individual in terms of that individual's past, both as exemplified in her personal past and in the long past of her

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<sup>5</sup>David Daiches, Virginia Woolf, p. 95.

ancestors. The theory presented in this novel is that Orlando's present is influenced not only by the experiences encountered by her ancestors. The history of Orlando's ancestors is presented as the life of one individual - Orlando. The novel-biography opens in the year 1586 when Orlando is a romantic youth of sixteen who spends much of his time daydreaming and writing poetry, and ends in 1928 when Orlando, having undergone many changes, including a sexual transformation, is now a rather less idealistic, but still poetically inclined, woman of thirty-six. A.A. Mendilow explained the tremendous discrepancy between Orlando's ageing and the actual passing of historical time in this way:

We have what biologists would call a description of ontogenetic and phylogenetic development, as a foetus progresses in the course of nine months through millions of years of evolution, passing through and beyond the stages reached at different times by successive series of ancestors. The phylogenetic time is incorporated into the ontogenetic time as one's ancestors are part of ourselves.<sup>6</sup>

Mrs. Woolf carries Orlando from the end of the sixteenth century to midnight, Thursday, the eleventh of October, 1928. On October 11, 1928, Orlando experiences the vision which focuses all her past into a single point, and demonstrates how Orlando creates, and is created by history; how she changes,

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<sup>6</sup>Mendilow. P. 231.

develops and carries forward the past into the present. In other words, a great deal of what composes the individual's present had its inception hundreds of years before the individual was born.

However, for the most part Orlando's life is presented spatially; that is, in perfect chronological order from period to period of English history. This would seem to be out of harmony with Virginia Woolf's conception of mind time and with the premise of her "tunnelling process" that recounts "the past by instalments, as I have need of it". The first five chapters of Orlando are related by the conventional method of chronological sequence. But, as James Hafley noted, this perfect chronological order

is completely nullified by the last fifteen pages, in which the action proper of the novel may be said to begin and in which the past is recapitulated temporally rather than spatially, so that the past becomes present, the present past, and, as Virginia Woolf had noted in her diary, "the actual event practically does not exist".<sup>7</sup>

Virginia Woolf's "tunnelling process" is not used, strictly speaking, until the last chapter. In this chapter it replaces, or nullifies, the chronological sequence of the preceding five chapters of the novel, so that the true value of the recollected past can be appreciated from the view-

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<sup>7</sup>Hafley, The Glass Roof, p. 96.

point of its juxtaposition with actual historical, or clock, time.

Chronological time is spatial and is so perceived by the intellect. It is thus that one event follows another and past, present and future exist - "The actual state, the present event, is made actual and present only by being fixed intellectually in space."<sup>8</sup> For Virginia Woolf, however, as has already been adequately demonstrated, time is not merely spatial. The true nature of time is demonstrated by intuition, which unifies within the present consciousness the discordant elements of the past introduced through the faculty of memory. The first five chapters of Orlando are what the intellect perceives; in the last chapter the intuitive perception of Orlando unifies all that has been presented chronologically. Orlando's intuition perceives the pure-time duration of events, perceives that there is no past, present or future but only psychological duration itself, a single, undivided stream.

As a young boy Louis, in The Waves, becomes conscious of the question of time as he leaves school on a train. Louis realizes, as he sits in the third-class railway carriage, that he is a direct descendant in time of the Egyptians in the era of the Pharaohs, and that if he shuts his eyes for even a moment he cheats human history of a moment of sight. "Its eye, that would see through me, shuts - if I sleep now, through slovenliness or cowardice, burying myself in the

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

past, in the dark" (The Waves, P. 56), for the present moment is merely an "inch in the long-long history that began in Egypt, in the time of the Pharaohs, when women carried red pitchers to the Nile" (p. 56). Louis feels that he has already "lived many thousand years" (P. 56). He continually identifies with the heroic dead and thus feels set apart from his five friends. As he enters a restaurant where he is to meet the others, he notes to himself: "I am not single and entire as you are. I have lived a thousand years already" (P. 109). Louis achieves a recognition of his personal identity through union with the past.

Later in his office, his thoughts are again occupied with the great problem of time:

Yet a vast inheritance of experience is packed in me. I have lived thousands of years.... I, now a duke, now Plato, companion of Socrates; the tramp of dark men and yellow men migrating east, west, north and south; ... all the furlled and close-packed leaves of my many-folded life are now summed in my name.

(Pp. 142-43)

Like Orlando, Louis understands the dependence of the present individual being upon his past selves; he realizes that the individual is basically a creature of the present but that he has evolved through the many generations of his ancestors, of his race, and of mankind. Thus, an important element of Louis is composed of those portions of the past which affect him. "In a person like Virginia Woolf the

past lives as surely as if she had lived it herself."<sup>9</sup> For Mrs. Woolf, the present moment is merely "part of the merging monster" or time "to whom we are attached" (The Waves. P. 55).

However, it is in her last novel, Between The Acts, that Virginia Woolf's theory of past as present is most completely developed. In this novel Mrs. Woolf attempts to explain the England of today and the civilization of today in terms of the long history of England and the longer history of mankind. The past is an important element of the novel from the opening scene. Old Mr. Oliver is in his drawing room, late in the evening, with Mr. Haines the gentleman farmer and Mrs. Haines, whose family "had lived near Liskeard for many centuries. There were the graves in the churchyard to prove it" (P. 7). Mr. Oliver has been discussing with his guests the county council's plan to bring water to the village:

... the site they had chosen for the cesspool was, if he had heard aright, on the Roman road. From an aeroplane, he said, you could still see, plainly marked, the scars made by the Britons; by the Romans; by the Elizabethan manor house; and by the plough, when they ploughed the hill to grow wheat in the Napoleonic wars.

(P. 8)

This passage, suggesting the long past, sets the scene

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<sup>9</sup>Margaret Church, Time and Reality, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963. P. 81.

for the annual village pageant, the focal point of the novel, around which most of the action centres, and which, itself, emphasizes the past history of England and the passage of time. The pageant, presented on the following day by the eccentric and mysterious Miss La Trobe, focuses the whole of the English past into the present day, this June day of 1939. It takes the form of scenes depicting the development of English civilization from the beginning to the present. The prologue is spoken by a little girl - "England am I" (P. 94); an older girl speaks for the England of Chaucer's day; then comes a parody of an Elizabethan play and "the Elizabethan age passed from the scene" (P. 113) to be followed by the "age of reason" represented by an entertaining burlesque of Restoration drama; following this comes the Victorian Age; and, finally, "Ourselves", represented by mirrors held up on the stage so that the audience can see themselves reflected while a voice from a megaphone informs them that they are "orts, scraps and fragments" (P. 219).

The Reverend Streatfield makes a brave attempt to analyze the pageant. "To me at least", he explains,

it was indicated that we are members  
 one of another. Each is part of the  
 whole.... We act different parts; but  
 are the same.... Dare we, I asked my-  
 self, limit life to ourselves?... Scraps,  
 orts and fragments! Surely we should  
 unite?

(P. 225)

Mr. Streatfield's interpretation is, of course, essentially

correct. Miss La Trobe is attempting to convey the idea that as individuals we are incomplete, that to achieve completeness we must recognize that we are "part of the whole" of humanity.

However, Mr. Streatfield's attempt to explain the pageant falls far short of Miss La Trobe's intention. "Surely we should unite?" Surely, but with what, or whom? Certainly, since "we are members one of another", we should attempt to create a union among ourselves, so that we complete "the whole". But surely the whole cannot be completed by a union of present beings, neither of whom is a complete individual in himself. For not only are we, as individuals, "scraps, orts and fragments" of total humanity but we are also merely "scraps, orts and fragments" of our own total being which depends on a myriad past and future, as well as other present, "selves" for completion. Surely this is also what Miss La Trobe intends to convey - that the present self is but a scrap of the complete personal identity which has evolved through thousands of years, just as the present moment in English civilization is but a scrap in the long history of development which preceded it.

Therefore, the present is incomplete in itself, and its significance can be truly appreciated only if the present moment is seen in its proper perspective in relation to the past. Surely this is the message of Miss La Trobe's pageant, a message which Virginia Woolf keeps alive between



the acts as well as during them. During one pause, for example, the cows begin to bellow for a lost calf, "the primeval voice sounding loud in the ear of the present moment" (P. 165). The past is continually brought forward into the present, both in the pageant and in the lives of the main characters of the novel, the members of the Oliver family.

Isa Oliver, who is married to Giles Oliver, the stock-broker and old Mr. Oliver's son, is very much aware of the influence of the past upon her, and of its existence within her. She walks, between the acts, into the stable yard

where the great pear tree spread its ladder of branches against the wall. The tree whose roots went beneath the flags, was weighted with hard green pears. Fingering one of them she murmured: "How am I burdened with what they drew from the earth; memories; possessions. This is the burden that the past laid on me, last little donkey in the long caravanserai crossing the desert. 'Kneel down' said the past. 'Fill your pannier from our tree. Rise up, donkey. Go your way till your heels blister and your hoofs crack.'" "

The pear was hard as stone. She looked down at the cracked flags beneath which the roots spread. "That was the burden", she mused, "laid on me in the cradle; murmured by waves; breathed by restless elm trees; crooned by singing women; what we must remember; what we would forget."

(P. 182)

For Isa the past is an inescapable responsibility, a burden which all must bear once born. This attitude is comparable to that of Rhoda, in The Waves, who would also like to be free from the burden upon the present moment -

"But I am fixed here.... An immense pressure is on me. I cannot move without dislodging the weight of centuries" (P. 90) - and to that of Louis when he feels that to close his eyes would be to rob mankind of a moment of vision, to shirk his responsibility, to refuse to bear the burden. Louis, however, does accept the responsibility and keeps his eyes open.

The attitude of Mrs. Swithin, Bartholomew Oliver's sister, toward the past is somewhat more casual than that of her nephew's wife. Mrs. Swithin does not feel burdened by the past; she moves about easily within the stream of mind time, "increasing the bounds of the moment by flights into past or future" (P. 14). Engrossed in her Outline of History, "she had spent the hours between three and five thinking about rhododendron forests in Piccadilly" (P. 13), and the prehistoric monsters which inhabited England when it was still part of the continent of Europe. Mrs. Swithin, indeed, has difficulty in wresting herself from the past and her prehistoric monsters when the maid enters the room:

It took her five seconds in actual time, in mind time ever so much longer, to separate Grace herself, with blue china on a tray, from the leather-covered grunting monster who was about, as the door opened, to demolish a whole tree in the green steaming undergrowth of the primeval forest.

(Pp. 13-14)

In juxtaposing "between three and five" with "rhododendron forests", and "as the door opened" and "leather-covered" with "monster", Virginia Woolf skilfully blends the past

and the present within Mrs. Swithin's mind, thus emphasizing that the past is the present. Similarly, Grace feels "on her face the divided glance that was half meant for a beast in the swamp, half for a maid in a print frock and white apron" (P. 14), and once again the past and the present are cleverly fused into a single time.

However, Mrs. Woolf's belief in the continuity of history and in the eternal perpetuity of the past in the present is most clearly illustrated at the end of Between The Acts, after the pageant has finished. It is the end of the day and the Oliver household is retiring. Mrs. Swithin is determined to finish her chapter in the Outline of History before she goes to bed. "'Prehistoric man', she read, 'half-human, half-ape, roused himself from his semi-crouching position and raised great stones'" (P. 255). Slipping a "letter from Scarborough between the pages to mark the end of the chapter", Mrs. Swithin retires to her room, leaving Isa and Giles alone, for old Mr. Oliver had retired earlier.

Left alone together for the first time that day, they were silent. Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night.  
(Pp. 255-56)

During this confrontation between estranged husband and wife, the room becomes less and less like a room and more

and more like a cave. Giles has turned out the light. "The great hooded chairs had become enormous. And Giles too. And Isa too against the window. The window was all sky without colour. The house had lost its shelter" (P. 256). The enormous hooded chairs remind one of the "great stones" which prehistoric man had raised in Mrs. Swithin's reading. Giles and Isa are enormous too, for they are associated with the cave dwellers who raised themselves from their "semi-crouching position". The house, having lost its shelter and with its windows "all sky" is like an open cave. There will be a reunion; they will embrace. "But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen...." This inherence of the past in the present is further exemplified by the succeeding sentences, in which this night of the present becomes a night of the long past. "It was night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks" (P. 256). The caveman is present in this couple, for the past lives in them as surely as does the present.

Virginia Woolf's fusion of past and present is the more complete in this passage because of the manner in which it is stated. Mrs. Woolf is careful not merely to draw a comparison between the past and the present, or to create

an analogy between two different nights. The present is not comparable to the past; this night was not similar to another night long ago; this night " was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks". It is also, of course, the night referred to in Mrs. Swithin's reading, the night which now exists in the present of her consciousness, the night when "Prehistoric man ... roused himself ... and raised great stones" (P. 255).

Moreover, this night is also the beginning of civilization, the night with which Miss La Trobe's next play is to open. Earlier, after the village pageant had ended, Miss La Trobe, left alone, was gathering up her things as she prepared to leave. As she gazed out over the land which, in the growing darkness, had lost its distinguishing outlines, she had a momentary glimpse of her next play:

She put down her case and stood looking at the land. Then something rose to the surface.

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

(P. 246)

Later, however, as she sits drinking in the public house the scene returns to her in the haze of tobacco smoke:

There was the high ground at midnight; there the rock; and two scarcely perceptible figures.... She set down her glass. She heard the first words.

(P. 248)

It becomes clear that the two figures among the rocks, which were represented in the description of the house by "the great hooded chairs", are Giles and Isa, or, at least, the "dwellers in caves" that exist in them. For as they face each other in the darkness,

It was night before roads were made,  
or houses. It was the night that  
dwellers in caves had watched from  
some high place among rocks.

Then the curtain rose. They  
spoke.

(P. 256)

The long past exists in the present moment, just as the long history of England inheres in its present. This is the message of Miss La Trobe's pageant. It is also Bernard's message in The Waves, when he refers to "the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again" (P. 255). It is this, also, that Eleanor begins to realize, in The Years, as she ponders: "Does everything then come over again a little differently?" (P. 297).

The past is eternally present, but this is not the complete message of these novels. The inherence of the past in the present is an unimportant theory when viewed in isolation, divorced from character. Time itself is irrelevant except as it relates to the consciousness of some personality. The 'past as present' aspect of the time theme in Virginia Woolf's novels is significant only because it is intricately interwoven with the problem of personal identity. As Orlando suggests, Mrs. Woolf is attempting to show

that personality is more than character; that personality is not static. The problem of personal identity is a question of more than the immediate self. "The personal or immediate self is a partial one. It must draw something from the past and from other present or personal selves for completion."<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, we see a little more clearly the significance of Clarissa Dalloway's feeling

that she must inevitably cease completely; ... 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; ... part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, ... but it spread ever so far, her life, herself.

(Mrs. Dalloway. Pp. 11-12)

For Mrs. Dalloway, however, this is not a positive theory. It is something she clings to in her horror of death, this hope of survival after death:

She felt herself everywhere; not 'here, here, here'; ... but everywhere. She waved her hand, going up Shaftesbury Avenue. She was all that. So that to know her, or anyone, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places. Odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street, some man behind a counter - even trees, or barns. It ended in a transcendental theory which, with her horror of death, allowed her to believe ... that since our apparitions,

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<sup>10</sup> Ethel Cornwell, The Still Point, p. 165.

the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that....  
(Pp. 168-69)

Clarissa Dalloway is not, at this stage, presented as a positive expression of the theory of the perpetuity of the past in the present. Nevertheless, Mrs. Woolf does intend Clarissa to indicate that her personal self could be complete only in union with all other selves, among them "people she has never met". The problem is insoluble because such a union is obviously impossible. Partial completion of the personal identity is possible, however, by a union with the most immediate of the other personal selves. The true self could become partly complete, partly substantial, by such a union; Clarissa could experience "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..." (P. 12).

It is this flimsy, mist-like substantiality to which Septimus Smith clings. His defiance of clock time is a refusal to relinquish his union with the past, with his dead friend Evans. By his death, he preserves intact that part of his personal identity which he had made complete by a union with Evans and the past. Thus it is that Clarissa, alone in her little room after hearing of his suicide, decides that "she did not pity him; with the clock striking



the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him, with all this going on" (P. 206). She does not pity Septimus because now "with the clock striking", she realizes that his life was not regulated by the clock, that he was not limited to the present. Because he had "thrown it away while they went on living", he had preserved that mist-like personal identity:

A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate.... There was an embrace in death.

But this young man who had killed himself - had he plunged holding his treasure?

(P. 204)

It is in her little room, with the clock striking the hour, that she realizes that he had "plunged holding his treasure"; he had preserved that communication, that union, that identity - "A thing ... that mattered". And Clarissa feels "glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living." For now she feels "somehow very like him - the young man who had killed himself" (P. 206). By his death she has learned that the completion of the self is possible only through a rejection of clock time, through a spiritual plunge into mind time where past and present and future selves are mystically fused. And in this realization Clarissa becomes a positive expression of Virginia Woolf's theory of the perpetuity of the past in the present.

Orlando, on the other hand, is presented as a positive expression of this theory from the very beginning, being a perfect embodiment of the past in the present. Orlando is always irked by the striking of a clock, being so very much aware of the elasticity of time she feels that "in the space of three seconds and a half ... she had broken her ankle, fallen in love, married Shelmerdine" (Orlando. P. 186). She comments ironically, indeed almost sarcastically, on those who regulate their lives by the clock:

And indeed, it cannot be denied that the most successful practitioners of the art of life ... somehow contrive to synchronize the sixty or seventy different times which beat simultaneously in every normal human system so that when eleven strikes, all the rest chime in unison.... Of them we can justly say that they live precisely the sixty-eight or seventy-two years allotted them on the tombstone.... others are hundreds of years old though they call themselves thirty-six. The true length of a person's life ... is always a matter of dispute. For it is a difficult business - this timekeeping; ... Now as she stood with her hand on the door of her motorcar, the present again struck her on the head. Eleven times she was violently assaulted.

"Confound it all!" she cried, for it is a great shock to the nervous system, hearing a clock strike ...  
 (Orlando. Pp. 215-16)

Now, driving home, Orlando ponders upon her identity, attempting to determine what she, as a totality, is:

So Orlando, at the turn by the barn, called "Orlando?" with a note of interrogation in her voice and waited. Orlando did not come.

"All right, then", Orlando said, with a good humour people practise on these occasions; and tried another. For she had a great variety of selves to call upon, far more than we have been able to find room for, since a biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may well have as many thousand ... but ... the one she needed most kept aloof, for she was.. changing her selves as quickly as she drove - there was a new one at every corner - as happens when, for some unaccountable reason, the conscious self, which is uppermost, and has the power to desire, wishes to be nothing but one self. This is what some people call the true self, and it is, they say, compact of all the selves we have in us to be; commanded and locked up by the Captain self, the Key self, which amalgamates and controls them all. Orlando was certainly seeking this self, as the reader can judge from overhearing her talk as she drove ...

(Orlando. Pp. 218-19)

What Orlando is seeking, then, is the completion of her "true self"; she is seeking that "Key self" which is "compact of all the selves we have it in us to be" and "which

amalgamates and controls them all." In other words, she is seeking the fulfilment of her true personal identity; that communication, that union, of all the selves that comes of being "nothing but one self."

"What, then? Who, then?" she questions as she drives on:

Thirty-six; in a motor-car; a woman.  
 Yes, but a million other things as well. A snob, am I? The garter in the hall? The leopards? My ancestors? Proud of them? Yes! Greedy, luxurious, vicious? Am I? (here a new self came in). Don't care a damn if I am. Truthful? I think so. Generous? Oh, but that don't count (here a new self came in).  
 ... Facile, glib, romantic. But (here another self came in) a duffer, a fumbler. More clumsy I couldn't be. And -and-  
 ... a toad set in emeralds! Harry the Archduke! Bluebottles on the ceiling! (here another self came in).... Trees, she said. (Here another self came in). I love trees ... And the night. But people (here another self came in). People? But (here another self came skipping over the top of her mind like the beam from a lighthouse).

(Orlando. Pp. 219-20)

What is occurring here, of course, is that Orlando is recalling her past selves, incidents from the past which have influenced her present, and attempting to determine what these past elements add up to. She is struggling to form a conception of her total being. For a moment, she catches a fleeting glimpse of the truth, the wild goose - "There flies the wild goose. It flies past the window out to sea" (P. 221). She has almost grasped the concept of her personal identity; she has reached the brink of illumination,

"but the goose flies too fast.... Always it flies fast out to sea..." (P. 221).

However, the truth of her being does not completely elude Orlando's grasp, for

it was at this moment, when she had ceased to call "Orlando" and was deep in thoughts of something else, that the Orlando whom she had called came of its own accord; ...

The whole of her darkened and settled, as when some foil whose addition makes the round and solidity of a surface is added to it, and the shallow becomes deep and the near distant; and all is contained as water is contained by the sides of a well. So she was now darkened, stilled and become, with the addition of this Orlando, what is called, rightly or wrongly, a single self, a real self. And she fell silent. For it is probable that when people talk aloud the selves (of which there may be more than two thousand) are conscious of dis severment, and are trying to communicate, but when communication is established they fall silent.

(Pp. 221-22)

When communication is established among the selves, "they fall silent." There is no longer a need for verbal communication, for the selves have become unified, truly "a single self, a real self" and total communication is implicit in oneness. And so, when "the stable clock struck four", Orlando "kept ... complete composure (for she was now one and entire, and presented, it may be, a larger surface to the shock of time)" (P. 226). She is no longer "violently assaulted" by the striking of the clock.

This gradual comprehension of what she, as a total being, amounts to culminates in the illumination which is achieved

during her visit to the carpenter's shop. Repulsed by the "raised saucer of pink flesh where the nail should have been" on Joe Stubbs's thumb,

she felt faint for a moment, but in that moment's darkness, when her eyelids flickered, she was relieved of the pressure of the present. There was something strange in the shadow that the flicker of her eyes cast, something which ... is always absent from the present ... it has no body, is a shadow without substance or quality of its own, yet has the power to change whatever it adds itself to. This shadow now, ... stole out, and attaching itself to the innumerable sights she had been receiving, composed them into something tolerable, comprehensible.... Yes, she thought, heaving a deep sigh of relief, as she turned from the carpenter's shop to climb the hill, I can begin to live again. I am by the Serpentine, she thought, the little boat is climbing through the white arch of a thousand deaths. I am about to understand ...

(P. 227)

What Orlando is about to understand is that if one were capable of calling together all of one's selves and of fusing them together as the true self, then one could pass entirely beyond the concept of linear time. For to achieve such union requires an infinite number and complexity of relationships. The crisscrossings between people, selves, - past, present and future - pass into infinity and the pattern is but dimly discernible. But in the pattern one thing is sure,

everything was partly something else ... things came nearer, and farther, and

mingled and separated and made the strangest alliances and combinations in an incessant chequer of light and shade.

(P. 228)

It is significant that Orlando's climb up the hill takes her to the old oak tree, the meeting place of all her past selves. "The ferny path led, with many turns and windings, higher and higher to the oak tree, which stood on the top" (P. 228). As she flings herself under the old tree, "a little square book bound in red cloth" falls from the breast of her leather jacket - her poem 'The Oak Tree'" (P. 229). This poem, covering three hundred years in both material and composition, is itself a symbol of evolutionary time. Just as it is a present poem which owes its existence to the past, so also are we present beings depending for completion upon the past.

Now as she lies on the hard, knotted roots of the oak tree, Orlando briefly reviews her past:

It was not necessary to faint now in order to look deep into the darkness where things shape themselves and to see in the pool of the mind now Shakespeare, now a girl in Russian trousers, now a toy boat on the Serpentine, and then the Atlantic itself, where it storms in great waves past Cape Horn. She looked into the darkness. There was her husband's brig, rising to the top of the wave! Up, it went, and up and up. The white arch of a thousand deaths rose before it. Oh rash, oh ridiculous man, always sailing, so uselessly, round Cape Horn in the teeth of a gale! But the brig was through the arch and out on the other side; it was safe at last!

(P. 231)

As she had been leaving the carpenter's shop earlier, Orlando had felt, with "a deep sigh of relief" that she could now "begin to live again" for she was by the Serpentine and "the little boat is climbing through the white arch of a thousand deaths. I am about to understand ..." (P. 227). Now, at the present culmination of her life, the Serpentine becomes the Atlantic Ocean and the little toy boat becomes her husband's brig sailing "round Cape Horn in the teeth of a gale."

As Orlando watches, the brig faces potential destruction, "the white arch of a thousand deaths", but successfully passes through it "and out on the other side; it was safe at last!" This symbolizes Orlando's realization that death is not an end but a return, a continuation of the pattern. For now as the clock announces midnight, the end of day and the end of the novel, Orlando's husband returns to her:

As she spoke, the first stroke of midnight sounded. The cold breeze of the present brushed her face with its little breath of fear. She looked anxiously into the sky. It was dark with clouds now. The wind roared in her ears. But in the roar of the wind she heard the roar of an aeroplane coming nearer and nearer.... And ... Shelmerdine, now grown a fine sea captain, hale, fresh-coloured, and alert, leapt to the ground ... the twelfth stroke of midnight sounded; the twelfth stroke of midnight, Thursday, the eleventh of October, Nineteen Hundred and Twenty-eight.

(P. 232)

"If it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy," Clarissa Dalloway had told herself upon hearing of Septimus



Smith's suicide, for "death was an attempt to communicate,  
... There was an embrace in death" (Mrs. Dalloway. P. 204).  
For Orlando also, death is an embrace; a communication;  
a final, complete union with Shelmerdine; a recognition  
of the one great "true self."

CHAPTER FIVE

ETERNAL RECURRENCE: "THE INCESSANT RISE  
AND FALL AND FALL AND RISE AGAIN"

Flood, fire,  
The desiccation of grasslands, restraint of princes,  
Piracy on the high seas, physical pain and fiscal grief,  
These after all are our familiar tribulations,  
And we have been through them all before, many, many  
times....  
As... time turns round itself in an obedient circle,  
They occur again and again but only to pass  
Again and Again into their formal opposites,...  
So that, taking the bad with the good, the pattern  
composed  
By the ten thousand odd things that can possibly happen  
Is permanent in a general average way.  
(W. H. Auden, "For the Time Being")

It was the communication of the selves, also, that Clarissa Dalloway was attempting to express when she spoke of her "odd affinities ... with people she had never spoken to" (Mrs. Dalloway. P. 169). Clarissa, however, had not extended the concept beyond herself to its logical conclusion. If Clarissa had these "affinities" with other people, then the same was true for every other individual, and there must necessarily be a great deal of overlapping among the selves. Just as other people were part of Clarissa, so Clarissa was part of countless others, each of whom had a myriad "affinities" with countless others. The concept necessitates that everyone, and every thing (for Clarissa was "part, she was positive, of the trees at home"), be related, directly or indirectly, to everyone, and every thing, else - past, present and future. "By means of the intellect, each person sees himself as single, separate and isolated; by means of intuition, however, he becomes at once infinitely divisible within himself and one with all that exists."<sup>1</sup> Eternity, for the process and hence for the individual as part of that process, is assumed since without it the pattern breaks down. To recognize an affinity with any other being is thus to recognize the concept of eternity.

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<sup>1</sup>James Hafley, The Glass Roof, p. 98.

As Orlando had noted, "everything was partly something else" and, conversely, everything was part of everything else - eternally. Thus it is that Orlando can now "begin to live again.... the little boat is climbing through the white arch of a thousand deaths. I am about to understand...."

(Orlando. P. 227). The pattern is the establishment of communication among all of the various selves, the communion of all things, which is the formation of total oneness. During a pause in the pageant in Between the Acts, Mrs. Swithin is observed by Isa and William as she gazes vaguely over the field:

She was off, they guessed, on a circular tour of the imagination - one-making. Sheep, cows, grass, trees, ourselves - all are one. If discordant, producing harmony - if not to us, to a gigantic ear attached to a gigantic head. And thus - she was smiling benignly - the agony of the particular sheep, cow, or human being is necessary; and so ... we reach the conclusion that all is harmony, could we hear it. And we shall.

(Between The Acts. P. 204)

The secret of life is that we are at once singularly individual and infinitely multiple. And although Virginia Woolf never destroys the individuality which sets her characters apart from each other, there does emerge in her later novels a very emphatic relationship between the one and the many. In Orlando, we are shown an assortment of individual Orlandos and finally the communication of all these diverse Orlandos which constitutes the real Orlando. When communication has been established among all of Orlando's

"selves", it is "as if her mind had become a fluid that flowed round things and enclosed them completely" (Orlando. P. 222).

In The Waves the wave image becomes an effective metaphor for personality, both in its individual, and in its unified, sense. The lives of the six characters individually and collectively assume the form of waves, at first gathering force and shape, rising to a crest and then breaking and dissolving once again. Moreover the sea is made to represent the eternity into which individuality and personality dissolve. The vignettes preceding the chapters in the novel make explicit this relationship between the waves and personality.

When the novel opens, the sea is indistinguishable from the sky; all is merged, unformed. Then, out of the vast sea which, day after day, century after century, continues to form new combinations, the individual waves begin to emerge. When the sun is at its height (temporally, the passages move from sunrise to sunset and from spring to winter) the waves appear separate and distinct; but as the sun begins its gradual decline, the waves seem to mingle and merge with each other in their approach to the shore. Then, as the day closes and night comes on, the sea becomes indistinguishable from the sky again. Finally, at the end of the book, after Bernard has summed up his life and the lives of his friends, the waves break on the shore, and the individual peaks dissolve into the sea mass again. In like manner, the six characters progress from simplicity to complexity, to simplicity again, and emerge from impersonality to develop a definity personal identity which, in turn, is finally resolved into impersonality. This is the process to which

Bernard refers when he speaks of "the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again."<sup>2</sup>

The relationship between wave and personality is further accentuated by the form of the novel which is composed of chapters and interchapters, or vignettes, - of crests and hollows; and by the manner in which the characters are presented in quite sharply divided dramatic monologues. These divided monologues emphasize the reality of separate identities and the relative isolation of the individuals within the group. At the same time, however, the same basic style and language are used to record the thoughts and perceptions of the six characters, and their perceptions tend, moreover, to overlap and interweave, so that there is the implication that there is some kind of union, some kind of multiple relationship existing beneath these individual responses to the external world.

Throughout the novel the six characters frequently come together to form a group, a wave, and are dispersed again. The centre around which they gather is Percival. In the presence of Percival their individual identities cease for a moment to divide them and they become one complete being. The farewell party for Percival, in the fourth section, brings the six friends together around their centre, and they become aware of a subtle fusion, a sense of things becoming

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<sup>2</sup>Ethel Cornwell, The Still Point, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1962. P. 174.

"richer, second by second ..." (P. 115). Their senses widen.  
 "Membranes ... float round us like filaments, making the air  
 tangible and catching in them faraway sounds unheard before"  
 (P. 115).

"It is Percival", said Louis, "... who makes us aware that these attempts to say, 'I am this, I am that', which we make, coming together, like separated parts of one body and soul, are false.... We have tried to accentuate differences. From the desire to be separate we have laid stress upon our faults, and what is particular to us. But there is a chain whirling round, round, in a steel-blue circle beneath."

(P. 117)

In celebrating what Percival means to them, the six friends let fall for a moment the individual identities which divide them. For the rest each achieves some limited individual fulfilment, while at the same time, "from the desire to be separate", developing a protective identity which renders impossible that complete union they need over and above their individual success. After the brief crest of communion the group breaks into its component identities:

"Now once more", said Louis, "as we are about to part, having paid our bill, the circle in our blood, broken so often, so sharply, for we are so different, closes in a ring. Something is made. Yes, as we rise and fidget, a little nervously, we pray, holding in our hands this common feeling, 'Do not move, do not let the swing door cut to pieces the thing that we have made, that globes itself here, among these lights, these peelings, this litter of bread crumbs and people passing. Do not move, do not go. Hold it for ever'".

"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 . . ."

(P. 124)

The reunion at Hampton Court after the death of Percival brings the six together again. Then Bernard sums up, at the end of the novel, feeling that the story of his life must include the story of all their lives. In his summing up he brings the characters together for a final reunion, thus accomplishing what Virginia Woolf, in a letter of John Lehmann, desired: "That there should be many characters and only one."<sup>3</sup>

In the same letter, however, she added that there should be "also on infinity, a background behind". And what Bernard is also doing, therefore, in his summing up, is sorting and ranging spatially his various "selves", just as Orlando had done in summing up her life. He feels that his life is a composite of many diverse selves, foremost among them the "selves" of Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda and Louis. Therefore, when he attempts to sum up his own life, he feels that he must sum up the lives of his five friends as well. For

it is not one life that I look back upon;  
 I am not one person; I am many people;  
 I do not altogether know who I am -  
 Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda or Louis;  
 or how to distinguish my life from theirs....  
 For this is not one life; nor do I always  
 know if I am man or woman, Bernard or

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<sup>3</sup>John Lehmann, The Whispering Gallery, p. 171. Quoted  
 in Schaefer, The Three Fold Nature of Reality, p. 157.



Neville, Louis, Susan, Jinny or Rhoda -  
so strange is the contact of one with  
another.

(Pp. 237, 242)

Bernard recognizes that each person is somehow individual, because each has encountered different experiences - one is affected by "the growl of the boot-boy making love to the tweeny among the gooseberry bushes"; another by "the dead man in the gutter; the apple tree, stark in the moonlight"; another by "the rat swarming with maggots"; and so on (P. 207). Because of these varying experiences, each of the six friends is highly individual - "we were all different. The wax - the virginal wax that coats the spine melted in different patches for each of us ... our white wax was streaked and stained by each of these differently" (P. 207). At the same time, each person is made up of a myriad selves; the individual is Bernard, Byron, Neville, Rhoda, and so on, by turns, so that there is an infinite relationship among all that exists, has existed or will exist. Beneath all these distinctions is that deeper unity to which all belong, that ocean of eternity. Each wave on the ocean is distinctly individual, each is composed of innumerable particles of water, and yet each is also one with all others by being part of the ocean. It is this oneness, this greater reality in which inner and external become fused, that Bernard becomes aware of as he sums up:

And now I ask, "Who am I?" I have been talking of Bernard, Neville, Jinny, Susan, Rhoda and Louis. Am I all of them? Am I one and distinct? I do not know. We sat here together. But now Percival is dead, and Rhoda is dead; we are divided; we are not here. Yet I cannot find any obstacle separating us. There is no

division between me and them. As I talked I felt "I am you". This difference we make so much of, this identity we so feverishly cherish, was overcome.... Here on my brow is the blow I got when Percival fell. Here on the nape of my neck is the kiss Jinny gave Louis. My eyes fill with Susan's tears. I see far away, quivering like a gold thread, the pillar Rhoda saw, and feel the rush of the wind of her flight when she leapt.  
(Pp. 248-49)

Because of the unity which exists among all things, the experiences of one person become the experiences of all others. Those particles which make up the individual wave become, as that wave sinks back into the ocean, particles of other waves, and the deeper reality which is the ocean itself may find expression in any number of waves. The individual strives for this kind of omniscient relationship whereby the distinctions created by the personal identity, inner and outer reality, become obliterated, smashed as the wave is smashed on the shore, and absorbed in the deeper reality of eternity. If you look at things steadily, "multiplicity becomes unity, which is somehow the secret of life" (Jacob's Room, p. 124).

When one is young, one is largely unaware of individual differences. As one grows older, one develops a definite personality, just as in the vignettes the wave develops a distinct form as the day progresses. Then, toward the end of life, one returns to the kind of impersonality one possessed in youth, just as the individual wave loses its definite form and begins to merge with others, and the sea becomes indistinguishable from the sky again, as it had been at the

beginning of the novel. Life, for Virginia Woolf, was a process of moving from integration to isolation to integration again.

In this sense, Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party is also a symbol of the process of life. At the beginning of the dinner there is confusion. All appear to be going in different directions, all absorbed in themselves, refusing to merge with the others and become a unified whole. Mrs. Ramsay senses this isolation of individuals:

Nothing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate. And the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her ... for if she did not do it nobody would do it.

(To The Lighthouse. P. 126)

It is Mrs. Ramsay's task to bring these disparate beings together, to unite them, to create harmony among them, to convert isolation into unity.

She enlists the aid of Lily Briscoe in creating this unity. She assigns Charles Tansley to Lily, giving her the charge of drawing him into harmony with the others. She intercepts her husband as he is about to explode with anger and disrupt the amity before it has been created. Meanwhile, she has drawn Mr. Bankes, rather reluctantly at first, into the general harmony as well:

"How you must detest dining in this bear garden", she said, making use, as she did when she was distracted, of her social manner. So, when there is a strife of tongues, at some meeting, the chairman, to obtain unity, suggests that everyone shall speak in French. Perhaps it is

bad French; French may not contain the words that express the speaker's thoughts; nevertheless speaking French imposes some order, some uniformity.  
(Pp. 135-36)

Mrs. Ramsay seems to have the power to find, or to create, order and unity in the midst of chaos and strife. As a result of this power, the dinner party becomes an unquestioned success, a great triumph of merging.

From what has been said about the relationship between the individual's personal self and the multiplicity of his social selves, it is clear that life appeared to Virginia Woolf in contradictory terms. On the one hand, various persons are brought together to form a unity, a complete whole at a party or during a meal, and the individual is "an undefined and undefinable quantity, inseparable from the general stream of humanity"<sup>4</sup> from which he arose. On the other hand, each person is "a separate distinct entity".<sup>4</sup> The individual is distinctly different from all other individuals, and yet he is part of a complex pattern of relationships with others which stretches into infinity, and thus he partakes of eternity.

The individual wave on the sea is a part of the ocean not only during the time that it is a distinct wave; its dissolution is a return to the state from which it arose. By analogy, the individual returns to death, which is not a cessation of being but rather the point at which the individual

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<sup>4</sup>Cornwell, p. 172.

selves become fused in eternity. Percival dies when he is thrown from a horse and breaks on the earth much as a wave is disintegrated when it breaks on the shore. As the dispersed particles of the wave sink back into the sea, however, another wave is immediately formed, as is indicated by the birth of Bernard's son at the same time as Percival's death.

In all of Virginia Woolf's novels after Mrs. Dalloway there is this persistent emphasis on recurrence. In To The Lighthouse there is a sense of "time after time"; there is, as Lily Briscoe sees, "constantly a sense of repetition - of one thing falling where another had fallen" (P. 295). Mrs. Ramsay realizes, after her dinner party, that no matter how long her guests live, they will "come back to this night; this moon; this wind; this house: and to her too" (P. 170). She herself, in fact, returns in the third section of the novel, after her death, in response to Lily Briscoe's need for her: "Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!" she cried ... Mrs. Ramsay - it was part of her perfect goodness - sat there quite simply, in the chair, flicked her needles to and fro ..." (P. 300).

In The Years, as Eleanor talks to Nicholas, suddenly it seems to her

that it had all happened before.... She knew exactly what he was going to say. He had said it before ... As she thought it, he said it. Does everything then come over again a little differently? she thought. If so, is there a pattern; a theme, recurring, like music; half remembered, half foreseen? ... a gigantic pattern, momentarily perceptible?

(P. 297)

The novel draws to a close as Eleanor expresses an understanding of this recurring pattern:

There must be another life, she thought... Not in dreams; but here and now, in this room, with living people ... she was about to grasp something that just evaded her. There must be another life, here and now, she repeated. This is too short, too broken. We know nothing, even about ourselves. We're only just beginning ... to understand.... For her too there would be the endless night; the endless dark. She looked ahead of her as though she saw opening in front of her a very long dark tunnel. But, thinking of the dark, something baffled her; in fact it was growing light.

(Pp. 343-44)

Meanwhile the other members of the party have become aware of the dawn as well: "'But the dawn has risen', said Renny, pointing at the sky. It was a fact. The sun had risen.... 'And I am going to bed', said Nicholas..." (P. 347). Sara, who has already been sleeping, is brought back to the world of the awake, to replace Nicholas or to be replaced by him in the other. "She yawned and stretched herself. She fixed her eyes on Nicholas as if she were bringing him back to the field of vision" (P. 347).

The final scene suggests another kind of renewal, the physical regeneration of mankind. Eleanor, looking out the window as the sun rises, has been watching a taxi which is, presumably, carrying a young newlywed couple:

A young man had got out; he paid the driver. Then a girl in a tweed travelling suit followed him. He fitted his latch-key to the door. "There", Eleanor murmured, as he opened the door and they

stood for a moment on the threshold.  
 "There!" she repeated, as the door  
 shut with a little thud behind them....  
 The sun had risen, and the sky above  
 the houses wore an extraordinary beauty,  
 simplicity and peace.

(P. 349)

There is in this passage the suggestion, which always accom-  
 panies marriage, of two people beginning a new life together -  
 "They stood ... on the threshold" - and also, of course, the  
 suggestion that by their physical union the regenerating  
 process of humanity will be carried on. This suggestion  
 is echoed in the final scene of Between The Acts. Before  
 they sleep, Giles and Isa "must fight; after they had fought,  
 they would embrace. From that embrace another life might  
 be born" (Pp. 255-56).

Even more conscious of renewal than Eleanor, however,  
 is Bernard, who is acutely aware that one does not move in  
 one direction only. At the end of section eight of The Waves,  
 Bernard is conscious of "the songs of ... boys, who are coming  
 back ... from a day's outing" (P. 201); and notices with a  
 touch of amusement that he still clasps "the return half of  
 (his) ticket to Waterloo ... even now, even sleeping" (P. 202).  
 At the end of the final section, after he has summed up his  
 life and the lives of his friends, Bernard is even more  
 strongly cognizant of "some sort of renewal". He thinks  
 of himself as being "almost worn out ... an elderly man who is  
 getting rather heavy and dislikes exertion" (P. 255). At  
 the same time, however, he is aware that

there is a kindling in the sky ... of lamplight or of dawn. There is a stir of some sort.... There is a sense of break of day.... Dawn is some wort of whitening of the sky; some sort of renewal. Another day, another Friday; another twentieth of March, January or September. Another general awakening.... The bars deepen themselves between the waves.... A bird chirps. Cottagers light their early candles. Yes, this is the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again.

(P. 255)

Bernard's final realization is that there is permanence in this process of renewal, there is permanence in the very process of change. Bernard understands at last the meaning of eternity; it is a process of "eternal renewal", of unending change, which is the only true permanence. At the end of this novel, as in The Years, dawn begins to brighten the sky, emphasizing once more the theme of eternal recurrence.

Against death the human race sends rider after rider, like Percival himself. Each wave breaks on the shore, on death, but there is permanence in the "rise and fall", the eternal process itself; and when the wave sinks back into the sea, its particles will help to form new waves. Bernard's vision is then his awareness of his individual impermanence but also of the permanence of the process of which he is a part. <sup>5</sup>

Bernard is aware, as Isa Oliver is not, that the only real permanence is change. Isa's "harvestless dim field" where "grows nothing for the eye ... nor sun rises", where the roses are "unblowing, ungrowing" and "change is not" (Between The Acts, p. 181) does not represent eternity for Virginia Woolf. As James Hafley has correctly interpreted:

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<sup>5</sup>Margaret Church, Time and Reality, p. 79.



The only true stability is change, for immobility is death.... Without change, mutability, the "rise and fall and fall and rise again", there cannot be life. It is because of change that at the conclusion of the novel Between The Acts "another life might be born." <sup>6</sup>

It is the immobility of death which Rhoda fears. Fearing that death which is a dissolution into nothingness, she finally recognizes (as Mrs. Dalloway does also) the fluid quality of time and her suicide, like Septimus Smith's, unites her with the timeless and enduring, with Percival. Early in The Waves Rhoda is struggling to grasp the reality of life. She realizes that her dream world is not the real world, but a fantasy. She notes that "it is not solid: it gives me no satisfaction ..." (P. 47). She recognizes that reality, life, is somehow a binding together of various identities and that it is somehow associated with fluidity. However, as Orlando had discovered, the essential element in bringing the selves together is communication; and Rhoda's ability to communicate with others is woefully inadequate.

I will pick flowers; I will bind flower  
 in one garland and clasp them and pre-  
 send them - Oh! to whom? There is some  
 check in the flow of my being; a deep  
 stream presses on some obstacle; it jerks;  
 it tugs; some knot in the centre resists....  
 Now my body thaws; I am unsealed, I am  
 incandescent. Now the stream pours in  
 a deep tide fertilizing, opening the shut,  
 forcing the tight-folded, flooding free.  
 To whom shall I give all that now flows  
 through me, from my warm, my porous body?

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<sup>6</sup>Hafley, The Glass Roof, p. 156.

I will gather my flowers and present them -  
 Oh! to whom? ... I will bind my flowers  
 in one garland and advancing with my hand  
 outstretched will present them - Oh! to  
 whom?

(P. 48)

It is in Percival's death that Rhoda finally achieves the communication which eludes her here. By his death Percival finally establishes communication with Rhoda, becomes part of her experience, and motivates her toward action. Her own death relinquishes and lets loose "at last ... the checked, the jerked-back desire to be spent, to be consumed" and unites her with the enduring spirit of Percival:

We will gallop together over desert hills  
 where the swallow dips her wings in dark  
 pools and the pillars stand entire. Into  
 the wave that dashes upon the shore, into  
 the wave that flings its white foam to  
 the uttermost corners of the earth, I  
 throw my violets, my offering to Percival.  
 (Pp. 140-41)

In the act of throwing her garlanded selves, her violets, "into the wave that flings its white foam to the uttermost corners of the earth", Rhoda joins those such as Septimus Smith and Clarissa Dalloway - who "had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine" (Mrs. Dalloway, p. 203) - who have realized union with the enduring, those who have become one with the fluidity and stability of the "eternal renewal".

Rhoda and Septimus differ from Clarissa in one significant respect, however. Upon recognizing the reality of psychological duration, Rhoda and Septimus seek union with the eternal in an attempt to escape from the reality of the social world. Although she too has come to recognize

the necessity of union with the eternal, Clarissa realizes that the individual must function within a social framework. Clock time and mind time, social reality and psychological reality, are not diametrically opposed. The individual achieves his true identity not only by recognizing unity and permanence within the process of change, but also by becoming aware of his role in relation to others. Inner, psychological reality and external, social reality merge in this process of eternity. It is possible to achieve a single, unified vision of reality.

## CHAPTER SIX

### TOWARD A UNIFIED VISION

"And what is my own position towards the inner and outer? I think a kind of ease and dash are good; — yes: I think even externality is good; some combination of them ought to be possible. The idea has come to me that what I want now to do is to saturate every atom. 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; ...Why admit anything to literature that is not poetry — by which I mean saturated?... I want to put practically everything in: yet to saturate."

(Virginia Woolf, Diary, 28 November 1928)

The significant defects of Virginia Woolf's first two novels, The Voyage Out and Night and Day, result largely from the lack of a single, unified vision; from an inability to fuse the life of the individual inner self with the life of the external, social self. This lack of a single focus is the direct result of a similar inability to see anything but direct opposition between mind time and clock time, by which the social life is regulated. Mrs. Woolf's immaturity as a novelist is manifest in the imperfect form of these novels. They are not unified, coherent wholes; they demonstrate no unified comprehension of the varied experiences they portray.

In these first two novels, Virginia Woolf does not delve into the social lives of the characters presented. Rather she attempts to divorce the inner world from the external world. A great deal appears to depend upon the tones and values of social behaviour, and yet the vital concern is always with the qualities of the personal life, with the inner world of idealism, so that the external world is reduced to a state of relative unimportance.

There is much direct criticism of the existing social system; the Victorian intellectuals and their ways of living are frequently caricatured. At the same time, Rachel Vinrace and Katherine Hilbery represent the free and

enlightened spirit who struggles to achieve personal freedom - by detaching itself, in effect, from the social system.

In opposition to these are the characters who represent caricatures of the superficiality, triviality and sterility of social relationships. The "free spirit", however, does not attempt to become engaged with this imperfect system. Rather it tends to withdraw from the actual world and to create in its place an imaginary ideal world.

Mrs. Woolf is clearly attempting, not to achieve a balance between the inner and external worlds, but instead to elevate the claims of the inner world. For example, Katherine Hilbery and Ralph Denham, in Night and Day, refuse to become engaged, though they declare they can not live apart, until they can feel assured they have achieved the state of spiritual communion of which they take marriage to be the outward form. However, Mrs. Woolf is unable to represent this as effecting any change in their society, which remains mechanically conventional. Indeed, from reading these novels one receives the impression that the antipathy between the self and society is irreconcilable and that the self can function within the social framework only by sacrificing its own life.

The ironic difficulty of her position becomes clear as one recalls that Mrs. Woolf was attempting to present the flux of the inner world in a novel form which employed chronological narration as its mode and in which character

had been conventionally portrayed as primarily social and public. What she needed was to create a form of the novel which would not depend upon the traditional methods of portraying plot and character. She needed a form in which life need not be shown as being made up of marriages, commerce and public events; a form in which she could express her own sense of life without having it filtered and distorted by the assumptions of the conventional form.

Jacob's Room is the first indication that it might be possible to achieve this new form. Here for the first time Virginia Woolf catches both the public self and the individual self in a unified vision which demonstrates her determination to find a form in which the individual self can be seen to function within the outer world. Unfortunately, she overemphasizes the importance of the individual's participation in the events of the external world. As a result, Jacob's existence is defined almost exclusively by his participation in these events, so that he can scarcely be said to possess a uniquely individual personality in his own right. Rather, he functions more as a representative of the British educated classes in the decade which culminated in the First World War. Nevertheless, the primary distinction of Jacob's Room lies in the fact that Virginia Woolf succeeds, to a great extent, in creating a vision which relates her personal ideal of the individual's role in life to her actual experience of life in a social environment. By perceiving an

essential relationship between social regulation and the unlimited flow of mind time, Mrs. Woolf is beginning to progress from a detached idealism toward a direct critical and purposeful engagement with the life of society. In Jacob's Room she is concerned not merely for Jacob's personal identity but also for the social values which he represents. She attempts to see beyond the superficiality of her society and to comprehend what she can perceive of its inner life.

This insight into the spiritual condition of humanity is carried a step further in Mrs. Dalloway. In this novel there is no longer the sharp distinction between clock time and mind time, between the individual self and the external world, which characterizes the earlier novels. Mrs. Woolf carefully avoids the oversimplification which inevitably springs from the divorce of the actual world from the ideal world. Clarissa Dalloway is not set off against the external world. Indeed, she is both more individual and more fully representative than Jacob Flanders. She has a more direct grasp on the realities of social experience; she is "the perfect hostess" who is, during her social gatherings, like a creature floating in its element. She is one of society's finest products. At the same time, however, she can appreciate the essential privacy of the human soul. The little room to which she retires to contemplate the suicide of Septimus Smith symbolizes this necessity to be sometimes alone. Her feeling of affinity with the old lady across the way whom



she watches retiring to bed indicates her awareness of the individual's need for privacy.

Insofar as Clarissa Dalloway is a representative of London society, she is treated with a critical attention which indicates her deep inadequacy as a complete person, and emphasizes the glittering triviality of her routine existence. The "divine vitality", which she declares she adores, is manifested in cabs passing, sandwich men shuffling and swinging, brass bands and barrel organs; in mere sensations of noise and movement and excitement. In herself, Clarissa is not of much interest; what she has to offer is a sharp awareness of her world and its people. She is "something of an animated mirror, having a life made up of the world she reflect(s) ... a living image of the surface of the society Virginia Woolf was concerned with."<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, however, Clarissa Dalloway is a criticism of her society. Her society is what it is seen to be in her; and her character, such as it is, is the character of her society. If her life is a virtual non-life, so too is the life of her society as a whole. Clarissa is something more than a representative of the British educated class; she embodies Virginia Woolf's criticism of that class and its concern with trivial aspects of life. Near the end of the novel, Clarissa, as she walks down the

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<sup>1</sup>A.D. Moody, Virginia Woolf, Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1963. P. 20.

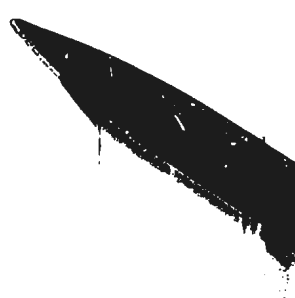
room with the Prime Minister, feels the "intoxication of the moment" and yet, "though she loved it and felt it tingle and sting", she thinks that somehow "these semblances, these triumphs (dear old Peter, for example, thinking her so brilliant), had a hollowness; at arm's length they were, not in the heart ... they satisfied her no longer as they used ..." (P. 193). The irony of Clarissa's system of values is clear in this passage. Her triumph is the empty triumph of being, as Peter Walsh had earlier accused her of being, "the perfect hostess".

The significant virtue of Mrs. Dalloway lies in its attempt to achieve a relationship between the world of the mind and the world of society. From this point of view, To The Lighthouse does not mark any fundamental progress. This novel does present a very positive vision of life but that vision depends upon the simplification of life and a separation of the inner and external worlds. Attention is directed to the reality of mind time. At the same time the actual, physical world, which is represented by Mr. Ramsay, is relegated to a subordinate position. Mr. Ramsay's part in the novel is primarily to insist upon the uncompromising facts of the human condition - "He was incapable of untruth; never tampered with a fact; never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being, least of all of his own children ..." (Pp. 10-11). There is, in effect, the same

divorce of the inner and external worlds in To The Lighthouse as characterizes Mrs. Woolf's first two novels. The significant action of the novel is emphatically rooted in the world of the mind. The self which is dramatized is the self of the mind, just as the time which is dramatized is mind time. The novel is concerned primarily with the problem of establishing the world of the mind in the face of an uncompromising and destructive natural universe.

The disengagement from the external world is emphasized, and partly enforced, by the virtual absence of plot. An expedition to the lighthouse, which is discussed in the opening scene of the novel, is put off because of the weather, but takes place ten years later. In the meantime Mrs. Ramsay and two of her children have died; and a marriage, which to a great extent she has arranged, turns out rather badly. As a plot, these simple happenings are too bare to amount to any important action.

However, although the external world is relegated to a subordinate position, external reality is acknowledged. In fact, there is throughout the novel an unflinching awareness of the particular facts of the external world. Mrs. Woolf is still striving toward a comprehensive understanding of time and reality in which both the internal and the external, the individual and the social, might be contained and unified. To The Lighthouse, therefore, is not a conscious attempt to dissociate the inner world from the external world.

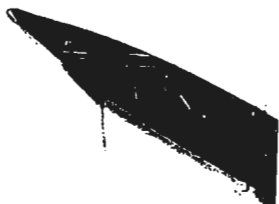


Mrs. Woolf, in seeking to establish the inner world upon a secure foundation, has inverted the conventional emphasis on objective reality, but that reality is still considered.

Mrs. Ramsay consciously dissociates herself from the external world during her dinner party. She becomes "like a hawk suspended" (P. 157). When she has succeeded in incorporating her guests into the harmony and unity of her dinner party, she can then, "like a hawk which lapses suddenly from its high station, flaunt and sink on laughter easily ..." (Pp. 158-59). She can leave her suspended position and immerse herself in the flux of life. This passage suggests that the things from which she has detached herself remain the element in which she lives and moves. Her detachment, in fact, has not cut her off from the external world, but has placed her mind in a position to comprehend it, as from above, even while she continues to be involved and active in it. Her detachment from the objective world is, moreover, deliberately checked by Mrs. Woolf's method of expressing it. The moment of detachment "partook, she felt, carefully helping Mr. Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity..." (P. 158). Her participation in the eternal flow of mind time is qualified by the necessity of having to participate in the events of the present reality, of having to help William Bankes to a piece of her Boeuf en Daube. "Here, she felt, putting the spoon down, was the still space that lies about the heart of things..." (P. 158). Here again the inner, mental process is linked

with the particular events of the external world, such as the laying down of a spoon. Always, there is this attempt to relate closely the internal and external worlds. The insistence on these trivial details indicates that Mrs. Ramsay's mind remains bound within the limiting conditions of time and place.

Lily Briscoe, too, undergoes such a detachment from objective reality. By subduing "the impertinences and irrelevances that plucked her attention and made her remember how she was such and such a person, had such and such relations to people" (P. 235), by shedding her social identity, by exchanging "the fluidity of life for the concentration of painting" (P. 237), Lily can rise to a pinnacle where she feels "like an unborn soul, a soul reft of body" (P. 237). From this position of mental elevation, Lily can view the external world from above, as Mrs. Ramsay had been able to do, and perceive a pattern in the complexity of things. High up on her "windy pinnacle", she can discern a pattern in the flux and fluidity of life, "as the waves shape themselves symmetrically from the cliff top, but to the swimmer among them are divided by steep gulfs, and foaming crests" (P. 235). On the cliff top, Lily does not feel the same as when "down in the hollow of one wave she saw the next wave towering higher and higher above her" (P. 236). Similarly, she constantly steps back from her canvas the better to discern the pattern created by the "brown running nervous lines" (P. 236) of her painting.



Virginia Woolf is implying in these passages that one can, by raising oneself temporarily out of the flux of life and by regarding the fluidity from a mentally elevated position, recognize the relationship which exists between the individual self and society, between the individual identity and mankind in general, just as from a physically elevated position one can discern the relationship which exists between the individual wave and the ocean. One can recognize also the way in which the individual wave, though it quickly dissolves, continues to exist as part of the ocean; and, by analogy, the way in which the individual, though he soon dies, survives as part of the larger reality of humanity. From close up, the waves appear highly individual, but from a distance each wave appears as part of an endless pattern; each wave loses its individuality as it is perceived as an element of the general pattern of life and the sea appears "slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it" (The Waves, p. 5).

Nevertheless, the pattern is not discernible to one who does not, at the same time, appreciate the distinct individuality of each of these elements. The creation of harmony, of unity, in personal relations, as in art, depends on the successful integration of many diverse elements. Unity can be realized only by one who is capable of recognizing and taking into account both the social and the private selves, the external and the internal realities.

This intimate knowledge of both levels of reality is the reason for Mrs. Ramsay's success at the dinner party.

In her painting Lily Briscoe is working at the problem of relating two opposing masses and resolving them, similarly, into a harmonious pattern. Her concern, and the concern of the novel, is to unite Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, and the external and internal worlds which they represent.

"What is the meaning of life?" Lily ponders as she struggles with the problem of relating the opposing masses on her canvas,

a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one. This, that, and the other; herself and Charles Tansley and the breaking wave; Mrs. Ramsay bringing them together; Mrs. Ramsay saying, "Life stand still here"; Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent) - this was of the nature of a revelation. In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was struck into stability. Life stand still here, Mrs. Ramsay said.

(Pp. 240-41)

Having satisfied her sense of Mrs. Ramsay and the internal world of mind time, Lily becomes aware of a need to comprehend Mr. Ramsay and the external, objective world as well, and to be on a level with ordinary experience:

One wanted, she thought, dipping her brush deliberately, to be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that's a chair,

that's a table, and yet at the same time,  
it's a miracle, it's an ecstasy.... Where  
was that boat now? And Mr. Ramsay? She  
wanted him.

(Pp. 299-300)

Lily's final stroke, a line drawn in the centre of her canvas, is an attempt to harmonize the two opposed masses, to unite Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, and to relate the world of clock time to the world of mind time.

In the painting this line is the uniting element; in the novel as a whole the uniting element is the lighthouse. In the first section of the novel, the lighthouse is, to a great extent, identified with Mrs. Ramsay. In the final section, as Mr. Ramsay sails toward the lighthouse, it emerges as a stark tower on a bare rock, and is identified by James with Mr. Ramsay:

He looked, James thought, getting his head now against the Lighthouse, now against the waste of waters running away into the open, like some old stone lying on the sand; he looked as if he had become physically what was always at the back of both of their minds - that loneliness which was for both of them the truth about things.

(P. 301)

As they approach the lighthouse, James sees it in terms associated with his mother and with his father. Recalling his mother's point of view, James sees the lighthouse first as "a silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye, that opened suddenly, and softly in the evening". Then, from his position in the boat with his father, he sees it as a "tower, stark and straight ... so that was the Lighthouse, was it? No, the



other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing" (Pp. 276-77).

The stark tower on its bare rock above the chaos of the sea is associated with Mr. Ramsay's uncompromising world of facts. The silvery, misty-looking tower with the yellow eye that opens softly is associated with Mrs. Ramsay and the ideal world which exists beyond the world of appearances. For James the Lighthouse is "real" in both senses; both views are possible and true - "For nothing was simply one thing". James establishes a relationship which admits the validity and necessity of both the external world of clock time and the internal world of the mind. He understands that the internal world of the mind exists within, and constructs itself out of, the world of external reality.

Nevertheless, To The Lighthouse does not achieve resolution in the full sense. Although mind time and clock time are brought together in a relationship that allows the existence of both and implies their interdependence, they remain divided off from each other. The attempt to relate the inner and external world, to accept life as a combination of both, demonstrates a more mature understanding of life than was seen in the earlier novels, but the relationship is established almost entirely from the point of view of the inner world. Whatever reality is not subjected to the mind's processes is not allowed its due weight. It is clear that Virginia Woolf has not yet succeeded in bringing the private and social

identities together in a unified vision. However, To The Lighthouse is an important step toward the more mature achievements of The Waves and Between The Acts.

The Waves is an attempt to comprehend life in more ultimate terms than those dealt with in To The Lighthouse. For the first time there is a response to the fullness of life and a recognition that what constitutes life goes beyond and far beneath the mind's concept of it as "society" or "the self." In comparison with this recognition the visions of the previous novels are incomplete and superficial.

During the time when she was planning The Waves, Virginia Woolf recorded in her diary that she was acutely aware, simultaneously, of both the permanence and the transitoriness of human existence:

Now is life very solid or very shifting?  
I am haunted by the two contradictions.  
This has gone on forever: will last forever; 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 ... <sup>2</sup>

She was aware that the individual being is transitory, is subject to clock time - he must die - and yet she was equally

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<sup>2</sup>Diary, 4 January 1929.

aware that "there is", nevertheless, "a coherence in things, a stability; something ... is immune from change, and shines out in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby" (To The Lighthouse, p. 158). In the "coherence" which exists beneath the arbitrary divisions of "self" and "society" resides the resolution of the antipathy between the evanescent and transitory reality of the external world and the never ending moment of the inner world. Beneath these distinctions and beneath change flows a continuity, an eternity, in which the inner and outer can become fused and united.

Rhoda's death is a refusal to accept the possibility of such a union. Bernard is essentially different, as an individual, from Rhoda. The key to Rhoda's character is her refusal to accept objective reality, to recognize that this reality is as much a part of the greater reality of life as is the reality of the mind. Rhoda refuses to compromise her ideal world. Her suicide represents the end of the idealist imagination which cannot accept life as it actually is. The key to Bernard's character is his willing immersion in life, his acceptance of, and his ability to cope with, whatever his experience might bring him. His concluding monologue is significant mainly because in it he does not seek, as Rhoda does, to escape the outer world of natural conditions, but accepts it as the proper sphere within which the mind functions. The multiple selves become one in a poised vision

that sees not perfection, but a critical and responsive acceptance of life on its own terms. The Waves marks the end of Virginia Woolf's attempt to escape from actuality into illusion, and the beginning of a willing engagement with life itself. It demonstrates a remarkably responsive concern with the conditions and possibilities of human existence. The unified vision of time and reality is now established. What remains is to perfect the vision.

This is the task of Mrs. Woolf's last novel, Between The Acts, which differs from The Waves in two significant respects. First, it incorporates the historical dimension treated earlier in Orlando but barely noticed in The Waves. Instead of merely affirming the continuity of the human process, Between The Acts attempts a critical scrutiny of the value of history for the present. Secondly, it establishes art, which was overstressed in To The Lighthouse and deliberately played down in The Waves, in a balanced relationship with life. Lily Briscoe had been set off from the actual, external world. Miss La Trobe is rather a mind merged in its process, as much as Bernard, but as a conscious artist, which he is not. In her attempt to comprehend history and the present moment, people and their relationship to each other and to nature, from the point of view of an individual involved in the process of life at a given point in time, place and society, Miss La Trobe affirms that the artist belongs in life, not outside or above it. Art should be

subordinated to the interests of life. The function of the artist is to be, as far as possible, a critical and alert intelligence willing to accept and participate in all that constitutes human life. Mrs. Woolf's vision here has progressed far beyond the limited vision of To The Lighthouse and crowned the achievement of The Waves.

Giles and Isa Oliver, the chief characters of the novel, are presented not in terms of the mind or the external world only, but in terms of the full personality. Although they fail to achieve complete union because of their individual differences, there is always an awareness of the potential wholeness of the human personality. Though they remain divided there is deep within their relationship an integral union which binds them and moves them toward an integrated fulfilment of their love. They are bound by affection, which transcends the distinctions of personal identity. Their relationship is more complex than, though essentially similar to, the one shared by Bartholomew Oliver and Lucy Swithin. Of Giles and Isa, as of Bart and Lucy, it can be said that "nothing changed their affection; no argument; no fact; no truth. What she saw he didn't; what he saw she didn't - and so on, ad infinitum." (P. 33). This tie holds them together when their cultivated minds divide them.

The conclusion, in which Giles and Isa become related to the animal culture from which they have evolved, emphasizes that beneath the divisions of a decayed and trivial social order, there is an essential animal energy which overcomes

division. Inner and outer realities are excluded from this primitive expression of personality and there is an effective communication between the cultured mind and the physical nature which is the source of its energy and being. The whole is balanced upon a discriminating yet unreserved acceptance of an un-ideal and actual social order as the sphere in which the human personality must function. The unified vision of Between The Acts is that of a creative comprehension of life which

grasps and affirms in the one complex action the energies by which we live, the forms in which we actually possess them, and the ends to which we might valuably direct them ... it accepts life as it is, contingent, limited, relative, even as it seeks for its fulfilment: it serves the best possibilities in human beings, but does not set itself above the world in which they exist and must act. <sup>3</sup>

From the point of view of the time theme, Between The Acts is a fitting conclusion to Virginia Woolf's career as a novelist. For it achieves a resolution of the main difficulties which had confronted her in the treatment of time through all her novels. Finally, in a single unified vision, she has comprehended the relationship between mind time and clock time, between the self and society, between the individual and the human race, and between civilization and the natural universe in which it functions. Inner and external become synthesized in eternity.

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<sup>3</sup>Moody, p. 96.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

"What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when... she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air."

(Mrs. Dalloway. P. 5)

"Into the wave that dashes upon the shore, into the wave that flings its white foam to the uttermost corners of the earth, I throw my violets, my offering to Percival."

(The Waves. Pp. 140-41)

"A young man had killed himself.... Always her body went through it, when she was told, first, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window.... She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more."

(Mrs. Dalloway. P. 203)

"Oh I try to imagine how one's killed by a bomb. I've got it fairly vivid - the sensation ... the scrunching and scrambling, the crushing of my bone shade in on my very active eye and brain: the process of putting out the light - painful? Yes. Terrifying. I suppose so.

Then a swoon; a drain; two or three gulps attempting consciousness - and then dot

dot dot.

(Diary. 2 October 1940)

Virginia Woolf's theory of time had its origin in a metaphysical conception of the unreality of clock time and the fluid quality of mind time. The unreality of clock time is emphasized in the early novels by her caricatures of those who were overly concerned with social regulation. Mrs. Woolf found it distressing that many people became so preoccupied with the mechanical notation of clock time that they lost sight of the continuity and heterogeneity of psychological duration, and considered the clock the only valid measurement of experience. What she found even more distressing, however, was that these people often attempted to impose this mechanical order upon the flux of experience and upon other human personalities; they attempted to regulate personality according to a social norm:

I meant to write about the Barnetts and the peculiar repulsiveness of those who dabble their fingers self-approvingly in the stuff of others' souls... Perhaps the root of it all lies in the adulation of the uneducated, and the easy mastery of the will over the poor. And more and more I come to loathe any dominion of one over another; any leadership, any imposition of the will. <sup>1</sup>

It is because they "dabble their fingers self-approvingly in the stuff of others' souls" that Doris Kilman, Sir William Bradshaw and Dr. Holmes are so repugnant. For Virginia Woolf, life was not "a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged", but rather a rushing flood of experiences.

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<sup>1</sup>Diary. 19 March 1919.



As a result of her attempt to minimize the importance of clock time she necessarily overstresses, at first, the role of mind time. This leads inevitably to a noticeable divorce of these two times. To emphasize the differences, one is set off against the other. Clock time, useful in the regulation of the social life, is not valid as a measurement of experience. Experience is measurable only by the rate of the succession of ideas in the mind - by mind time or psychological duration.

The flow of psychological duration necessarily includes elements of the past, introduced through the faculty of memory. These recollections of the past, however, are changed and coloured by the later experiences of the person recalling them and are not, therefore, the same events which occurred in the past. They are present events existing in the present of the mind.

The individual's present being depends to a large extent on his past experiences. The present self is the sum of what the individual has been at various times, the composite of his past selves - but not only this. The individual inevitably forms associations with many other individuals, and these associations are also elements of the present self. Of these other present "selves", the relationships, conscious or subconscious, with everyone and every thing he has ever met, the individual may have many, many hundreds. People and events only heard of, or read about, affect his life. They form a part of what his life at any given moment is. One's experiences, including social contacts, largely affect one's identity.



However, the totality of one's being is influenced also by the experiences of one's parents, grandparents, great-grandparents and so on, back into the remote past to the dawn of civilization. Bernard recognizes that in each individual

the is the old brute, too, the savage, the hairy man who dabbles his fingers in ropes of entrails; and gobbles and belches; whose speech is guttural, visceral - well, he is here. He squats in me. To-night he has been feasted on quails, salad and sweetbread. He now holds a glass of fine old brandy in his paw. He brindles, purrs and shoots warm thrills all down my spine as I sip. It is true, he washes his hands before dinner, but they are still hairy. He buttons on trousers and waistcoats, but they contain the same organs.... That man, the hairy, the ape-like, has contributed his part to my life.... He had brandished his torch in murky by-streets where girls suddenly seem to shine with a red and intoxicating translucency. Oh, he had tossed his torch high! He has led me wild dances!

(The Waves. Pp. 249-50)

Others are selves from the less distant past - the influences of immediate ancestors - and the present selves.

The real self, the Key self, is, as Virginia Woolf illustrated in Orlando, the communication of all these various selves, the establishment of unity among the selves. At the same time, however, each person is highly individual. He is single and entire and, simultaneously, multiple and diverse. The multiplicity of the individual's relationships with others stretches into infinity, so that he is at once a creature of the present and a part of all time, of eternity. All of these selves become one in eternity.

This dissolution of personality into impersonality within the pattern of eternity led Virginia Woolf to re-assess her earlier divorce of clock time and mind time. She realized that just as the multiplicity of personal identities was absorbed and fused within the endless flow of eternity, so also it should be possible to achieve a unified vision of private and public experience, to recognize an essential relationship between them. Although this unified vision of time and experience was not achieved until The Waves and Between The Acts, she knew from the beginning that it should be possible:

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

(Night And Day. Pp. 358-59)

Mrs. Woolf's development through her early novels and up to Between The Acts was a progressive education of her imagination in the enmity to life of that kind of idealism which created a "perpetual disparity between ... the life of solitude and the life of society", and in the necessity for human beings to seek fulfilment in a wholehearted engagement with their actual world, limited and limiting as it is bound to be.

Although Virginia Woolf wrote a great deal of literary criticism, she can well afford to rest her claims on her novels, which show her to be one of the half-dozen novelists of this

century who will not soon die. Her treatment of time and personality in the novels brought alive a profoundly searching concern for the ultimate meanings and values of life; even her death illustrated her concern for the unity and continuity of human experience. In the words of David Daiches:

It was a symbolic ending. All her life she had been fascinated by the problem of the flow of time and its relation to experience. Her novels are full of images of flowing water and other symbols of the flux of life. Personality, as she perceived it, was a unity arising out of continual change, consciousness a continual blending of reminiscence and anticipation. When she united herself with the flux of experience by disappearing into the flowing waters of an English river, anyone who had read and appreciated her books must have felt a sense of shock and of almost personal grief; but he would have understood why she chose to end her life that way. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Daiches, Virginia Woolf, p. 157.

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