THE USE OF OBJECTS IN THE FICTION OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

by

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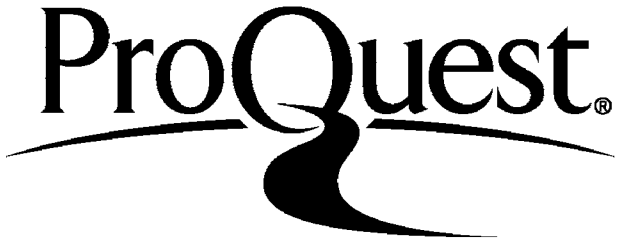

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the use of objects in the fiction of Virginia Woolf. The study centres on Virginia Woolf's middle and mature works: Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, and The Waves. Basically, the object is conceived of in a material sense, as part of the phenomena, inanimate and natural, outside and other than the self. While the object is distinguished from character, from the human being, it is not viewed in isolation, but in relation to character. This correlation is not arbitrary but derives from a relationship maintained (explicitly or implicitly) by Virginia Woolf herself. It is argued that Virginia Woolf's use of objects is in accord with her literary aims to break away from the sociological tradition of Edwardian fiction and to establish the novel as an art form proper. Thus, instead of employing objects in a naturalistic or literal sense alone, Virginia Woolf uses objects artistically, to effect both formal and thematic patterns. It is a use of signification, not of representation. While admitting to the two-fold, formal and thematic use of objects by Virginia Woolf, this study is concerned only with the latter - thematic use. An examination of objects in Virginia Woolf reveals that objects recur in set thematic contexts. These have been assessed as philosophical (epistemological, psychological), social, and existential. Each theme forms an individual chapter and is analysed in respect of each of the three selected books. Finally, objects are established as significantly telling of Virginia Woolf's governing perspective; as revealing her solipsistic and nihilistic outlook.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my supervisor, Mr W.A. Davenport, for his advice and help; Ms. Avital Simchoni, for her comments and encouragement; and Mr Peter R. Gill, for reading the manuscript and advising on final corrections. But most of all I wish to express my deepest gratitude and love to my parents who made the writing of this thesis possible.

INTRODUCTION

In "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" (1924), that famous essay by Virginia Woolf where she launches her most severe attack on Edwardian fiction, Virginia Woolf makes the following statement:

> You see one thing in character, and I another. You say it means this, and I that. And when it comes to writing, each makes a further selection on principles of his own. Thus Mrs Brown can be treated in an infinite variety of ways, according to the age, country, and temperament of the writer.[1]

Arnold Bennett had accused her of creating flimsy, insubstantial characters in Jacob's Room (1922).[2] It was not only a question of literary, but also of philosophical standards: Arnold Bennett was in effect challenging Virginia Woolf's very conception of human character, of man. So Virginia Woolf retaliated with a philosophical argument as well. Human character , she says, does not have a fixed meaning, for each of us understands character differently. The concept of character changes from person to person and from age to age. In other essays Virginia Woolf was to explain the historical and temperamental circumstances which had necessitated a revision in literary standards, and which had shaped her own philosophical and literary perspective. These circumstances, as well as the contention between Virginia Woolf and the Edwardians (Wells, Bennett, Galsworthy) are examined in more detail later. At this point let us refer merely to the philosophical argument that Virginia Woolf raises. She stresses the subjective-historical element as the shaping power of Mrs Brown. Mrs Brown changes according to the individual and historical consciousness of the writer. Turning from the creative to the critical map we can discern a similar pattern.

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[1] Collected Essays, ed. Leonard Woolf, I (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), 325. Hereafter cited as CE.

[2] Arnold Bennett, "Is the Novel Decaying?," Cassell's Weekly, 28 March 1923, p. 47.

The declamatory remarks made by Virginia Woolf do not only serve as a justification, but also as an apt description of the critical history of her fiction.

The criticism of Virginia Woolf has undergone numerous transformations, each generation modelling her anew, and in its own image.[1] She was favourably received in the early twenties, at the beginning of her career as a novelist, and prior to the publication of her more controversial books. Her first two novels, The Voyage Out (1915) and Night and Day (1919) are conventional works, very much within the Edwardian tradition which Virginia Woolf was to later condemn. It is only with Jacob's Room that Virginia Woolf breaks away from her Edwardian heritage, and establishes the lyrical, anti-mimetic standards she was to experiment with and perfect in such later works as Mrs Dalloway (1925), To the Lighthouse (1927) and The Waves (1931). It is especially these latter, Virginia Woolf's mature and distinctly experimental works, that provoked angry reactions. Indeed, Virginia Woolf's reputation was at its lowest during the thirties, when, governed by the social and political changes without, literary opinion proved intolerant towards other than socio-political matters. Virginia Woolf was thus duly condemned by Marxists, and by the no less ideologically-minded Scrutiny school.[2] Post war criticism tended on the whole to be

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1 For the different trends and landmarks in Woolf criticism see Robin Majumdar, Virginia Woolf: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism 1915-1974 (New York: Garland, 1976), pp. xi-xxii; and Hermione Lee, The Novels of Virginia Woolf (London: Methuen, 1977), pp. 1-6.

2 For Marxist critiques see for example, R.D. Charques, Contemporary Literature and Social Revolution (London: Martin Secker, 1933), pp. 108-14; and Dmitri Mirski, The Intelligentsia of Great Britain, trans. Alex Brown (London: Victor Gollancz, 1935), pp. 111-20. For Scrutiny critiques see for example, M.C. Bradbrook, "Notes on the Style of Virginia Woolf," Scrutiny, 1 (May 1932), 33-38; F.R. Leavis, "After To the Lighthouse," Scrutiny, 10 (January 1942), 295-98; and W.H. Mellers, "Mrs Woolf and Life," Scrutiny, 6 (June 1937), 71-75.

affirmative. Perhaps by force of the disillusionment following the war, political issues were left aside, and instead attention centred on the peculiarities of Virginia Woolf's craft and on her personal vision. Here the positive criticism of David Daiches,[1] Joan Bennett,[2] and later Erich Auerbach's brilliant analysis of Virginia Woolf's technique,[3] contributed to a more favourable image of Virginia Woolf, and to growing acclaim. The celebration of Virginia Woolf's sensibility and technical ingenuities was abandoned however in the sixties which gave way to a re-assessment of Virginia Woolf's social relevance, a tendency which has ever since been in the ascent.[4] The social interest in Virginia Woolf has been recently met with a growing psycho-biographical interest. The social and psycho-biographical approaches can be said to presently dominate the Woolf arena.[5]

Apart from the fact that the present social interest in Virginia Woolf is also a product of and reflects existing socio-political trends, it bears little resemblance to the initial social evaluation of Virginia Woolf in the thirties. For rather than discredit, the present social interest in Virginia Woolf seeks to set her social consciousness

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1 The Novel and the Modern World, 2nd ed. (1938; rpt. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960). Virginia Woolf, 2nd ed. (1942; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1963).

2 Virginia Woolf: Her Art as a Novelist, 2nd ed. (1945; rpt. Cambridge: University Press, 1964).

3 "The Brown Stocking," in Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 525-53.

4 The favourable social trend in Woolf criticism was heralded by Herbert Marder, Feminism and Art: A Study of Virginia Woolf (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968).

5 Kindled by Quentin Bell, Virginia Woolf: A Biography, 2 vols. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1972), three case-histories of Virginia Woolf have been recently published: J.O. Love, Virginia Woolf: Sources of Madness and Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Roger Poole, The Unknown Virginia Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); and Phyllis Rose, Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

on a pedestal. The judicial perspective has itself shifted from the more emphatically socialistic banner of the thirties, to the sexist and sexual perspective of the present. Feminism, androgyny,[1] the life of Virginia Woolf as a member of that intriguing group of artist-intellectuals known by the name of Bloomsbury[2] - all tinged with a generous dose of sexual and psychological analysis - characterises contemporary Woolf criticism. The moral momentum of the thirties has all but disappeared and been replaced by the fashionable, the esoteric.

There is little doubt that Women's Lib and the climate by which the movement has been generated plays an important part in the re-appraisal of the social, political, ultimately feminist consciousness of Virginia Woolf.[3] It is true: Virginia Woolf was a feminist. Her two political pamphlets, A Room of One's Own (1929) and Three Guineas (1938), as well as the numerous essays devoted by Virginia Woolf to (usually obscure) women writers, strongly support such a claim.[4] To stress Virginia Woolf's political image is fine as long as it is kept in proportion and limited to these writings where she deliberately set

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1 For Feminism and Androgyny see especially Marder, Feminism and Art; and Nancy Topping Bazin, Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1973).

2 The more serious approach of the earlier studies of Bloomsbury by Irma Rantavaara, Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury, Suomalaisen Tiedeakatemian Toimituksia, Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fenicae, Series B, 82.1 (Helsinki, 1953); and by J.K. Johnstone, The Bloomsbury Group: A Study of E.M. Forster, Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf, and their Circle (London : Secker and Warburg, 1954) which examine the intellectual correlation between Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury is no longer practised, the contemporary interest in the group centring on the eccentricities of its members rather than on their ideas and work.

3 A surprisingly early feminist appreciation is by Mary E. Kelsey, "Virginia Woolf and the She-Condition," Sewanee Review, 39 (October-December 1931), 425- 44. See also Annis Pratt, "Sexual Imagery in To the Lighthouse: A New Feminist Approach," Modern Fiction Studies, 18 (Autumn 1972), 417-31.

4 It is interesting to note that (fuelled no doubt by the Feminist movement) a selection of Virginia Woolf's essays on women has been recently issued under the separate title, Virginia Woolf, Women and Writers (London: The Women's Press, 1970).

out to tackle matters political. In her fiction however, Virginia Woolf rarely deals with political issues. To judge her fiction in political terms is therefore not very relevant. Indeed, a political reading of Virginia Woolf's novels diminishes their true worth, a worth which has little to do with, and which moreover transcends any social or political ideology. Also disturbing is the fact that sometimes feminist appreciations leave the impression that the advocation of women's rights was Virginia Woolf's sole aim and occupation, and even if her political image is stressed by way of argument alone, it must be kept in perspective. After all, Virginia Woolf's husband, Leonard Woolf, was not only a politician, but (among other things) also a creative writer.[1] Is he therefore acclaimed as such? Without wishing to belittle in any way either Virginia Woolf's political, or her husband's creative role, in neither case did it play the major role. Virginia Woolf was foremost a novelist, an aesthete, not an activist. As her friend and professional colleague E.M. Forster noted: "she was a poet, not a philosopher or a historian or a prophetess...." He also said: "It is as a novelist that she will be judged." Indeed, should be judged.[2]

Unlike the feminist interest in Virginia Woolf which is dictated by the external political scene, the psycho-biographical interest is dictated by scholarly factors. It is the ever growing availability of biographical material, not only about Virginia Woolf, but also about

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[1] Better known perhaps for his five volumes of autobiography (for details consult the Bibliography at the end of this work) Leonard Woolf's creative writing includes two novels: The Village in the Jungle (London: Edward Arnold, 1913) and The Wise Virgins (London: Edward Arnold, 1914); a collection of short stories: Stories from the East (London: The Hogarth Press, 1921); and a play: The Hotel (London: The Hogarth Press, 1939).

[2] Virginia Woolf, The Rede Lecture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942); rpt. in Two Cheers for Democracy (London: Edward Arnold, 1951), pp. 261; 258.

many of her Bloomsbury friends, and those on the periphery of the group, which has given rise to the life-study approach to Virginia Woolf.[1] The author's title as a novelist once again suffers under this vogue. On the one hand Virginia Woolf is celebrated as the Queen of Bloomsbury, on the other she is psycho-analysed ad nauseam. But what is the relevance, if at all, to the fiction? It is sad to think that Virginia Woolf's name owes more to Bloomsbury than to her novels, or that her acute sensibility and final act of suicide (and the same can be said of the more recent case of Sylvia Plath) do more for her popularity and fame than her fiction.

Not surprisingly, the pseudo-academic interest in Virginia Woolf has raised an outcry among a number of critics who insist on investigating the novels rather than the life of Virginia Woolf, her art rather than the Bloomsbury myth. The Novels of Virginia Woolf by Hermione Lee, and Virginia Woolf: A Study of her Novels by T.E. Apter[2] are two recent works which try to redress the critical balance in favour of the fiction. Such works remain however in the minority and the sexual-biographical, admittedly more popular interest in Virginia Woolf prevails to ultimately ridicule those studies which dare employ other than trendy standards.

This study is in sympathy with the critical minority and shares the latter's view that the true worth of Virginia Woolf has little to do with "Bloomsbury, lesbianism, madness or suicide"[3] but everything to do with her fiction. And here some of Virginia Woolf's own comments about the function of criticism, interjected in an essay on Defoe, may

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[1] For details of autobiographical material of Virginia Woolf see Bibliography. For auto- and biographical material of Bloomsbury consult Michael Rosenthal, Virginia Woolf (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 261-63.

[2] T.E. Apter, Virginia Woolf: A Study of her Novels (London: Macmillan, 1979).

[3] Lee, p. 1.

serve as a case in point. While no adept of a definite critical discipline, but an eclectic, impressionistic critic,[1] Virginia Woolf presently dismisses extrinsic methods (the historical, the biographical) in favour of formal analysis proper:

> For the book itself remains. However we may wind and wriggle, loiter and dally in our approach to books, a lonely battle waits us at the end. There is a piece of business to be transacted between writer and reader before any further dealings are possible, and to be reminded in the middle of this private interview that Defoe sold stockings, had brown hair, and was stood in the pillory is a distraction and a worry. Our first task, and it is often formidable enough, is to master his perspective. Until we know how the novelist orders his world, the ornaments of that world, which the critics press upon us, the adventures of the writer, to which biographers draw attention, are superfluous possessions of which we can make no use.[2]

This forms also the essential standpoint of the present work. It is not concerned with the psyche, social and political affiliations, or sexual habits of Virginia Woolf, but with her fiction per se. More specifically, this is a study of Virginia Woolf's craft. In no way does the study pretend to exhaust Virginia Woolf's artifice (and it is questionable whether such a task is really feasible). It is concerned with a very specific aspect of Virginia Woolf's art: with her use of objects.

The study itself centres on the three books of the middle period of Virginia Woolf's career as a novelist: Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse and The Waves. While the first two books are usually accepted as Virginia Woolf's better works, The Waves, if somewhat less satisfactory (ostensibly due to its over refined and introverted mood) is still highly representative of Virginia Woolf. Indeed, the three books can be said to form Virginia Woolf's more characteristic utterances, and are possibly

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[1] The most comprehensive study of Virginia Woolf's criticism to date is Mark Goldman, The Reader's Art: Virginia Woolf as Literary Critic (The Hague: Mouton, 1976).

[2] "Robinson Crusoe," CE I, 70.

her experimental fiction at its best.

Although Orlando (1928) too belongs to the middle period, it is, as David Daiches points out, essentially a "jeu d'esprit rather than a serious novel."[1] As such Orlando understandably lacks the maturity which characterises the other middle works. The same can be said also of Jacob's Room and Between the Acts (1941). Although they too are notably "experimental," they are basically landmarks in Virginia Woolf's experimental effort (the one marking its beginning, the other, Virginia Woolf's last and posthumous work, yet again breaking new ground) and therefore lack the cohesion and control of the selected titles where experiment is regulated and matured. The three books may also be distinguished from Virginia Woolf's more conventional works, The Voyage Out, Night and Day and The Years (1937). These books belong to the tradition of sociological fiction and are therefore not as archetypal as her other more ambitous novels which deliberately break away from the naturalistic tradition.[2]

It will be admitted however, that the presumed attestation of the selected titles to Virginia Woolf's essential voice has not been the primary motive in their choice. The selection of the books has been mainly determined by their suitability to the nature of the inquiry. This suitability is both quantitative and qualitative. While a recurrence of objects in the selected books has rendered them amenable to the purpose of the study, it is mainly for their peculiar utilisation of objects that the books have been chosen. After all, objects abound also in Virginia Woolf's other fiction. Their use however , cannot be said to be significant, for it is basically limited to a literal,

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[1] The Novel and the Modern World, p. 214.

[2] For details of novels see Bibliography. Subsequent references to the novels are given in the text.

naturalistic sense. This is not the case with the selected titles. Here the object acquires a far greater significance than when it is used as a naturalistic asset alone. It is with the hidden potential of the object (to be presently explained) that this study is concerned, and the study is necessarily confined to those books which most satisfy this interest.

It will be appreciated that given the nature of the study and its subsequent confinement to a sample of Virginia Woolf's fiction, an historical or comprehensive view of her work has been found impossible, as indeed it would appear irrelevant. Still, an attempt has been made to preserve the essential dynamic quality that characterises Virginia Woolf's fiction, and to view the selected books in relation to each other, as well as to Virginia Woolf's literary career as a whole.[1]

While the three books form the material basis, it is the object that forms the primary focus. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (sixth edition) defines "object" as (1) "Thing placed before eyes or presented to one of the senses; material thing," (3) "Person or thing to which action or feeling is directed...." As a rule, the philosophical notion of "object" as (5) "Thing thought of or apprehended as correlative to the thinking mind or subject," that is, "object" in an abstract sense, is excluded. On the whole, the object is conceived of in a material sense, as part of the phenomena, inanimate and natural, outside and other than the self. Furthermore, the object is distinguished from character, from the human being. Still the object is not viewed in isolation but in relation to the human being. This correlation is not arbitrary but derives from a relationship maintained (explicitly or

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[1] The dynamic nature of Virginia Woolf's fiction is faithfully considered by James Hafley in his study, The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as Novelist (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1954).

implicitly) by Virginia Woolf herself. Thus in Mrs Dalloway for example, the car and plane which appear in the opening scene (5-33) are analysed in relation to the main characters, Clarissa Dalloway, Septimus Smith and his wife Rezia. Similarly, in To the Lighthouse, the central symbol, the lighthouse, is correlated to Mr and Mrs Ramsay and to their youngest child James. Again, in The Waves, the various ornaments which compose the seascape described in the italicised sections are correlated to the human sector as represented by the six voices of Bernard, Neville, Louis, Susan, Jinny and Rhoda.

Although person as object is excluded as a rule, Percival, the seventh and elusive persona in The Waves is analysed as an object. This is because Percival appears more like an object (in the sense noted above) than a character. Percival is basically passive, he is acted upon rather than active himself. Selfless and apparently lacking a consciousness of his own, Percival fails to materialise as an actual character.

But what is the relevance - if at all - of studying Virginia Woolf's use of objects? After all, in her two literary manifestos, "Modern Fiction" (1919) and "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" Virginia Woolf establishes mental experience and character (by which she means sensibility) as the prime aims of the new novel. These aims involve a rejection of the Edwardian literary tradition as represented by Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy. On the one hand Virginia Woolf condemns the values of these writers whom she names "materialists":

> It is because they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body that they have disappointed us, and left us with the feeling that the sooner English fiction turns its back upon them, as politely as may be, and marches, if only into the desert, the better for its soul.

More significantly, Virginia Woolf contests the Edwardian "well made novel" as a false model of life. Her criticism is mainly directed

against Arnold Bennett whose impeccable picture of life she finds thoroughly detestable:

> He can make a book so well constructed and solid in its craftsmanship that it is difficult for the most exacting of critics to see through what chink or crevice decay can creep in. There is not so much as a draught between the frames of the windows, or a crack in the boards. And yet - if life should refuse to live there?

In place of the solid and compact sense of reality expressed by the Edwardian writers Virginia Woolf proposes an ethereal spiritual vision which, she believes, is more true to life, for:

> 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?[1]

Surely there is little room for objects in this idealistic vision of life which asserts spirit over matter, inner over external reality? Indeed, an inclusion of objects would seem at variance with the very aims of Virginia Woolf to break away from the material saturation of Edwardian fiction, in search of a lyrical world, introspective and contemplative in mood. Virginia Woolf remains true to her spiritual vision of life and in her (particularly experimental) fiction sensibility not matter prevails.

But Virginia Woolf's fiction certainly does not consist of the feeling consciousness alone. Every now and again an object looms up to momentarily inhibit the ever pervading sensibility. A Writer's Diary offers a relatively simple explanation as to why objects are significantly included even in the more lyrical of Virginia Woolf's novels. While the diary re-affirms Virginia Woolf's preference for the ethereal, it also displays a conscious effort on her part to temper in her fiction the visionary with the concrete. As though aware of the dangers involved

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[1] "Modern Fiction," CE II, 104; 106.

in a work too visionary - dangers of diffusion and incoherence - Virginia Woolf is determined to keep in check her natural instinct to "follow the flight." Indeed, viewed from an historical perspective, Virginia Woolf's novels display this very effort, the author alternating the one lyrical novel, with the other novel of fact. Thus the lyrical impressionism of Jacob's Room is followed by the social criticism of Mrs Dalloway, and similarly, the mystical world of The Waves is counterbalanced by the social history of The Years. Virginia Woolf's own comments on The Years (first conceived of as The Pargiters) highlight the dualism of fact and vision between which the novels alternate, and a balance of which Virginia Woolf struggles to maintain in each book individually:

> Everything is running of its own accord into the stream.... What has happened of course is that after abstaining from the novel of fact all these years - since 1919 - and N. & D. [Night and Day] is dead - I find myself infinitely delighting in facts for a change, and in possession of quantities beyond counting: though I feel now and then the tug to vision, but resist it. This is the true line, I am sure, after The Waves - The Pargiters - this is what leads naturally on to the next stage - the essay-novel.[1]

It is precisely for his combination of the concrete and the visionary that Virginia Woolf admires the Russian writer Turgenev. Her praise may be taken as revealing her own ambition to achieve the very same. It is Turgenev's balanced perspective that Virginia Woolf so admires: "Many novelists do the one; many do the other - we have the photograph and the poem. But few combine the fact and the vision; and the rare quality that we find in Turgenev is the result of this double process."[2]

It is possible that the objects that inhabit Virginia Woolf's own

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[1] A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), p. 189. Hereafter cited as AWD.

[2] "The Novels of Turgenev," CE I, 249.

fictional landscape are part of her effort to maintain some kind of balance between the vision which she prefers, and the concrete which she deems necessary.

But this is only a very partial explantion which has more to do with Virginia Woolf's literary aims than with the reality of her fiction. While it may perhaps explain why objects are significantly included in the fiction, it does not explain how. It has already been suggested that a naturalistic use of objects would be contrary to Virginia Woolf's aims. In order to determine what standards are applied to the object, a further consideration of Virginia Woolf's literary principles is necessary.

Virginia Woolf's argument with the Edwardian writers does not merely entail a re-assessment of the substance, but also of the concept of fiction. Virginia Woolf does not only reject the external social reality in favour of the inner psychological focus, she also contests the naturalistic or mimetic concept of fiction. In this Virginia Woolf is not alone but concurs with the general Bloomsbury code. Declaring war on Naturalism, Bloomsbury asserts an art for art's sake discipline, a pure art dogma, where "significant form"[1] replaces the mimetic and utilitarian standards of the preceding tradition. Whether in art (Impressionism) or in fiction (Edwardian).

As a novelist, Virginia Woolf naturally directs the effort for the purification of art to fiction. Her distrust of mimetic fiction is

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[1] The term "significant form" was first coined by Clive Bell in Art (London: Chatto and Windus, 1914). The book is a somewhat cumbersome treatment of the formalistic art theory of Roger Fry as presented in "An Essay in Aesthetics" (1909); rpt. in Vision and Design (London: Chatto and Windus, 1920), pp. 11-25. In the same essay Fry significantly distinguishes his own formalistic aesthetics from the ethical aesthetics of Tolstoy as presented in What is Art (1898). See also Fry, "Retrospect," in Vision and Design, pp. 188- 99.

rooted in the belief that it is ultimately redundant, not only in essence, but also historically, and more significantly, aesthetically.

Virginia Woolf does not dispute that life is the basic subject matter of fiction. Her argument is against verisimilitude as an end in itself: "The writer's task is to take one thing and let it stand for twenty; a task of danger and difficulty; but only so is the reader relieved of the swarm and confusion of life and branded effectively with the particular aspect which the writer wishes him to see." The novelist should not aim to represent, but to reveal the essence of and elucidate life: "he must seize her treasure from her and let her trash run to waste." Otherwise his work runs the risk of becoming superficial and moreover, dated:

> Stridently, clamorously, life is forever pleading that she is the proper end of fiction and that the more he sees of her and catches of her the better his book will be. She does not add, however, that she is grossly impure; and that the side she flaunts uppermost is often, for the novelist, of no value whatever. Appearance and movement are the lures she trails to entice him after her, as if these were her essence, and by catching them he gained his goal. So believing, he rushes feverishly in her wake, ascertains what fox-trot is being played at the Embassy, what skirt is being worn in Bond Street, worms and winds his way into the last flings of topical slang, and imitates to perfection the last toss of colloquial jargon. He becomes terrified more than anything of falling behind the times: his chief concern is that the thing described shall be fresh from the shell with the down on its head.... But his work passes as the year 1921 passes, as fox-trots pass, and in three years' time looks as dowdy and dull as any other fashion which has served its turn and gone its way.[1]

In "Phases of Fiction" written three years later, in 1929, Virginia Woolf re-states this argument. Mimetic fiction is once more reprimanded as platitudinous:

> Truth-telling is liable to degenerate into perfunctory fact-recording, the repetition of the statement that it was on Wednesday that the Vicar held his mothers' meeting which was often attended by Mrs Brown and Miss Dobson in their pony

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[1] "Life and the Novelist," CE II, 135-36.

> carriage, a statement which, as the reader is quick to perceive, has nothing of the truth in it but the respectable outside.

Similarly, Virginia Woolf reiterates the view that mimetic fiction is historically redundant:

> Already some of the 'great novels' of the past ... are perished except in patches because they were originally bolstered up with so much that had virtue and vividness only for those who lived at the moment that the books were written. Directly manners change, or the contemporary idiom alters, page after page, chapter after chapter, become obsolete and lifeless.[1]

But it is the aesthetic redundancy of mimetic fiction that concerns Virginia Woolf most. In an essay entitled "The Art of Fiction" (1927) the author launches an attack on "the humane as opposed to the aesthetic view of fiction." E.M. Forster's Aspects of the Novel (1927) which is reviewed in the essay, represents the humane view of fiction, and forms the main target of attack. Although Virginia Woolf herself loosely employs "life" as a literary criterion, she presently argues that it is too vague and arbitrary a term. Still, it is neither the vagueness of the term "life," nor the mimetic concept of fiction as such (challenged in the essays noted above), but the aesthetic implications of "life" as a literary criterion that form the crux of the essay's argument. Virginia Woolf maintains that by setting verisimilitude as the ultimate test of fiction, Forster displays total disregard for the aesthetic principles of fiction, and it is this "unaesthetic attitude" that is deplored. "There is not a critic alive now," Virginia Woolf writes, "who will say that a novel is a work of art and that as such he will judge it." The essay ends with a view to changing not only representation as a critical criterion but also the mimetic orientation of fiction at large:

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[1] CE II, 64-65;100.

> If the English critic were less domestic, less assidious to protect the rights of what it pleases him to call life, the novelist might be bolder too. He might cut adrift from the eternal tea-table and the plausible and preposterous formulas which are supposed to represent the whole of the human adventure. But then the story might wobble; the plot might crumble; ruin might seize upon the characters. The novel, in short, might become a work of art.[1]

In "The Narrow Bridge of Art" (1927) Virginia Woolf sets out to propose a new literary form which will be better equipped to account for the modern experience than inherited forms such as lyrical poetry or poetic drama. These inherited forms, Virginia Woolf argues, are obsolete and are no more suited to contain the confusion, the profusion of the times than "a rose leaf to envelop the rugged immensity of a rock."[2] However, as Virginia Woolf proceeds to explain the new literary form - the future novel - conceived of as an amalgamation of poetry, drama and prose, she inadvertently discloses her ambition for the "aesthetification" of fiction. Indeed, in its very conception the future novel draws on formalistic rather than mimetic principles: it is the aesthetic not the moral power of the future novel that Virginia Woolf explores. Ultimately, the relevance of the future novel to the modern reality - the professed objective of the essay - becomes a marginal issue, and the main effort is devoted to an elaboration on the aesthetic potential of the future novel, and by implication of fiction in general.

If, as it is sometimes claimed, Virginia Woolf seems to somewhat falter in her psychological aims[3] (to "record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall," and to "trace the

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1 CE II, 55.

2 CE II, 219.

3 See for example, Daiches, Virginia Woolf, pp. 70-71;Lee, p. 15; and James Naremore, The World Without a Self: Virginia Woolf and the Novel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 60-76.

pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness"[1]), for the most part she remains true to her ambition to free fiction of the mimetic ethos, and to assert it as an art form proper. Indeed, it is possible that far too much has been made of Virginia Woolf's psychological, and too little of her aesthetic designation of fiction. It is possible that if her own fiction were to be freed of the burden of her professed aims to represent the process of consciousness - aims which are not only expressed in vague language, but which have subsequently suffered much misinterpretation - it would emerge as aesthetic rather than as psychological in essence.[2]

That aestheticism runs strong in Virginia Woolf is nothing new, but given the recent tendency to present Virginia Woolf as some kind of social philosopher, it is perhaps necessary to stress this point anew. After all, the social orientation of fiction is, as we have seen, precisely what Virginia Woolf reacted against, indeed, for which she was duly condemned in the thirties. We may not always agree with the viewpoint then expressed, but at least in the thirties Virginia Woolf

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[1] "Modern Fiction," p. 107.

[2] Some of Virginia Woolf's own comments on psychological fiction would seem to corroborate this view. While a great admirer of James and Proust, and one of the main inaugurators of the psychological novel herself, Virginia Woolf warns against the inevitable narcissism of psychological fiction:

> The psychological novelist has been too prone to limit psychology to the psychology of personal intercourse; we long sometimes to escape from the incessant, the remorseless analysis of falling into love and falling out of love, of what Tom feels for Judith and Judith does or does not altogether feel for Tom. We long for some more impersonal relationship. We long for ideas, for dreams, for imaginations, for poetry ("The Narrow Bridge of Art," p. 225).

In "Phases of Fiction" Virginia Woolf yet again argues in favour of poetic rather than emotional truth:

> Indeed the enormous growth of the psychological novel in our time has been prompted largely by the mistaken belief, which the reader has imposed upon the novelist, that truth is always good; even when it is the truth of the psychoanalyst and not the truth of the imagination (CE II, 100).

was presented in her essential aesthetic spirit.[1]

The aesthetic aspects of Virginia Woolf's fiction are many and various. To begin with, many of her major characters are artists: Terence Hewet, the would-be writer in The Voyage Out; Lily Briscoe, the painter in To the Lighthouse; Bernard, the writer and eternal phrase-maker in The Waves; Miss La Trobe, the playwright in Between the Acts. Other characters, such as Rachel Vinrace, heroine of The Voyage Out, Septimus Smith and Clarissa Dalloway, Mrs Ramsay - are all endowed with the artist's sensibility, and if not in effect, are artists in essence. Some of Virginia Woolf's more prevalent themes concern, if directly or indirectly, art, beauty and creativity. The very essence of Virginia Woolf's fiction is aesthetic: Virginia Woolf writes poetic fiction, her novels are intricately woven, resound in image and metaphor, and are infused with a sense of rhyme, rhythm and sound.

The aesthetic effort is also apparent - and this bears on the present study - in Virginia Woolf's use of objects. Having already disparaged a naturalistic use of objects as inconsistent with Virginia Woolf's aims to free fiction of its material saturation, in the light of her other professed aim to ground the novel in art rather than in life, we can now add that it is to such an end that the object is put. The object is used artistically, by which is meant that it is used as a means and for effect rather than in a literal sense or as an end in itself. It is a use of signification, not of representation.

Objects are used artistically both in a formal and a thematic sense. For example, Jacob's room in the novel by that name; Big Ben in

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[1] As in n. 2, p. 2. For more favourable accounts of aestheticism in Virginia Woolf see Forster, Virginia Woolf; and David Cecil, "Virginia Woolf," in Poets and Story-Tellers: A Book of Critical Essays (London: Constable, 1949), pp. 160- 80.

Mrs Dalloway; the lighthouse in To the Lighthouse; the sea in The Waves - all fulfil a centralising role and contribute to the aesthetic cohesion of these works. However, this study is not concerned with the object as a formal device but with the conceptual implications of objects. The question of Symbolism is inevitable in this context and in order to further establish the approach of the study, it is necessary to say something more about Symbolism and Virginia Woolf.

In his analysis of To the Lighthouse Arnold Kettle disputes the suitability of the term Symbolism (conceived of in its more traditional sense, as representation, embodiment of idea) to Virginia Woolf.[1] Indeed, Virginia Woolf herself challenges the applicability of Symbolism to her work. We already know of Virginia Woolf's distaste for mimetic fiction, and she similarly rejects a mimetic concept of Symbolism. Thus, in a letter to her friend, the art critic Roger Fry, Virginia Woolf discredits the critical dissemination of the central symbol of To the Lighthouse. She explains that she conceived the lighthouse as part of the book's design, and adds that although she had expected that it would indeed be interpreted variously, she herself had not thought of the lighthouse in terms of any particular meaning, for, as she declares: "I can't manage Symbolism except in this vague, generalised way."[2] Commenting on The Waves, Virginia Woolf again stresses her preference for a suggestive rather than representative method of Symbolism:

> What interests me in the last stage was the freedom and boldness with which my imagination picked up, used and tossed aside all the images, symbols which I had prepared. I am sure that this is the right way of using them - not in set

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1 Henry James to the Present Day, Vol. II of An Introduction to the English Novel (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1951), p. 91.

2 Quoted by Quentin Bell, Mrs Woolf: 1912-1941, Vol. II of Virginia Woolf: A Biography, p. 129.

> pieces, as I had tried at first, coherently, but simply as images, never making them work out; only suggest.[1]

In "Craftsmanship" (1937) Virginia Woolf conducts a linguistic inquiry, but the central thesis of the essay, regarding the suggestive power of words, may be taken as telling of Virginia Woolf's concept of Symbolism. "In reading," Virginia Woolf writes, "we have to allow the sunken meanings to remain sunken, suggested, not stated; lapsing and flowing into each other like reeds on the bed of a river."[2]

Virginia Woolf's concept of Symbolism is in accord with her literary inclinations in general, and it is basically aesthetic. She is foremost interested in the suggestive and evocative power of the symbol, in its sheer resonance. In this Virginia Woolf is certainly not alone, but shares with other contemporaries, such as Pound, Eliot, Joyce, in whose work the image-symbol acquires a life-power of its own, and is resonant rather than strictly representative.

In his book The Literary Symbol, W. Y. Tindall establishes the ambiguity and essential irreducibility of the symbol. Tindall also places special emphasis on the context of the symbol:

> No constituent image is without context, and every image owes context part of what it bears.... By reciprocal limitation and expansion, image and context, two interacting components of what they create, carry feelings and thoughts at once definite and indefinite. This composite of image and context constitutes that symbol.[3]

This definition can serve as a guideline to Virginia Woolf's concept of and use of Symbolism. Indeed, in the light of the views expressed by Virginia Woolf herself, it is perhaps more appropriate to talk in terms of the circumference or context, rather than of the meaning or representation of her imagery.

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[1] AWD, p. 169.

[2] CE II, 248.

[3] The Literary Symbol (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), p. 9.

Symbolic appreciations of Virginia Woolf abound and vary both in scope and in method. By far the most comprehensive are The Symbolism of Virginia Woolf by N.C. Thakur,[1] and Worlds in Consciousness: Mythopoetic Thought in the Novels of Virginia Woolf by J.O. Love.[2] Then there are the individual articles, such as "Mythic Patterns in To the Lighthouse" by J.L. Blotner,[3] and "The Lighthouse: Face to Face" by F.L. Overcash[4] which, as these titles indicate, relate to the one work only. Some critics, the latter two for example, apply a single discipline in their symbolic reading (mytho-Freudian and religio-Christian) but on the other hand in "Some Aspects of Virginia Woolf's Imagery" Irene Simon employs an eclectic approach and interprets symbols variously.[5]

Allowing for the few exceptions,[6] the more common critical practice falls short of Virginia Woolf's own literary standards. Most critics commit the "symbolic fallacy" and read the symbol in terms of its corresponding meaning alone. Thus the car in the opening scene of Mrs Dalloway is usually explained as a symbol of the state and power. The lighthouse, the central symbol in To the Lighthouse is interpreted more variously. One critic correlates the lighthouse with the individual,[7]

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1 The Symbolism of Virginia Woolf (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

2 Worlds in Consciousness: Mythopoetic Thought in the Novels of Virginia Woolf (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

3 "Mythic Patterns in To the Lighthouse," PMLA , 71 (September 1956), 547-62.

4 "The Lighthouse: Face to Face," Accent, 10 (Winter 1950), 107-23.

5 "Some Aspects of Virginia Woolf's Imagery," English Studies, 41 (June 1960), 180-96.

6 See for example, Irene Simon, "Some Aspects of Virginia Woolf's Imagery"; Stella McNichol, Virginia Woolf: To the Lighthouse, Studies in English Literature, 48 (London: Edward Arnold, 1971), pp. 42-55; and Jean Guiguet, Virginia Woolf and Her Works, trans. Jean Stewart (London: The Hogarth Press, 1965), pp. 398-419.

7 Daiches, Virginia Woolf, p. 86.

while another sees the lighthouse as a symbol of the "rhythm of joy and sorrow in human life,"[1] and yet another interprets the lighthouse as a male symbol.[2] Percival in The Waves is also variously interpreted. James Hafley describes him as "the life of action and behaviour,"[3] but Harvena Richter on the other hand emphasises Percival's mystical and mythical significance.[4] While these views are not erroneous in themselves, they do fail to comply with the author's own principles and thus invariably diminish her art.

Admitting that objects do indeed acquire a symbolic significance in Virginia Woolf, the present study wishes to assess that significance in the light of the author's own principles. Therefore, the immediate and often quite apparent corresponding meaning of the object is neglected. Instead an attempt is made to view the object in a wider perspective, to examine its overall context rather than meaning as such. Indeed, the object is not conceived of as "standing for" but as part of a general circumference.

An examination of objects in the fiction of Virginia Woolf reveals that the author uses objects systematically. Objects recur in set contexts, appear in connection with distinct themes. The study is organised according to these recurring thematic contexts, each of which forms an individual chapter and is analysed in respect of the three selected titles.[5]

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1 Joan Bennett, p. 103.

2 Carl Woodring, Virginia Woolf, Columbia Essays on Modern Writers, 18 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 26.

3 The Glass Roof, p. 113.

4 Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 125-27.

5 Each theme is introduced individually at the beginning of its respective chapter.

Perception is the first context in which the object is viewed. The object is analysed as a starting point for examples of perception, cognition and feeling, that is, both from an epistemological and from a psychological point of view. The object is then assessed from a social perspective. No attempt is made to cover Virginia Woolf's various social concerns, but merely to account for those social themes that are related to objects. Finally, the object is viewed existentially, as a means of providing a significant perspective of the human condition.

It may be pointed out that the different themes in relation to which objects are discussed have not been arbitrarily chosen, but have been dictated by and derived from the novels themselves. It may be further pointed out that while the three books at the centre of this study are all shown to share in their use of objects, this use understandably varies and acquires the individual stamp of each book.

Finally, it will be pointed out that this study, which prefers to view Virginia Woolf in terms of her craft, does not pretend to shed new light on her vision which (perhaps with the exception of its existential evaluation) has all but been exhausted. The study merely wishes to suggest yet another way of approaching Virginia Woolf: to make a case for her use of objects.

1. SUBJECT AND OBJECT AND THE NATURE OF REALITY

Introductory

In Jacob's Room, Virginia Woolf's first large-scale impressionistic work, and the first of her works which firmly establishes her departure from the mimetic tradition of her Edwardian predecessors, in a scene which anticipates the imaginary train ride incorporated two years later in "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown," the hero of the book, Jacob Flanders, on a train journey to Cambridge, is scrutinised by his fellow passenger - a Mrs Norman. Like Virginia Woolf's later impressionistic weaving around Mrs Brown, Mrs Norman presently ruminates about her fellow passenger. Mrs Norman and Jacob are total strangers, this is their first and only encounter, and they never meet again. Mrs Norman's view of Jacob is therefore necessarily subjective and the fruit of her own imagination. Indeed, the elderly lady's reflections are soon interrupted by the author commenting: "Nobody sees anyone as he is, let alone an elderly lady sitting opposite a strange young man in a railway carriage. They see a whole - they see all sort of things - they see themselves[...]" (28). This observation not only holds true for the situation noted above, it also sums up Virginia Woolf's philosophical standpoint at large, a standpoint which may be defined as subjectivism, or as one critic has suggested, as "epistemological relativism."[1] Refuting an absolutist approach, Virginia Woolf maintains that life is inexplicable, a mystery, that this experience called "life" is a lonely, isolated experience, incommunicable from self to self. Her

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[1] See Suzette Henke, "Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse: In Defense of the Woman Artist," Virginia Woolf Quarterly, 2 (Winter and Spring 1975-6), 40.

hesitating, doubting perspective is best illustrated in "Modern Fiction" by the metaphorical denotations of "life" as "a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope," as a "varying," "unknown and uncircumscribed spirit," images which suggest Virginia Woolf's vision of life as elusive and diffuse. For Virginia Woolf the essential truth about life is its irreducibility, unintelligibility, and it is because they present life in this light that Virginia Woolf admires, indeed, prefers the Russian writers (Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov) to their literary colleagues in England:

> It is the sense that there is no answer, that if honestly examined life presents question after question which must be left to sound on and on after the story is over in hopeless interrogation that fills us with a deep, and finally it may be with a resentful, despair. They are right perhaps; unquestionably they see further than we do and without our gross impediments of vision.[1]

The significance of Virginia Woolf's praise of the Russian mind is not so much in its corroboration of her own outlook as it is in its inadvertent qualification of her literary aims. Virginia Woolf summons her contemporaries to look within rather than without, to explore the spiritual and mental domain of human experience rather than its social vestments. Admonishing the secure world picture advocated in Edwardian fiction as no longer valid to the modern reality, Virginia Woolf proposes a doubting sensibility in its place.

It is possible to relate the hazy and hesitating perspective advocated by Virginia Woolf to historical as well as to personal factors.[2] Virginia Woolf herself offers an historical justification of her

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[1] "Modern Fiction," p. 109. For Virginia Woolf on Russian fiction see also "The Russian Point of View," CE I, 238-46.

[2] For the evolution of Virginia Woolf's philosophical perspective see also Richter, Chs. i-ii.

philosophical and literary principles. Thus in "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" Virginia Woolf takes an organic view of modern fiction. She declares that "in or about December, 1910, human character changed" and adds: "All human relations have shifted - those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature."[1] It is now common knowledge that the date chosen by Virginia Woolf to signify the change in perspective refers to the first London exhibition of Post-Impressionist art, organised by her two friends, Roger Fry and Desmond MacCarthy. And at once Virginia Woolf's quarrel with the Edwardian writers assumes a wider significance: it is not a private, isolated quarrel, but a facet of a general revision of standards. Indeed, Virginia Woolf herself regards the new literary trend, for which she acts spokesman, as a single expression of a whole movement, of the modern consciousness at large. Her comprehensive view of modern fiction is also what gives her argument its sound foundation, as Virginia Woolf convincingly argues that the change without has in turn effected a change in literary concepts, that just as the social conventions of the past no longer hold true for the present, neither do the old literary conventions. The new reality has rendered the old world on its literary standards obsolete. Set on expressing the modern reality, the modern writer can do so only by founding new standards, other means.

"Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" merely asserts the interdependency of life and art, but it does not take a very penetrating look into the kind of reality in which modern fiction is rooted. It is in "How it Strikes a Contemporary," an essay written a year previously, that

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[1] CE I, 320; 321.

Virginia Woolf offers further insight into the shaping forces of contemporary literature. Assessing the contemporary literary scene, she values its topicality and strong hold on the reality of the times, but on the other hand admits to its "intellectual poverty." In an attempt to discover the reasons for this flaw, Virginia Woolf turns to the literature of the past. She is struck by the "unabashed tranquillity" and sure belief of her literary ancestors, Wordsworth, Scott, and Jane Austen:

> It is the power of their belief - their conviction, that imposes itself upon us.... They have their judgment of conduct. They know the relations of human beings towards each other and towards the universe.... certainty of that kind is the condition which makes it possible to write. To believe that your impressions hold good for others is to be released from the cramp and confinement of personality.

Turning back to her contemporaries Virginia Woolf concludes that it is their lack of faith that is at the root of a literature poor and flawed:

> So then our contemporaries afflict us because they have ceased to believe. The most sincere of them will only tell us what it is that happens to himself. They cannot make a world, because they are not free of other human beings. They cannot tell stories because they do not believe that stories are true. They cannot generalize. They depend on their senses and emotions, whose testimony is trustworthy, rather than on their intellects, whose message is obscure. And they have perforce to deny themselves the use of some of the most powerful and some of the most exquisite of the weapons of their craft. With the whole wealth of the English language at the back of them, they timidly pass about from hand to hand and book to book only the meanest copper coins. Set down at a fresh angle of the eternal prospect they can only whip out their notebooks and record with agonized intensity the flying gleams, which light on what? and the transitory splendours, which may, perhaps, compose nothing whatever.[1]

But more significantly, Virginia Woolf establishes a correlation between disbelief and subjectivity, relating the insecurity of the modern

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[1] CE II, 159-60.

sensibility to its subsequent egocentricity. Yeats, Virginia Woolf's contemporary, puts forward the same argument - if only more succinctly - in "The Second Coming": "The best lack all conviction, while the worst/ Are full of passionate intensity."

Incertitude is set at the root of the constricted perspective of modern fiction, but what is the cause of the doubting sensibility itself? "The Leaning Tower" (1940) which investigates the relation between socio-political factors and literary creativity provides the answer. The essay cements the thesis previously presented in "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" by taking a closer look at the reality in which literary tendencies are rooted, and by further presenting that reality as the essential shaping force of the doubting sensibility. As in her other essays, also here Virginia Woolf assesses contemporary literature from an historical perspective. Following a deliberation on the social and political immunity enjoyed by her literary forebears, Virginia Woolf argues that as of 1914, the First World War and after, such an immunity is no longer possible. Although the basic status of the modern writer is as of old in that he still enjoys an advantageous economical status, the foundations of his "ivory tower" have been shaken. Unlike his forebears, the modern writer is no longer immune from the events of his time. His work is no product of a private imagination, of "emotion recollected in tranquillity," but a product of the world without, a world shaky and unstable:

> Everywhere change; everywhere revolution. In Germany, in Russia, in Italy, in Spain, all the old hedges were being rooted up; all the old towers were being thrown to the ground. Other hedges were being planted; other towers were being raised. There was communism in one country; in another fascism. The whole of civilization, of society was changing.... towers that were built of gold and stucco were no longer steady towers. They were leaning towers.

The socio-political revolution without has left its ineluctable mark on contemporary literature, "written under the influence of change, under the threat of war." Contemporary literature bears the mark of its times: it is confused, class-and self-conscious. It reflects the frustration of a mind no longer certain about its social position. It is self-conscious because, failing to find security without, the writer has been forced to turn within. Referring back to her contemporaries, Virginia Woolf explains this evolution of the subjective, inward-turning modern sensibility, shown as a product of an age of uncertainty:

> Who can wonder if they have been incapable of giving us great poems, great plays, great novels? They had nothing settled to look at; nothing peaceful to remember; nothing certain to come. During all the most impressionable years of their lives they were stung into consciousness - into self-consciousness, into class-consciousness, into the consciousness of things changing, of things falling, of death perhaps about to come. There was no tranquillity in which they could recollect. The inner mind was paralysed because the surface mind was always hard at work.
>
> Yet if they have lacked the creative power of the poet and the novelist, the power ... that creates characters that live, poems that we all remember, they have had a power which, if literature continues, may prove to be of great value in the future. They have been great egotists. That too was forced upon them by their circumstances. When everything is rocking round one, the only person who remains comparatively stable is oneself. When all faces are changing and obscured, the only face one can see clearly is one's own.[1]

The passage offers a moral vindication for Virginia Woolf's own wavering sensibility, rooting it in the historical and temperamental reality of her times.

But grounded as it may appear in historical circumstances, the relativistic outlook advocated by Virginia Woolf is as firmly rooted in her own personal reality. Indeed, the abundant biographical material on the author confirms a portrait self-searching, timid, insecure. Thus

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[1] CE II, 170; 176-77.

in her diary Virginia Woolf writes: "I enjoy almost everything. Yet I have some restless searcher in me. Why is there not a discovery in life? Something one can lay hands on and say 'This is it'?.... I'm looking: but that's not it - that's not it. What is it? And shall I die before I find it?"[1] Whether innate, or aggravated by other factors such as the early loss of dear ones, possibly also by the melancholy presence of a father determined to involve a whole household in his mourning, or whether Virginia Woolf's acute sensibility be both innate and circumstantial, remains for the psychologist to speculate upon. What remains however quite unequivocal is the actual faltering and apprehensive nature of her mind. We can add that it so happened that her personal temperament found its natural echo in the temperament of her times, that the reality without was so as to offer only further confirmation to the reality within.[2]

But it is possible to consider Virginia Woolf's code of incredulity from yet another perspective, and to view it not merely as a product of temperamental - historical, personal - unrest, but also as having been positively encouraged by her immediate intellectual milieu, that of the Stephen household.

Critic, biographer, and historian of ideas, an Evangelist turned Agnostic, and one of the celebrated thinkers of his time, Leslie Stephen,

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[1] AWD, p. 86.

[2] Virginia Woolf lost her mother, Mrs Julia Duckworth Stephen in 1895, at the age of thirteen. Two years later, her step-sister, Stella Duckworth died, and in 1904, Virginia Woolf lost her father, Sir Leslie Stephen. Her first mental breakdown is recorded as having taken place in 1895, followed by a second, and first suicide attempt, in 1904. The correlation between Virginia Woolf's breakdowns and her parents' deaths suggests that her mental instability was at least in part circumstantial. The Mausoleum Book (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) written by Leslie Stephen in memory of his second wife, Julia, offers a vivid account of his bereavement, and of the gloom and sombre atmosphere which pervaded the Stephen household as a result. For Virginia Woolf's own accounts of her parents' deaths see "Reminiscences" and "A Sketch of the Past," in Virginia Woolf, Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (Sussex: The University Press, 1976), pp. 28-59; 61-137.

in his irascibility and gloom, may have indeed aggravated his daughter's sensitivity, but he also provided her with all the intellectual stimulus she could have wished.[1] An eccentric himself, Leslie Stephen encouraged individuality in the members of his own family - as Virginia Woolf's tribute to her father testifies:

> The relations between parents and children today have a freedom that would have been impossible with my father. He expected a certain standard of behaviour, even of ceremony, in family life. Yet if freedom means the right to think one's own thoughts and to follow one's own pursuits, then no one respected and indeed insisted upon freedom more completely than he did. His sons, with the exception of the Army and Navy, should follow whatever professions they chose; his daughters, though he cared little enough for the higher education of women, should have the same liberty....
>
> It was the same with the perhaps more difficult problem of literature. Even today there may be parents who would doubt the wisdom of allowing a girl of fifteen the free run of a large and quite unexpurgated library. But my father allowed it. There were certain facts - very briefly, very shyly he referred to them. Yet 'Read what you like,' he said, and all his books, 'mangy and worthless', as he called them, but certainly they were many and various, were to be had without asking. To read what one liked because one liked it, never to pretend to admire what one did not - that was his only lesson in the art of reading. To write in the fewest possible words, as clearly as possible, exactly what one meant - that was his only lesson in the art of writing. All the rest must be learnt for oneself.[2]

The individualism encouraged in Virginia Woolf from early childhood, strengthened by a thoroughly perplexed mind, a perplexity partly innate, partly circumstantial and fed by the unsure reality of her times, appears to have found its natural climax in the relativism she was to advocate in her writings.

But causes aside, it remains to be seen how Virginia Woolf's

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[1] For a critical biography of Leslie Stephen see Noel Gilory Annan, Leslie Stephen: His Thought and Character in Relation to his Time (London: McGibbon and Kee, 1951).

[2] "Leslie Stephen," CE IV (1967), 79-80.

philosophical standpoint is incorporated in her fiction. Given the objective of the present study, it will be appreciated that the fictional assimilation of perspective can be referred to only in brief.

Virginia Woolf's doubting sensibility is perhaps most explicitly set rhetorically, as for example, in the above quotation from Jacob's Room. Such cries as "Life is always and inevitably much richer than we who try to express it"[1] intermittently recur throughout her fiction. In The Voyage Out it is the heroine, Rachel Vinrace, who assumes the role of the searcher: "'What I want to know,' she said aloud, 'is this: What is the truth? What's the truth of it all?'" (121). In To the Lighthouse it is Lily Briscoe, the painter, who reiterates this plea. Unlike Rachel who maintains a somewhat idealistic outlook till the end, Lily - older and wiser - realises that there is no absolute, but merely fleeting moments of truth:

> What is the meaning of life? That was all - a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark.... (183)

In The Waves Bernard, the eternal phrase-maker, inadvertently shares Lily's vision when, on recollecting his friends, he admits: "Our friends - how distant, how mute, how seldom visited and little known. And I, too, am dim to my friends and unknown; a phantom, sometimes seen, often not. Life is a dream surely" (236).

Lily and Bernard share more than merely an epistemological quest. Both are artists who approach life from the prism of art, of the creative process. To them "truth" is essentially created, self-made, rather than anything inherent or absolute. Lily's reflection about

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[1] "The Narrow Bridge of Art," p. 229.

the Rayleys, her friends, illustrates this creative conception of knowledge in practice. She weaves a series of scenes round the Rayleys only to admit that "this making up scenes about them, is what we call 'knowing' people, 'thinking' of them, 'being fond' of them! Not a word of it was true; she had made it up; but it was what she knew them by all the same" (196-97).

Lily's realisation that her knowledge of the Rayleys is "made up" is significantly telling of the epistemological role of the artist in Virginia Woolf. A Keatsian at heart (Septimus is a great admirer of Keats whom he recurrently quotes), Virginia Woolf maintains that through his art the artist achieves control over life, arrests meaning. While this aesthetic epistemology is more apparent in her treatment of the artist-figure, it also applies to many of her other characters - Rachel Vinrace, Septimus Smith, Clarissa Dalloway, Mrs Ramsay - who are aesthetically inclined, and share the artist's creative drive. Indeed, the creative principle - central to art - appears to be at the very heart of Virginia Woolf's conception of knowledge as kinetic, as created, as part of a perpetual process of discovery - a conception which may well be traced back to Virginia Woolf's own vocation as artist.

Composed of the emotional or subjective life, of the inner or mental reality, such as dreams, reflections and sensory impressions - the private world of the self - the very substance of Virginia Woolf's fiction reflects her philosophical standpoint. Content is further upheld formally, the impressionistic - some have called it stream of consciousness method - suggesting the flux and flow otherwise associated with life itself.

But the finest assimilation of perspective is probably achieved

in terms of point of view. The individual sensibility not only forms the essential subject matter, it is the very perspective from which the Woolf narrative unfolds. The world is reflected through a given consciousness; coloured by the reflecting sensibility. The narrator does not occupy an omniscient position: on the contrary, as narrator Virginia Woolf often herself professes a doubting voice, to thus only re-enforce the already restricted, inconclusive narrative perspective. Often - as in To the Lighthouse and The Waves in particular - there is not merely one, but several reflecting sensibilities, and indeed, Erich Auerbach rightly describes Virginia Woolf's technique as "multipersonal." Auerbach further relates the technique to Virginia Woolf's vision of reality, the fragmentation of experience into numerous viewpoints, coupled with the authorial doubt, evoking, according to the critic, a basic "haziness, vague indefinability of meaning." Auerbach also assesses the multipersonal technique historically, and views it as a product of an age of change and instability, "of the First World War and after," of "a Europe unsure of itself, overflowing with unsettled ideologies and ways of life, and pregnant with disaster," thus offering further confirmation of Virginia Woolf's own literary apology.[1] Mitchell Leaska has devoted a full-length study to Virginia Woolf's technique which, like Auerbach, he too assesses as telling of the author's relativistic outlook and vision of life as complex, diffuse.[2]

The epistemological appreciations of Virginia Woolf noted above mainly relate to character, to her method of characterisation. But Virginia Woolf's epistemological manipulation of method or point of

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[1] Mimesis, p. 551.

[2] Mitchell A. Leaska, Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse: A Study in Critical Method (London: The Hogarth Press, 1970).

view is not limited to character and can be further discerned in her presentation of objects. Her characters are not only seen in contemplation of each other, but also in contemplation of their surroundings, and objects of perception occupy a central place in Virginia Woolf's work.

While the object of perception, as well as its contemplating consciousness may vary, the act of contemplation remains basically the same. The object is seen in a subjective manner: it is shaped by the contemplating consciousness, and inadvertently becomes an extension, projection of the contemplating consciousness.[1]

It is possible to relate Virginia Woolf's interest in objects of perception to two (themselves related) sources. While Virginia Woolf's general interest in objects of perception may have been encouraged by her fellow Bloomsbury artists, her epistemological use of objects can be traced to Bloomsbury's ideological leader, the Cambridge philosopher, G.E. Moore.

Given that perception is the very raison d'être of the visual arts, it is only to be expected that the Bloomsbury artist and art critic would have been interested in problems of perception. Indeed, problems of perception - such as the artist's vision and peculiar response to visual data, aesthetic appreciation, the translation of visual data into artistic form, etc. - strongly materialise in the art theory and criticism of Roger Fry and Clive Bell.[2]

The aesthetic context of perception that preoccupies the Bloomsbury artist assumes in Virginia Woolf an epistemological context. In this she echoes Moore's similar treatment of perception as put forward

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[1] See also Richter, p. 67.

[2] See for example, Fry, Vision and Design, and Bell, Art.

in many of the essays comprising his Philosophical Studies,[1] but also in such later essays as "A Defence of Common Sense" (1925) and "The Proof of an External World" (1939).[2] With his characteristic analytic vigour, Moore investigates the nature of the knowledge involved in perception and in sense experience in general. Refuting the idealist thesis represented by Berkeley's famous statement that "to be is to be perceived" and that there is no reality independent of a perceiving consciousness, Moore significantly distinguishes between the act of consciousness and the object of consciousness, and asserts the mutual existence and validity of them both. Still, Moore is acutely aware of the complexity of ascertaining the knowledge derived from sense experience. This complexity is partly rooted in the abstract and insubstantial, therefore also somewhat evasive nature of consciousness, which Moore indeed describes as "transparent" and "diaphanous," images which, as is frequently observed, recall Virginia Woolf's similar references to consciousness in "Modern Fiction." There is also the complexity of the actual act of consciousness, which involves the fusion of two kinds of reality, of which the consciousness is the spiritual, and the object of consciousness the material. Given the composite nature of the act of consciousness, the knowledge attained therein will too be of a composite, dual nature. But it is foremost the subjective nature of consciousness which gives rise to Moore's indecisive epistemological position. Together with his American contemporary, the psychologist and philosopher William James,

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[1] G.E. Moore, Philosophical Studies (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922).

[2] These later essays are collected in G.E. Moore, Philosophical Papers (London: George Unwin, 1959). For aspects of perception in Moore and Woolf see also Richter, pp. 19-21.

Moore emphasises the exclusive and partial nature of consciousness.[1] Given the biased core of consciousness it is impossible to conclusively determine whether what is seen is identical with what is, or whether it is a distortion, and if so, to what extent. Moore leaves the appearance-reality controversy unresolved. On the one hand he is truly convinced about the material reality of the object of perception, but on the other hand he is inclined to believe that in the act of perception that reality cannot be conclusively ascertained.

Virginia Woolf and Moore do not share the same outlook. In her spiritual designation of life as of art Virginia Woolf assumes a much more idealistic standpoint than Moore who, while admitting to the existence of mental reality, is far more persistent in his insistence on the existence of the material world, and thus more emphatically a realist. Virginia Woolf and Moore do concur however in their belief concerning the selective and partial nature of the act of consciousness. But this is perhaps as far as their affinity goes: Virginia Woolf and Moore belong to two different disciplines, a difference which it would be well to keep in mind before embarking on too reckless an assessment of their kinship.[2]

Moore's interest in objects of perception is essentially epistemological, his main aim being to assess the kind of knowledge attainable

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[1] Unlike James who explicitly states the subjective nature of the act of consciousness in his, The Principles of Psychology (London: Macmillan, 1890), I, Ch. ix, Moore is not as direct, but his similar position can nonetheless be gleaned especially from his paper, "A Defence of Common Sense."

[2] In his article, "The Philosophical Realism of Virginia Woolf," in English Literature and British Philosophy, ed. S.P. Rosenbaum (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 316-56, S.P. Rosenbaum maintains that on the contrary, Virginia Woolf and Moore have much in common; that they share a basic vision of reality, which the critic defines as a dualism of matter and spirit.

therein. Even Moore's so-called "psychological" observation concerning the partial nature of consciousness is analysed epistemologically, Moore concluding thereupon that knowledge involving sense data is ambivalent and inconclusive.

This is not the case with Virginia Woolf. While her treatment of objects of perception is epistemologically telling, it does not form, as in Moore, an end in itself. On the contrary, the subjective nature of consciousness is put to a psychological use, is employed to enhance character, to ultimately serve a literary end. The psychological useof the object is itself rooted in the epistemological premise that the object is known subjectively, in which case it follows that a character's view of a given object will be necessarily telling of the character itself. Viewed subjectively, the object of perception offers significant insight into the character by whom it is perceived.

Since subjective perception or point of view has already been mentioned in relation to Virginia Woolf's method of characterisation, to refer to its similar use in relation to objects may give rise to some confusion. It is perhaps necessary to begin by stating that two channels of characterisation are herein involved, channels which, while sharing many factors, also differ. Both channels involve a subject (percipient), an object (of perception) and an act of perception. They differ however in the kind of object perceived. In the one channel the object of perception is a human being, in the other the object of perception is non-human. The difference in the kind of object perceived accounts for a difference in the end result of the two channels of characterisation. In the case of a non-human object of perception, the characterisation achieved refers to the percipient alone, who is revealed in the act of perception. Here the actual object of perception

is irrelevant except in a utilitarian sense, in that it provides a stimulus to the percipient, in whose favour the act of perception is manipulated. When the object of perception is itself a human being, the characterisation achieved applies to both the percipient and to the object of perception. Here too the (subjective) mode of perception provides a perspective of the percipient but, given that the object of perception is also a human being, the act of perception necessarily contributes also to the characterisation of the latter. Indeed, here the act of perception is designed so as to provide a perspective primarily of the object of perception. There is little interest in the percipient as such, who merely acts as a means of providing information on the object of perception. It may be pointed out that while much has been written about the latter channel of characterisation (when the object of perception is a human being),[1] relatively little has been written about the characterisation involved in non-human objects of perception.[2] One of the main issues pursued in the present chapter relates to the psychological-cum-characterising power of non-human objects of perception.

Indeed, the psychological use of the object is significant if only because it bears on Virginia Woolf's literary aims to redeem character from its shallow representation in Edwardian fiction. In "Modern Fiction" and "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" in particular,

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1 See for example, Leaska, Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse.

2 An exception is Richter, Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage, Chs. v-vii. It will be admitted that while the present chapter may share with Richter's similar analysis of objects, the two studies differ in their essential aims. In Richter the object is singled out as one of the various constituents of Virginia Woolf's modes of subjectivity, the latter forming the pivot of the work. In the present study on the other hand, it is the object that forms the main focus, the subjective mode to which it is related forming but one of several other contexts in which the object is analysed.

Virginia Woolf deplores the hollowness of the human being portrayed by the Edwardian writer: it is a shallow portrait, devoid of any depth. The Edwardians, Virginia Woolf argues, have

> never once looked at Mrs Brown in her corner. There she sits in the corner of the carriage - that carriage which is travelling, not from Richmond to Waterloo, but from one age of English literature to the next, for Mrs Brown is eternal, Mrs Brown is human nature, Mrs Brown changes only on the surface, it is the novelists who get in and out - there she sits and not one of the Edwardian writers has so much as looked at her. They have looked very powerfully, searchingly, and sympathetically out of the window; at factories, at Utopias, even at the decoration and upholstery of the carriage;[1] but never at her, never at life, never at human nature.

In short, Mrs Brown has been usurped. By relinquishing the paraphernalia by which Mrs Brown is bogged down in Edwardian fiction, in favour of her inner emotional self, Virginia Woolf hopes to restore Mrs Brown's rightful place to fiction.

As in the case of Virginia Woolf's philosophical standpoint, the shift from a sociological to a psychological view of the human being involves certain temperamental - private and historical - factors. Indeed, the psychological shift may be taken as an expression of the change in perspective at large: from the surety professed by Virginia Woolf's literary predecessors, to the individualised and more humble perspective of Virginia Woolf and her contemporaries.

It is possible that Virginia Woolf's psychological interest may have been to some extent stimulated through personal experience; that her own history of mental illness accompanied by hallucinations, states of excitement on the one hand, severe depressions on the other, may have revealed to her the hidden depths of the human psyche, unrevealed

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[1] "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown," p. 330.

because unuttered, and locked within the privacy of the self.[1]

Virginia Woolf's private encounter with "the dark places of psychology" was to find its confirmation in the philosophic and psychological findings of the time. In France - Henri Bergson; in America - William James - were conducting a philosophic inquiry into consciousness. Virginia Woolf is often associated with these names. It has already been established that her depiction of consciousness as "a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope" recalls James's similar references to consciousness as "halo" and "penumbra." Similarly, Virginia Woolf's conception of inner psychological time, of time as diffuse rather than successive, is often compared to Bergson's delineation of time in terms of flux or la durée.

The philosophic inquiries of the human psyche were to acquire their scientific corroboration in the works of Freud, later of Jung, who were attesting to man as an emotional being, complex and obscure. They were writing of the infinite riches of the self, of its unexplored and little-known-of region - the subsconscious - variously, enigmatically expressed in fantasy, in dream. The psychological view of man exploded the myth of man as a rational intelligible being, and replaced it with a portrait of man as fallible, incongruous, abstruse.

Indeed, Virginia Woolf's liaison with psychology, and especially with Freud, was to become a firm one. The Hogarth Press, owned by the Woolfs, was the first to publish Freud's work (later, his collected works) in England, and the Woolfs themselves met the psychologist in

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[1] For accounts of Virginia Woolf's illness see relevant entries in Leonard Woolf, Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Years 1911-1918 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964); Downhill All the Way: An Autobiography of the Years 1919-1939 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1967), and The Journey Not the Arrival Matters: An Autobiography of the Years 1939-1969 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1969).

1939.[1] Freud was also much acclaimed by Bloomsbury in general, and popular among other of the Woolfs' friends and acquaintances. Virginia Woolf's brother and sister-in-law, Adrian and Karin Stephen, and Lytton Strachey's brother and sister-in-law, James and Alix Strachey, played a leading role in the establishment of psycho-analysis in England, James Strachey having trained under Freud himself.

But Virginia Woolf is a writer, not a psychologist, and whatever psychological awareness she may have attained, whether through personal experience, or whether through intellectual exposure, not only assumes the language of her own - the literary - medium, but is further subordinated to the aesthetic banner with which she set out to redeem fiction.

If on the one hand the very substance of her work, composed of the emotional and inner reality of the human being, introspective and inward-turning in mood, suggests a psychological orientation, this turn acquires an extremely economical expression, thus conforming to the "synthesis" and "epitome" which, Virginia Woolf believes, befits the art of fiction.

In her use of objects of perception, Virginia Woolf is able to fuse into one both her psychological and artistic aims. The act of perception is manipulated so as to be revealing of the psychological reality of the percipient. Psychological depth is thus achieved within a compressed framework, and without any sacrifice of aesthetic subtlety. Indeed, of all the so-called "psychological" novelists of her time - Richardson, Proust, Joyce - Virginia Woolf is the most economical in her exploration of consciousness. This economy is apparent in the very size of Virginia Woolf's books, which are relatively short in length, compared to the voluminous (and numerous in volumes) work of the others. This

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[1] For the Woolfs and Freud, see Leonard Woolf, Downhill All the Way, pp. 163-69.

is not to say that Virginia Woolf's portrait of the self is in any way slighted by its aesthetic frame, or that it is in any way less penetrating. It merely means that it is not as obvious as in Richardson or Proust, where the human psyche is all but spread out, dissected to its finest detail. It also means that to discern Virginia Woolf's psychological insight demands that much more effort and concentration on the part of the reader.

Having said all this, all that remains to do is set to the task of studying objects of perception in Virginia Woolf. The inquiry will centre on the object's epistemological and psychological bearings which, as we have seen, are inextricable from each other - subjective perception serving inadvertently in the deciphering of the self.

Finally, the course of this chapter may best be described in terms of a three-fold correlation established in To the Lighthouse. This correlation is voiced by Andrew, one of the Ramsays' eight children, who, in answer to Lily's question as to the nature of his father's, Mr Ramsay's philosophy, replies: "'Subject and object and the nature of reality ...'" (28).

1.1 MRS DALLOWAY

The main bent of Mrs Dalloway, Virginia Woolf's fourth novel, usually seen as her first mature work,[1] is ethical. The various concerns of the book, the philosophical (epistemology, existentialism), the psychological (the study of insanity), the social, are all coloured by the governing ethical tone. Still, it is possible to select any one concern and to view it in isolation from the ethical framework. Such is the course of the following discussion which examines the epistemology of Mrs Dalloway, not from the ethical but from the point of view of objects of perception. If however, at the end of this discussion certain ethical conclusions are reached, the reason for this lies not with the method, but with the book itself.

In spite of the fact that epistemology is a marginal concern in Mrs Dalloway (unlike its predecessor, Jacob's Room, and its successors, To the Lightouse and The Waves where epistemology is central), and is subordinate to the ethical pursuit, it is still quite evident as a theme. The four main characters, Clarissa Dalloway, her former lover Peter Walsh, Septimus Smith, and his young Italian wife, Rezia, are all concerned in one way or another with the question of knowledge.

Clarissa for instance, contests a rational in favour of an intuitive view of life: "She would not say of anyone in the world now that they were this or were that," and adds that: "Her only gift was knowing people almost by instinct" (10; 11). In one of his recollections of Clarissa, Peter throws further light on Clarissa's sceptical outlook. He recalls that in their youth they had both held the view that it is impossible to really know people, and that the self is basically elusive (168-69). Clarissa is a sceptic and a mystic. Like the author herself, she believes in the essential mystery of life.

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[1] See Daiches, Virginia Woolf, p. 61.

Clarissa's transcendental theory is another - the poetic - expression of her scepticism. For as a transcendental theory (which establishes reality as an all-encompassing continuum where all things, human and non-human alike, merge with each other, are held under a single universal act) it too admits to the essential irreducibility and inexplicability of life.

Peter may not share Clarissa's transcendental philosophy, but he does share - if not in theory then in practice - the conception of life's essential mystery which is at the root of Clarissa's transcendentalism. It is possible to say that Peter's main pursuit is epistemological : his energies are concentrated in an effort to fathom, unravel Clarissa. Peter himself admits to this quest:

> No, no, no! He was not in love with her any more! He only felt, after seeing her that morning, among her scissors and silks, making ready for the party, unable to get away from the thought of her; she kept coming back and back like a sleeper jolting against him in a railway carriage; which was not being in love, of course; it was thinking of her, criticizing her, starting again, after thirty years, trying to explain her. (85)

Time and again during that one day in June in which the novel is set Peter's thoughts revert to Clarissa. He painstakingly invokes scene after scene from their shared past, as if by that he were to catch her essence. But just as Peter's scenic invocation of Clarissa is disjointed and fragmented, his final image of her is obscure and incoherent. Clarissa evades Peter to the end. His epistemological quest, far from ending in any substantial conclusion about Clarissa, merely ends in an affirmation of her being: "It is Clarissa, he said/ For there she was." This last and wholly non-qualifying utterance of Peter as he beholds Clarissa at the end of the day, of the party, says nothing at all about Clarissa, it simply states her existence as a fact. Peter's concluding statement thus allows for the essential mystery of the self to resound

as the final truth about Clarissa, perhaps about life itself.

Septimus too in engaged in an epistemological quest, but unlike Peter whose efforts are directed towards the understanding of the one person only, Septimus' efforts aim to decipher life, reality as a whole. In his attempt to reason out his own loss of feeling subsequent to his experience in the war, Septimus surmises that "it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning" (98). Having arrived at this nihilistic possibility, Septimus proceeds to himself furbish the world with meaning. But Septimus, driven mad ostensibly by the war, constructs a totally incomprehensible world, full of ambiguities and contradictions. It is a crazy world where the trees beckon, the dead are alive, and the birds speak Greek. It is a world where human nature is benevolent, yet abhorrent; where peace reigns yet suffering prevails. Like Peter's, also Septimus' quest endswhere it began. For Septimus' vision of truth is ultimately meaningless. His rambling imagination leaves him no more enlightened than his initial nihilistic vision of a world bereft of meaning.

Rezia, Septimus' young Italian wife, is not as ambitious as her husband. She does not wish to resolve the meaning of the world, she merely wishes to untangle Septimus' incomprehensible behaviour. Septimus' madness is the cause of much of Rezia's suffering, and her reasoning out of Septimus' irrational behaviour, is inextricable from the question: "Why should she suffer?" (73). Towards the end of the Smiths' drama it is suggested that Rezia eventually comes to share Septimus' perspective. Together at home, and momentarily secluded from the world outside, Septimus and Rezia unite. Rezia sides with Septimus against the two doctors, Bradshaw and Holmes, who wish to convert Septimus back to "normality," to society. When Dr Holmes arrives to

attend to his patient, Rezia, who had formerly welcomed the doctor, now tries to block his way in. But Dr Holmes pushes her aside and Septimus, in a final effort to preserve his freedom, commits suicide. Rezia is not perplexed by Septimus' act. On the contrary, her final impression of Dr Holmes "dark against the window" (167) indicates that she has eventually come to share Septimus' view of Dr Holmes, indeed, to share Septimus' vision. And if Rezia eventually shares Septimus' vision it means that like Septimus, she too perceives a world irrational and senseless. Rezia's quest then too ends where it began: on a note of a reality inexplicable and obtuse.

In spite of their various social and temperamental differences, and in spite of the different objectives of their quests, the four main characters - Clarissa, Peter, Septimus and Rezia - are all shown to share with each other, as no doubt with the author herself, the same doubting perspective. Clarissa's intuitive and almost religious attitude to life, Peter's failure to construct a conclusive picture of Clarissa, Septimus' incredulous vision, eventually adopted also by Rezia, all point to a basic relativistic code.

But while Virginia Woolf's philosophical perspective - her code of disbelief - can be deduced from the ruminations of the characters, it is also very much diffuse, stretched out over the meandering reflections of the characters. A more consolidated form of Virginia Woolf's doubting voice is given in the opening scene of Mrs Dalloway (5-33). Indeed, like Virginia Woolf's short story "The Mark on the Wall" (1917), the opening scene of Mrs Dalloway works almost like an epistemological exercise per se. The mysterious personage's car which gradually works its way through the London streets until it finally disappears at Buckingham Palace, and the skywriting plane which draws an unintelligible

smoke design in the sky, form the highlights of the opening scene, and are at the centre of the so-called epistemological exercise.

The following pages examine the epistemological use of car and plane. The discussion will first centre on the overall treatment of the two objects, with special reference to Virginia Woolf's doubting sensibility. The discussion will then examine the responses of the main characters (Clarissa and the Smiths), with special reference to the psychological and characterising use of the objects.

The car is first mentioned as it stops outside the flower shop where Clarissa is detained buying flowers for the party she is to hold later that day. The only conclusive information offered about the car's occupant is that he (or she) is of the highest rank. But otherwise, the actual identity of the passenger is concealed: "nobody knew whose face had been seen. Was it the Prince of Wales's, the Queen's, the Prime Minister's? Whose face was it? Nobody knew" (17). The ambiguity of the occupant's identity is sustained on several levels. It is emphasised by way of repetition,[1] the author referring time and again to the ambivalent identity of the passenger:

> The motor car with its blinds drawn and an air of inscrutable reserve proceeded towards Piccadilly, still gazed at, still ruffling the faces on both sides of the street with the same dark breath of veneration whether for Queen, Prince, or Prime Minister nobody knew. The face itself had been seen only once by three people for a few seconds. Even the sex was now in dispute. (19)

Also the authorial perspective contributes to the mystification of the car. The narrator appears to be in no better a judicial position than

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[1] For repetition as method see Reuben Arthur Brower, "Something Central which Permeated: Virginia Woolf and Mrs Dalloway," in The Fields of Light: An Experiment in Critical Reading (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), pp. 123-37. See also Allen McLaurin, Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 149-57.

the characters themselves, and like them she too speculates upon and questions the identity of the passenger. In his analysis of a select passage from To the Lighthouse Erich Auerbach comments on this rhetorical doubt of Virginia Woolf:

> there are other possibilities - hardly definable in terms of syntax - of obscuring and even obliterating the impression of an objective reality completely known to the author; possibilities that is, dependent not on form but on intonation and context ... the author at times achieves the intended effect by representing herself to be someone who doubts, wonders, hesitates, as though the truth about her characters were not better known to her than it is to them or to the reader.[1]

In the opening scene of Mrs Dalloway Virginia Woolf practises this same sceptical role and joins in the common effort to unravel the identity of the passenger in the car. The mystification of the car is further upheld dramatically. The London passers-by ascribe various identities to the passenger, improvising on the three-fold ambiguity of Queen, Prince and Prime Minister. But no one view wins precedence over the other, and even as the car finally disappears at Buckingham Palace, the identity of the passenger remains unresolved.

Similar patterns of incoherence are established in relation to the plane. Indeed, the plane is itself used to sustain the ambiguity already set by the car. As the plane suddenly shoots out into the sky it draws the people's attention away from the car, but only so as to pick up where the car had left off by enacting the very same ambiguity:

> Suddenly Mrs Coates looked up into the sky. The sound of an aeroplane bored ominously into the ears of the crowd. There it was coming over the trees, letting out white smoke from behind, which curled and twisted, actually writing something! making letters in the sky! Everyone looked up.
>
> Dropping dead down, the aeroplane soared straight up, curved in a loop, raced, sank, rose, and whatever it did, wherever it went, out fluttered behind it a thick ruffled bar of white smoke which curled and wreathed upon the sky in letters. But what letters? A C was it? an E, then an L? Only for a moment did they lie still; then they moved and

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[1] Mimesis, p. 535.

> melted and were rubbed out in the sky, and the aeroplane shot further away and again, in a fresh space of sky, bega n writing a K, and E, a Y perhaps? (23)

Ambiguity is once more set rhetorically, the author every now and again pausing to question the letters drawn in the sky. Ambiguity is further upheld dramatically as various members of the London crowd voice different views of the smoke design: "'Blaxo,' said Mrs Coates"; "'Kreemo,' murmured Mrs Bletchley"; "'It's a toffee,' murmured Mr Bowley"(24). But as in the case of the car, no one view wins predominance, and, even as the focus finally shifts away from the plane (back to Clarissa who in the meantime has returned home) the smoke design remains unresolved.

Before the epistemological inquiry is carried any further, it should be pointed out that the ambiguity ascribed to car and plane basically applies to their epistemological use. But both car and plane function on many other levels to which the concept of ambiguity is only partly relevant, if at all.

For example, the car carries obvious national-political connotations. As it has been already pointed out, the only unequivocal information offered about the car relates to the eminence of its passenger. This unequivocalness is preserved even as the identity of the passenger is speculated upon, the three-fold conjecture Queen-Prince-Prime Minister sustaining the principle of eminence throughout.

But as a symbol of the state, of authority and power, the car also acts as a social or status symbol. Whatever the identity of the passenger, he/she belongs to the elite and ruling class, otherwise represented by the Dalloways and their peers, the Whitbreads, the Bradshaws, Lady Bruton. It is this ruling class that is at the centre of the social critique.

Alternatively, some critics attribute a metaphysical and religious

significance to car and plane.[1] The mysterious, inscrutable quality of the objects sets them as something apart from and above the human reality, as inhabiting a realm that transcends the human being. It is especially the plane that, in its daring, sky-soaring performance seems to suggest that transcendental power to which man himself aspires:

> Away and away the aeroplane shot, till it was nothing but a spark; an aspiration; a concentration; a symbol (so it seemed to Mr Bentley, vigorously rolling his strip of turf at Greenwich) of man's soul; of his determination, thought Mr Bentley, sweeping round the cedar tree, to get outside his body, beyond his house, by means of thought, Einstein, speculation, mathematics, the Mendelian theory - away the aeroplane shot. (32)

The political, social and metaphysical significance of car and plane is perhaps more obvious than their epistemological use and may explain why the latter is indeed often overlooked. But if the epistemological use of the objects is not as apparent as their other uses, it does not mean that it is any less significant. On the contrary, the many-fold as well as systematic mystification of car and plane suggests that their epistemological use is central. A closer examination of the way that the three protagonists of the opening scene - Clarissa and the two Smiths - respond to car and plane will enable us to further ascertain the epistemological use of the objects.

As Clarissa leaves the flower shop her thoughts turn to the car that had caused the commotion outside: "It is probably the Queen, thought Mrs Dalloway.... The Queen going to some hospital; the Queen opening some bazaar ..." (19-20). Although the eminence of the passenger is unequivocal, the actual identity is disputable, so that Clarissa's view, while legitimate, is still a matter of subjective

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[1] See for example, Love, Worlds in Consciousness, p. 152; and McLaurin, p. 154.

conjecture. Indeed, the actual choice of identity is significantly telling of Clarissa herself. As the epitome of status, the Queen forms Clarissa's natural ideal, the ideal of Clarissa's bourgeois class-ridden consciousness. It is interesting to note, for example, that Clarissa herself identifies herself by her titles: "this being Mrs Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs Richard Dalloway" (13). Even as Clarissa responds to the upsurge of energy in the London streets, an upsurge in celebration of spring, of the end of the war, she must draw on her pedigree, as if it were the only way she could partake of the communal celebration:

> For it was the middle of June. The War was over, except for someone like Mrs Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin; or Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed; but it was over; thank Heaven - over. It was June. The King and Queen were at the Palace. And everywhere, though it was still so early, there was a beating, a stirring of galloping ponies, tapping of cricket bats; Lords, Ascot, Ranelagh and all the rest of it; wrapped in the soft mesh of the grey-blue morning air, which, as the day wore on, would unwind them, and set down on their lawns and pitches the bouncing ponies, whose forefeet just struck the ground and up they sprung, the whirling young men, and laughing girls in their transparent muslins who, even now, after dancing all night, were taking their absurd woolly dogs for a run; and even now, at this hour, discreet old dowagers were shooting out in their motor cars on errands of mystery; and the shopkeepers were fidgeting in their windows with their paste and diamonds, their lovely old sea-green brooches in eighteenth-century settings to tempt Americans ... and she, too, loving it as she did with an absurd and faithful passion, being part of it, since her people were courtiers once in the time of the Georges, she, too, was going that very night to kindle and illuminate; to give her party. (6-7).

Also the activity that Clarissa associates with the Queen ("going to some hospital ... opening some bazaar") is borrowed from her own experience. Although Clarissa herself shirks any philanthropic activity (indeed, she is quite sceptical of its worth, and even makes light of her husband's political causes), and although her own social engagements

are limited to parties, the activity Clarissa ascribes to the Queen is the very kind of activity that her peers indulge in, her female peers in particular. For example, Lady Bradshaw, wife of Sir William Bradshaw, the psychiatrist consulted by the Smiths, fills her life with social engagements: "she regretted her stoutness; large dinner-parties every Thursday night to the profession; an occasional bazaar to be opened; Royalties greeted ... interests she had, however, in plenty; child welfare; the aftercare of the epileptic, and photography ..." (105). Lady Bruton, another benevolent aristocrat, is renowned for her philanthropy, and is presently engaged in a "project for emigrating young people of both sexes born of respectable parents and setting them up with a fair prospect of doing well in Canada" (120). Like the Queen, the society ladies with whom Clarissa associates, are public figures, patronesses of society, whose so-called political causes, social engagements, community action, are nothing more than a pastime.

The assimilation of subject and object - of Clarissa and the Queen - is made all the more apparent by Clarissa assuming a royal pose herself. She is described wearing "a look of extreme dignity," and is thus made to physically mirror the identity she ascribes to the unknown figure in the car. Indeed, as Clarissa continues to ruminate about the Queen, she soon exchanges the embryonic image of Queen with that of herself:

> The crush was terrific for the time of day. Lords, Ascot, Hurlingham, what was it? she wondered, for the street was blocked. The British middle classes sitting sideways on the tops of omnibuses with parcels and umbrellas, yes, even furs on a day like this, were, she thought, more ridiculous, more unlike anything there has ever been than one could conceive; and the Queen herself held up; the Queen herself unable to pass. Clarissa was suspended on one side of Brook Street; Sir John Buckhurst, the old Judge, on the other, with the car between them ... when the chauffeur, leaning ever so slightly,

> said or showed something to the policeman, who saluted and raised his arm and jerked his head and moved the omnibus to the side and the car passed through. Slowly and very silently it took its way.
>
> Clarissa guessed; Clarissa knew of course; she had seen something white, magical, circular, in the footman's hand, a disc inscribed with a name - the Queen's, the Prince of Wales's, the Prime Minister's? - which, by force of its own lustre, burnt its way through (Clarissa saw the car diminishing, disappearing), to blaze among candelabras, glittering stars, breasts stiff with oak leaves, Hugh Whitbread and all his colleagues, the gentlemen of England, that night in Buckingham Palace. And Clarissa, too, gave a party. She stiffened a little; so she would stand at the top of her stairs. (20)

The transformation from the image of Queen to the image of Clarissa which is here shown on a mental level, later acquires its more dramatic expression. In her party Clarissa is seen to realise herself in terms of her very ideal. She is seen escorting "her Prime Minister down the room, prancing, sparkling, with the stateliness of her grey hair," and bearing a look of "inexpressible dignity" (192). In her own way, in her own home, Clarissa is Queen too.

Clarissa's response to the car provides a significant insight into her character. It reveals her as a status-ridden, prestige-seeking self, possessed of superficial values and mean interests. As an ideal, the Queen captures the "glittering triviality"[1] of Clarissa and her clique.

Rezia does not belong to Clarissa's class, indeed, she can hardly be more removed from it. She is a simple provincial girl from Milan, estranged from and intimidated by the English society. Rezia's naivete is captured in her response to the car: "But Lucrezia could not help looking at the motor car and the tree pattern on the blinds. Was it the Queen in there - the Queen going shopping?" (18). Like the activity that Clarissa ascribes to the Queen, so is the activity that Rezia

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[1] A.D. Moody, Virginia Woolf, Writers and Critics (Edinburgh : Oliver and Boyd, 1963), p. 19.

ascribes to the Queen rooted in her own personal experience. Clarissa ascribes a formal engagement to the Queen, the kind of activity practised by her own peers, and Rezia ascribes an everyday and simple task to the Queen, something she herself would do. Rezia's uncomplex and simple mind is again revealed in her view of the smoke design drawn by the plane: "It was toffee; they were advertising toffee, a nurse-maid told Rezia. Together they began to spell t ... o ... f ..." (25).

While Rezia's is a refreshing simplicity, lost in the complex mind of Septimus, and corrupted in the subterfuge and sophistication of her social betters - the Dalloways, the Whitbreads, the Bradshaws, Lady Bruton - it is also at the root of Rezia's suffering. Rezia's ordeal is mental: she suffers because she fails to understand the causes of Septimus' breakdown, to comprehend his erratic behaviour. It is thus only when Rezia gains insight into Septimus' madness and shares his vision that she finally also gains peace of mind. Indeed, Septimus' suicide - the culmination of his madness, of his vision too - leaves Rezia enlightened, and she accepts it with total equanimity:

> 'The coward!' cried Dr Holmes, bursting the door open. Rezia ran to the window, she saw; she understood. Dr Holmes and Mrs Filmer collided with each other. Mrs Filmer flapped her apron and made her hide her eyes in the bedroom. There was a great deal of running up and down stairs. Dr Holmes came in - white as a sheet, shaking all over, with a glass in his hand. She must be brave and drink something, he said (What was it? Something sweet), for her husband was horribly mangled, would not recover consciousness, she must not see him, must be spared as much as possible, would have the inquest to go through, poor young woman. Who could have foretold it? A sudden impulse, no one was in the least to blame (he told Mrs Filmer). And why the devil he did it, Dr Holmes could not conceive.
>
> It seemed to her as she drank the sweet stuff that she was opening long windows, stepping out into some garden. But where? The clock was striking - one, two, three: how sensible the sound was; compared with all this thumping and whispering; like Septimus himself. She was falling asleep. But the clock went on striking, four, five, six, and Mrs Filmer waving her apron (they wouldn't bring the body in here, would they?) seemed part of that garden; or a flag. She had

> once seen a flag slowly rippling out from a mast when she stayed with her aunt at Venice. Men killed in battle were thus saluted, and Septimus had been through the War. Of her memories most were happy....
> 'He is dead,' she said, smiling.... (165-66)

Of the three protagonists' responses to car and plane, the responses of Septimus are not only more extensive, but also more interesting, since they reflect his collapsing perspective. For example, Septimus' reaction to the car :

> Everyone looked at the motor-car. Septimus looked. Boys on bicycles sprang off. Traffic accumulated. And there the motor-car stood, with drawn blinds, and upon them a curious pattern like a tree, Septimus thought, and this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him. The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames. It is I who am blocking the way, he thought. Was he not being looked at and pointed at; was he not weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for a purpose? But for what purpose? (18)

Septimus fails to realise that the car is something apart from himself. He confuses the car with himself ("It is I who am blocking the way, he thought") and absorbs it as part of his prophetic vision, translating the car as an apocalyptic symbol. Septimus' response to the plane is ruled by the same visionary perspective:

> So, thought Septimus, looking up, they are signalling to me. Not indeed in actual words; that is, he could not read the language yet; but it was plain enough, this beauty, this exquisite beauty, and tears filled his eyes as he looked at the smoke words languishing and melting in the sky and bestowing upon him, in their inexhaustible charity and laughing goodness, one shape after another of unimaginable beauty and signalling their intention to provide him, for nothing, for ever, for looking merely, with beauty, more beauty! Tears ran down his cheeks. (25)

Once again Septimus fails to dissociate himself from the object of perception. Seen by Septimus, the smoke design drawn in the sky becomes a secret communication meant for him alone, and which Septimus soon translates in terms of his aesthetic vision.

Septimus' failure to dissociate himself from the object of perception, and the incongruity between the object of perception and Septimus' impression of it, are the characterising principles of Septimus' abnormality. Association and exaggeration underlie Septimus' view of his surroundings throughout all but the last chapter of his story. If it is car, plane, trees, birds, dog or man (Peter Walsh), seen by Septimus, they all acquire a prophetic significance, and become part of his visionary landscape.[1]

This pattern prevails until just before Septimus' suicide. At home, alone with Rezia, and in a moment of domestic harmony, Septimus temporarily regains his sanity. Objects are no longer given a prophetic significance, but are viewed dispassionately:

> He began, very cautiously, to open his eyes, to see whether a gramophone was really there. But real things - real things were too exciting. He must be cautious. He would not go mad. First he looked at the fashion papers on the lower shelf, then gradually at the gramophone with the green trumpet. Nothing could be more exact. And so, gathering courage, he looked at the sideboard; the plate of bananas; the engraving of Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort; at the mantlepiece, with the jar of roses. None of these things moved. All was still; all were real. (157)

This is the first time that Septimus relates to objects as apart from himself. He maintains a purely factual view of his surroundings, and does not charge what he sees with emotion. Septimus' regained composure is also apparent in his relation to Rezia. Instead of the usual prophesies and incomprehensible declarations which had previously obstructed their communication, Septimus now conducts a straightforward conversation, on Rezia's own level.

Septimus' sense of well being does not last long however. Once Rezia leaves the room to attend to the neighbour's daughter who has come to bring the evening newspaper, and Septimus is left alone, he relapses into his old self. But this time, although Septimus panics,

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[1] For Septimus and objects of perception, see also Richter, pp.88-89.

he still maintains a very lucid view of his surroundings:

> He started up in terror. What did he see? The plate of bananas on the sideboard. Nobody was there (Rezia had taken the child to its mother; it was bed-time). That was it: to be alone for ever. That was the doom pronounced in Milan when he came into the room and saw them cutting out buckram shapes with their scissors; to be alone for ever.
>
> He was alone with the sideboard and the bananas. He was alone, exposed on this bleak eminence, stretched out - but not on a hill-top; not on a crag; on Mrs Filmer's sitting-room sofa. As for the visions, the faces, the voices of the dead, where were they? There was a screen in front of him, with black bulrushes and blue swallows. Where he had once seen mountains, where he had seen faces, where he had seen beauty, there was a screen.
>
> 'Evans!' he cried. There was no answer. A mouse had squeaked, or a curtain rustled. Those were the voices of the dead. The screen, the coal-scuttle, the sideboard remained to him. Let him, then, face the screen, the coal-scuttle and the sideboard [...]. (160- 61)

Septimus' factual view of his surroundings is maintained throughout the act of suicide. Very coolly, very rationally, Septimus considers various means of suicide - the bread-knife, the gas-fire, razor-blades, the window - and finally settles for the window. Not for a moment does Septimus' perspective falter, he is in full control of his senses, and considers the means of suicide with the utmost perspicuity. Even the old man descending the staircase opposite whom Septimus sees as he is about to throw himself from the window is viewed by Septimus clearly, dispassionately. The lucidity of vision that is maintained by Septimus just prior to and throughout the act of suicide suggests that the suicide is not an act of a sick, but of a sane mind: it is a willed death committed by a man who is in full control of his senses. Why Septimus commits suicide is another matter, and it is discussed in the two following chapters. At this point what is emphasised is that Septimus' final hour is ruled by a dissociated and composed perception of his surroundings, and by implication, by a sane mind.

From Septimus' various responses to objects it is possible to

conclude that objects of perception act as signposts in Septimus' psychic graph. Association and an emotive view of the object are the principles that characterise Septimus' deranged mind. Alternatively, dissociation and a factual view of the object suggest a healthy, "normal" psyche.

But the definition of madness, the differentiation between sanity and insanity (in her diary Virginia Woolf wrote: "Mrs Dalloway has branched into a book; and I adumbrate here a study of insanity and suicide; the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side")[1] is much more complex than the principles drawn above may imply. For, set against the responses of other characters (Clarissa, Rezia, odd Londoners) to the same objects (car and plane for example), Septimus' responses do not appear as substantially, only marginally different. To recall, the only conclusive information about the car relates to the (national) eminence of its passenger, and the only conclusive information about the plane is that it draws letters in the sky. But otherwise, there is no conclusive evidence about either the actual identity of the passenger, or about the actual writing in the sky, and both objects remain shrouded in a halo of mystery. The mystification of car and plane at once sanctions the subjective viewpoint, and indeed, both car and plane elicit a multiplicity of viewpoints from the London crowd. Still, in spite of their variation, all viewpoints (excluding Septimus') relate to the cognitive element of the two objects. Thus, whatever the identity ascribed to the passenger - whether that of Queen, Prince of Wales, or Prime Minister - the basic concept of greatness is preserved. Similarly, however they interpret the letters in the sky, most people in the London crowd still recognise the smoke design as a letter combination. This is not the case with Septimus who fails

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[1] AWD, p. 52.

to respond to the cognitive element of the objects, and maintains a thoroughly idiosyncratic view of car and plane. This failure on Septimus's part sets him apart from the norm, and marks him as deviant (he deviates from the norm set by the majority) or "madman."

However, just as it is possible to view Septimus as apart from the norm, it is also possible to view him as on a par with the norm. For, it is not Septimus alone whose view of the objects is subjective or emotive. Given the essential ambiguity of car and plane, all viewpoints (Clarissa's, Rezia's, for example), necessarily involve a speculative, subjective element as well. And once subjectivity is established as the rule, who is to draw the line between the one subjective view that condemns and the other that vindicates?

Septimus' madness is thus vindicated on purely epistemological grounds. The subjective-speculative principle of perception shared by sane and insane alike suggests that it is but a narrow bridge that separates the two, and that if there is any difference, it is more of degree than of kind. All viewpoints relating to car and plane are subjective; Septimus' view is merely excessively so. Indeed, much has been said of the affinity of the two protagonists, Clarissa and Septimus, although this affinity is usually established on temperamental rather than on epistemological grounds.[1]

But it is not only similitude of perception which suggests that Septimus is wrongly condemned. Even if the opposite argument is adopted, and Septimus is indeed to be viewed as madman, for his "lack of proportion," for maintaining a vision which is in excess of the facts, do not the so-called guardians of society - Dr Holmes, who declares that

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[1] See for example, Alex Page, "A Dangerous Day: Mrs Dalloway Discovers her Double," Modern Fiction Studies, 7 (Summer 1961), 115- 24; and Bazin, p. 112.

there is nothing wrong with Septimus; Dr Bradshaw, in his sheer professionalism; Lady Bruton, in her obsessive causes - display the very same "lack of proportion" for which Septimus is made to pay?

In Mrs Dalloway objects of perception fulfil a distinct epistemological and psychological function, a function which ultimately serves in the main socio-ethical pursuit of the book. The overall treatment of objects of perception, especially the subjective viewpoint which dominates the characters' responses to objects, suggests Virginia Woolf's doubting, fragmentary vision of reality, her sceptical and relativistic outlook. Seen subjectively, the object provides a significant perspective of the perceiving consciousness. Thus the responses of Clarissa, Rezia and Septimus to car and plane were shown as revealing of each character's personality core. The object was further shown to play an important role in the study of insanity, one of the main concerns of the book. Septimus' perception of objects was shown as ruled by an excessively subjective perspective, and by a failure to dissociate himself from the object perceived. Extreme subjectivity and association were defined as the characterising principles of Septimus' insanity. However, a correlation between Septimus' perception of objects and that of the other characters revealed that Septimus' perception differs essentially in degree, not in kind. All perceptions include an element of subjectivity, Septimus' perception is just excessively subjective. Objects of perception were thus shown to be ethically significant, to serve in the vindication of Septimus and invariably in the indictment of the system by which Septimus is wrongly condemned.

S.P. Rosenbaum's assertion that: "A discussion of the epistemology of Mrs Dalloway is an incomplete way of approaching that

novel because so many of its philosophical concerns are also ethical"[1] is relevant only insofar as it establishes the ethical concern of the book. For even when Mrs Dalloway is approached from a singularly epistemological perspective it is still shown to bear the essential ethical stamp of the book.

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[1] "The Philosophical Realism of Virginia Woolf," p. 337.

1.2 TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

To the Lighthouse is regarded by many critics as one of the finest achievements of Virginia Woolf, and even her more adverse critics, such as F.R. Leavis[1] and William Troy,[2] are willing to acknowledge its merit. The book marks an important stage in the author's mastering of her vision; according to James Hafley it is the first novel of Virginia Woolf which marks the "creative modulation of her perspective," and he explains:

> Having given artistic definition to her vision of experience, have realized a total donnée, Virginia Woolf was now able to manipulate that formal perspective in various ways; and thus she was modulating the philosophical perspective as well, discovering new angles, new emphases, new modes, with each new construct. Mrs Dalloway defines - but To the Lighthouse illustrates - her own concept of reality.[3]

The modulation of perspective is indeed both formal and philosophical, and no where else in Virginia Woolf's fiction does vision owe more to form: the formal is ultimately also the philosophical perspective. Auerbach's analysis of To the Lighthouse firmly establishes the methodical assimilation of perspective, the multipersonal method, to all intents and purposes perfected in To the Lighthouse, assessed as significantly telling of Virginia Woolf's concept of reality as fragmented and diffuse.

But To the Lighthouse is not merely a dogged regulation of perspective through literary form, it is also, as S.P. Rosenbaum points out, "Virginia Woolf's most overtly philosophical novel."[4] Indeed,

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1 See "After To the Lighthouse," p. 297.

2 See "Virginia Woolf and the Novel of Sensibility," Symposium, 3 (January-March 1932), 53-63; rpt. in William Troy, Selected Essays, ed. Stanley Edgar Hyman (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1967), p. 73.

3 The Glass Roof, pp. 77-78.

4 "The Philosophical Realism of Virginia Woolf," p. 338.

philosophical problems reverberate throughout the book. These are approached from three main perspectives : lyrical, analytic and aesthetic, represented by Mrs Ramsay, Mr Ramsay and Lily respectively. It has been suggested that Mrs Ramsay professes intuition, Mr Ramsay, reason,[1] and this is apparent in the kind of philosophy they each practise. Mrs Ramsay's is meditative, and relates mainly to aspects of human existence, such as the ephemeral nature of life, of happiness. On the other hand Mr Ramsay is concerned with epistemological problems, such as the scope of human knowledge, the limits of human understanding, problems which he tackles with an analytic vigour true to his profession. Lily Briscoe highlights the difference between Mr and Mrs Ramsay's outlooks:

> Mrs Ramsay sat silent. She was glad, Lily thought, to rest in silence, uncommunicative; to rest in the extreme obscurity of human relationships. Who knows what we are, what we feel? Who knows even at the moment of intimacy, This is knowledge? Aren't things spoilt then, Mrs Ramsay may have asked ... by saying them? Aren't we more expressive thus? (195)

On the other hand the image of the scrubbed kitchen table which symbolises for Lily Mr Ramsay's philosophy (28), captures the analytic realism of Mr Ramsay's mind. But then Lily is herself concerned with philosophical problems which she characteristically approaches from an artistic perspective. Time and again Lily is to demand an explanation of human nature, of human relations. Especially of Mrs Ramsay she is to ask:

> What art was there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into those secret chambers? What device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored? Could the body achieve it, or the mind, subtly mingling in the intricate passages of the brain? or the heart? Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs Ramsay

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[1] See for example, Hafley, p.82.

> one? for it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions or tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge, she had thought, leaning her head on Mrs Ramsay's knee. (60)

Or of life:

> What did it mean? Could things thrust their hands up and grip one; could the blade cut; the fist grasp? Was there no safety? No learning by heart of the ways of the world? No guide, no shelter, but all was miracle, and leaping from the pinnacle of a tower into the air? Could it be ... that this was life? - startling, unexpected, unknown? (204)

But To the Lighthouse is not only a philosophical, it is also a psychological novel. The psychological quest is primarily related to relations within the Ramsay family, to those between parents and children, husband and wife. The strong autobiographical basis of the family portrait, ostensibly based on Virginia Woolf's own family may indeed explain, as F.R. Leavis suggests, the success of the book,[1] but while the biographical connection is perhaps interesting, a strictly biographical reading of the work is ultimately reductive. To the Lighthouse is no more narcissistic than any other novel by Virginia Woolf, and its psychological relevance transcends the personal element, indeed, it is universal.

To the Lighthouse is also a structural masterpiece, and Virginia Woolf's diary entries reveal a conscious effort to master design.[2] The philosophical and psychological quests thus characteristically fuse. Objects of perception form one of the main meeting points of the two quests. While the human being itself forms a main object of perception - the Ramsay family and their odd admixture of friends are forever busy watching and scrutinising each other - also the lighthouse and the island are subjected to a thorough process of scrutiny. The following pages

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[1] "After To the Lighthouse," p. 297. See also AWD, pp. 76-77; and Moments of Being, p. 80.

[2] See for example, AWD, p. 99.

are devoted to an analysis of the way these two objects are seen. As in the preceding analysis of Mrs Dalloway, the present analysis too aims to show how Virginia Woolf's epistemological and psychological concepts are held in the one act of perception; are consolidated in the author's subtle manipulation of objects of perception.

Even as a boy of six, James, the youngest of the Ramsays' eight children is aware of the lighthouse's presence. It forms for him a source of excitement and attraction,and, encouraged by his mother's optimism, of hope too. James's response to Mrs Ramsay's remark which triggers off the novel is characteristic of his approach as a child to the lighthouse:

> 'Yes, of course, if it's fine tomorrow,' said Mrs Ramsay. 'But you'll have to be up with the lark,' she added.
> To her son these words conveyed an extraordinary joy, as if it were settled the expedition were bound to take place, and the wonder to which he had looked forward, for years and years it seemed, was, after a night's darkness and a day's sail, within touch. (5)

The weather fails however and as a result the trip to the lighthouse is postponed. It is only ten years later that James can finally realise his childhood aspiration. As he is about to reach the lighthouse, he recalls the lighthouse of his childhood:

> The Lighthouse was then a silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye that opened suddenly and softly in the evening.... It was sometimes hardly to be seen across the bay. In the evening one looked up and saw the eye opening and shutting and the light seemed to reach them in that airy sunny garden where they sat. (211)

This view of the lighthouse is telling of James as child. As a boy he is mystified by this strange object, distant, and beyond his reach and grasp. James's wonder and bewilderment colour the lighthouse which therefore emerges as fantastic, romantic. But on the other hand it is James's mental age that translates the lighthouse as material form, as something concrete which he can thus identify. The lighthouse

is therefore both "silvery, misty-looking" and a "tower with a yellow eye," the one image evoking the child's wonderment, the other, his mental age. If, as Harvena Richter suggests, "Mrs Woolf's characters ... appear to bring the objective world into subjective consciousness in order to dominate it,"[1] this is all the more true of the child who, engaged in a process of discovery, curbs the object to his perspective so as to render it accessible. The translation of the unfamiliar into subjective language enables the child to grasp his surroundings.[2]

James's childhood view of the lighthouse is not only coloured by the child's consciousness, but also by James's physical relation to the object of perception. While the haziness attributed to the lighthouse suggests an element of mystification, it also suggests that the lighthouse is seen from afar, as indeed James looks at the lighthouse from the shore.[3]

In addition, it is important to remember that this is the child's view of the lighthouse as recollected by James the adolescent, and that ten years separate James from the events recalled. Hence it is possible that James's recollected lighthouse involves an element of idealisation, a possibility made all the more likely by James's present ordeal to successfully steer the boat to the lighthouse and to win his father's approval.

There exists yet another possibility, namely that James's childhood image of the lighthouse has been nurtured in him by his mother. The fairy-tale quality surrounding the lighthouse associated with James's childhood, recalls Mrs Ramsay's own talent for story-telling. This is

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1 Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage, p. 68.

2 For a further discussion of the child's perspective see Richter, pp. 78-82.

3 For a further discussion of the physical perspective see Richter, pp. 83-87.

manifest not only in Mrs Ramsay's reading of The Fisherman's Wife to James, but also in the nursery scene when she is called upon to comfort Cam, frightened of the pig's skull hanging on the wall. Mrs Ramsay quickly transforms the threatening object into an enchanting world:

> she quickly took her own shawl off and wound it round the skull, round and round and round, and then she came back to Cam and laid her head almost flat on the pillow beside Cam's and said how lovely it looked now; how the fairies would love it; it was like a bird's nest; it was like a beautiful mountain such as she had seen abroad, with valleys and flowers and bells ringing and birds singing and goats and antelopes [...]. (132)

Both James's childhood image of the lighthouse as well as the present example suggest a linguistic modification of an initially unpalatable object, translated into an image, or set of images, with which the child can then identify. Thus the lighthouse is not merely a tower, but a personified tower with a playful eye. Such an image may well have come out of a children's book, or, alternatively, may have been provided by someone acquainted with the child's world, which Mrs Ramsay no doubt is.

As James grows older, he sheds his childhood view of the lighthouse. Ten years later James sees the lighthouse differently:

> James looked at the Lighthouse. He could see the white-washed rocks; the tower, stark and straight; he could see that it was barred with black and white; he could see windows in it; he could even see washing spread on the rocks to dry. (211)

The complaisant lighthouse of James's childhood disappears to be replaced with a severe, prosaic lighthouse. It is a black and white tower, perceived in those very terms, distinctly and literally. As in James's childhood image of the lighthouse, also here several elements combine to produce the present image. James no longer responds to the lighthouse as a child, but as an adolescent. The sentimentality and fantasy legitimate for the child, are incompatible now, and the romantic

vision of the child is therefore replaced with the lucid vision of the sixteen year old boy. Once seen from a distance, the lighthouse is now viewed from the sea and, as the Ramsay boat sails on towards its destination, from an ever-diminishing distance. The close range from which the lighthouse is now seen explains the clarity with which James observes the lighthouse, recognising details otherwise blurred when as a child he had looked at the lighthouse from the shore. In addition, the lighthouse is responded to from the present alone, and thus loses the idealising haze and gloss of the recollected lighthouse. These factors, of mental age, time and space, combine with the emotional factor, which is the main shaping power of the lighthouse. The following passage establishes the centrality of the emotion in the shaping of the lighthouse by correlating the visual impression of the lighthouse to a respective feeling in James:

> Indeed they were very close to the Lighthouse now. There it loomed up, stark and straight, glaring white and black, and one could see the waves breaking in white splinters like smashed glass upon the rocks. One could see lines and creases in the rocks. One could see the windows clearly; a dab of white on one of them, and a little tuft of green on the rock.... So it was like that, James thought, the Lighthouse one had seen across the bay all these years; it was a stark tower on a bare rock. It satisfied him. It confirmed some obscure feeling of his about his own character. (230- 31)

What is the emotion which the "stark and straight, glaring white and black" lighthouse confirms? What is it in the lighthouse which makes it so attractive to James and with which he so identifies? To answer these questions it is necessary to examine Mr Ramsay.

In the first part of the novel, "The Window," Mrs Ramsay and James are seen together, indulging in one another's company, and content in their mutual seclusion from the rest of the family. Mr Ramsay, striding in the garden, interrupts this harmony, much to the resentment

of Mrs Ramsay and James. However, it is especially to James that Mr Ramsay poses a threat, and James's hostility towards his father is clearly suggested in his visualisation of Mr Ramsay as "the beak of brass, the arid scimitar" (45). Ten years later, as James sails to the lighthouse, he remembers this hostility:

> Something, he remembered, stayed and darkened over him; would not move; something flourished up in the air, something arid and sharp descended even there, like a blade, a scimitar, smiting through the leaves and flowers even of that happy world and making them shrivel and fall (211).

Indeed, the image of the pointed weapon is the characterising image of James's emotion towards Mr Ramsay. For instance, when Mr Ramsay shatters the boy's hopes about going to the lighthouse, the emotions of James are refined by the author to read: "Had there been an axe handy, a poker, or any weapon that would have gashed a hole in his father's breast and killed him, there and then, James would have seized it" (6).

The imagery is highly charged with Freudian connotations and suggests the Oedipal conflict between father and son as they compete against each other for the wife-mother's love.[1] But the imagery is not exclusively used for psychological purposes, it also serves as a padding in the overall characterisation of Mr Ramsay. Although the image of Mr Ramsay as a sharp weapon etc. is usually presented from the point of view of James, other references, namely authorial, establish this image as objectively true. For instance, there is enough in Mr Ramsay's physique to substantiate James's childhood view of his father. Tall, upright and straight, Mr Ramsay physically mirrors

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[1] For Freudian interpretations of To the Lighthouse see Blotner, "Mythic Patterns in To the Lighthouse," and Glenn Pedersen, "Vision in To the Lighthouse," PMLA, 73 (December 1958), 585-600.

the very impression of the lighthouse as seen by the adolescent James.

Mr Ramsay's mind matches his physical stance. A philosopher by vocation, Mr Ramsay strictly obeys the truth of fact. He is severe, dogmatic and exacting, and subjects himself to the same logical scrutiny he metes out to his fellow men:

> It was a splendid mind. For if thought is like the key-board of a piano, divided into so many notes, or like the alphabet is ranged in twenty-six letters all in order, then his splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one, firmly and accurately, until it reached, say, the letter Q. He reached Q. Very few people in the whole of England ever reach Q.... But after Q? What comes next? After Q there are a number of letters the last of which is scarcely visible to mortal eyes, but glimmers red in the distance. Z is only reached once by one man in a generation. Still, if he could reach R it would be something. Here at least was Q. He dug his heels in at Q. Q he was sure of. Q he could demonstrate. If Q then is Q - R.... 'Then R [...]' He braced himself. He clenched himself. (39-40)[1]

Mr Ramsay's analytical, rational thought recalls the unadorned, and uncompromising lighthouse seen by the adolescent James.

But inasmuch as Mr Ramsay's mind is rational, his temperament is not. Indeed, Mr Ramsay's behaviour is incompatible with his analytical mind, for he is moody, emotional, histrionic. Thus Mr Ramsay appears in the first part of the book pacing the garden, immersed in himself, reciting odd lines of poetry, glaring at Lily and Mr Bankes accidentally caught in his way: "His eyes, glazed with emotion, defiant with tragic intensity, met theirs for a second, and trembled on the verge of recognition ..." (30). Ten years later Lily is again arrested by the same dramatic demeanour: "Suddenly Mr Ramsay raised his head as he passed and looked straight at her, with his distraught wild gaze

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[1] The philosophical caricature of Mr Ramsay has been related to Virginia Woolf's own father, Sir Leslie Stephen, and to the Bloomsbury philosopher, G.E. Moore. See Annan, pp. 98-99; and Rosenbaum, pp. 339-40.

which was yet so penetrating, as if he saw you, for one second, for the first time, for ever ..." (167). These references to Mr Ramsay yet again recall the "glaring white and black" lighthouse that James the adolescent sees.

Imposing, ascetic, and irascible, Mr Ramsay is an eccentric who sets himself apart from his fellow men. He is often seen alone, engrossed in one of his intellectual mazes. He is likened to "a desolate sea-bird, alone" (51), and his life-long friend, Mr Bankes, characterises him by a "solitude which seemed to be his natural air" (25), to crown him with "glories of isolation and austerity" (27). In his solitary existence Mr Ramsay once more recalls the lighthouse, the "stark tower on a bare rock."

The several traits of Mr Ramsay are consolidated in Lily's image of him:

> The kitchen table was something visionary, austere; something bare, hard, not ornamental. There was no colour to it; it was all edges and angles; it was uncompromisingly plain. But Mr Ramsay kept always his eyes fixed upon it, never allowed himself to be distracted or deluded, until his face became worn too and ascetic and partook of this unornamented beauty which so deeply impressed her. (176-77)

This image recalls James's childhood view of Mr Ramsay as sharp, angular. Austere and hard, it captures Mr Ramsay's mind and character, his analytical thought, his determination and aloofness.

The correlation established between the lighthouse and Mr Ramsay is not always implicit and is often quite explicitly expressed. For instance, the very first reference to the lighthouse, made by Mrs Ramsay, distinctly associates the lighthouse with Mr Ramsay. Walking to town with Charles Tansley, Mrs Ramsay draws his attention to the scene before them: "Mrs Ramsay could not help exclaiming, 'Oh, how beautiful!' For the great plateful of blue water was before her; the

hoary Lighthouse, distant, austere, in the midst ..." (16). As she contemplates the seascape inhabited by the single object, Mrs Ramsay soon adds: "That was the view ... that her husband loved." Indeed, Mr Ramsay is to testify to this himself when, even as he at last wins the company of his wife, he admits that:

> He would like a little solitude.... That was the country he liked best, over there; those sandhills dwindling away into darkness. One could walk all day without meeting a soul. There was not a house scarcely, not a single village for miles on end. One could worry things out alone. (80)

And the lighthouse, although not directly mentioned, is forever there, an indispensable part of the foreground.

The affinity between the lighthouse and Mr Ramsay is also marked by their physical closeness. Time and again Mr Ramsay is seen drawing towards the lighthouse, as if he were magnetised by it. Thus, in his determination to master a better intellect, Mr Ramsay is set facing the bay and likened to "a stake driven into the bed of a channel upon which the gulls perch and the waves beat ..." (52). The metaphorical association of Mr Ramsay and the lighthouse is thus at once sustained dramatically.

The assimilation of Mr Ramsay and the lighthouse culminates in James's mature vision of the lighthouse. The "stark and straight, glaring white and black ... stark tower on a bare rock" assembles the essential features of Mr Ramsay - his severity, austerity, his soldierly upright stance. Moreover, in his uncompromising view of the lighthouse James has come to share Mr Ramsay's analytical, rational thought. And, as James looks now at his father, now at the lighthouse, he admits to his identification:

> [Mr Ramsay] sat there bareheaded with the wind blowing his hair about, extraordinarily exposed to everything. He looked very old. 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. (230)

The juxtaposition and sheer proximity of Mr Ramsay and the lighthouse set them as interchangeable, until Mr Ramsay is seen to materially assume the very impression of the lighthouse, transmitting the single emotion which binds father, lighthouse, and son . The voyage, begun in dissent, ends in rapprochement, in reconciliation.

James's final vision of the lighthouse does not merely entail an acceptance of his once rejected father. It is more subtle, mature, and includes a balanced perspective of both father and mother, which Lily, on the shore, is to similarly attain in her painting. While seeing the lighthouse in a new light, which draws on the essential traits of Mr Ramsay, James does not exclude his childhood impression of the lighthouse, associated with Mrs Ramsay, but maintains the two impressions as equally true. James affirms his present image of the lighthouse, only to re-affirm the lighthouse of his childhood: "No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing. The other was the Lighthouse too" (211). And equally affirmed, James's double vision of the lighthouse mimics the emotional equilibrium he otherwise attains in relation to both parents.[1]

The lighthouse, as seen by James the child, as seen by James the adolescent, is clearly conditioned by his particular perspective. Here, several factors, such as mental age, time and space, combined with the emotional and governing factor, merge together to produce the image of the lighthouse. Given the subjection of the lighthouse to

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[1] The same can be said of Virginia Woolf herself who, in writing To the Lighthouse set her own parents in perspective. See AWD, p. 138; and Moments of Being, p. 81.

these factors, it inadvertently fulfils a distinct characterising function: the lighthouse portrays James as child, as adolescent, it marks James's relation to both his parents, and thus indirectly portrays Mr and Mrs Ramsay as well.

The psychological cum characterising use of the object is further manifest in Mrs Ramsay's relation to the lighthouse, a relationship which is primarily established in the first chapter, "The Window," section 11. In one of those rare mystical moments, experienced in total solitude, Mrs Ramsay communes with the lighthouse which flashes at her across the water:

> she looked out to meet that stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of the three, which was her stroke, for watching them in this mood always at this hour one could not help attaching oneself to one thing especially of the things one saw; and this thing; the long steady stroke, was her stroke. Often she found herself sitting and looking, sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at - that light for example....
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> She looked up over her knitting and met the third stroke and it seemed to her like her own eyes meeting her own eyes, searching as she alone could search into her mind and her heart.... She praised herself in praising the light, without vanity, for she was stern, she was searching, she was beautiful like that light. It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone, one leant to things, inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one; felt an irrational tenderness thus (she looked at that long steady light) as for oneself. There rose, and she looked and looked with her needles suspended, there curled up off the floor of the mind, rose from the lake of one's being, a mist, a bride to meet her lover....
>
> she looked at the steady light, the pitiless, the remorseless, which was so much her, yet so little her, which had her at its beck and call (she woke in the night and saw it bent across their bed, stroking the floor), but for all that she thought, watching with fascination, hypnotized, as if it were stroking with its silver fingers some sealed vessel in her brain whose bursting would flood her with delight, she had known happiness, exquisite happiness, intense happiness, and it silvered the rough waves a little more brightly, as daylight faded, and the blue went out of the sea and it rolled in waves of pure lemon which curved and swelled and broke upon the beach and the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind and she felt, It is enough! It is enough! (73-76).

Stella McNichol observes that the lighthouse "somehow represents" Mrs Ramsay.[1] This is true: but while the association of Mrs Ramsay and the lighthouse is perhaps obvious, it is not as simple as it may seem. Let us examine this association in more detail.

Mrs Ramsay identifies with the third stroke of the lighthouse which appears to her steady and searching, and which fills her with a sense of stability and peace. She positively responds to the light which, while confirming her beauty and sternness, also seems remorseless and pitiless. Thus, as W.A. Davenport notes, Mrs Ramsay does not associate a single, but several and conflicting emotions with the lighthouse.[2] Seen in such a way, the lighthouse at once becomes a stronghold of ambiguity which, identified with by Mrs Ramsay, suggests a contrariety in Mrs Ramsay herself. In order to further establish the nature of the correlation drawn between Mrs Ramsay and the lighthouse, a more detailed reading of Mrs Ramsay's contemplation of the lighthouse is necessary.

The lighthouse has an hypnotic-erotic effect on Mrs Ramsay, and lulls her into a sub-conscious state. The pacifying effect which the lighthouse has on Mrs Ramsay recalls her own domestic role as wife, mother, hostess. Mrs Ramsay is a great source of comfort and protection herself. Mrs Ramsay's comforting role is manifest in her relationship with her children, especially with James, to whom she serves as a refuge from the imposing figure of his father. But Mrs Ramsay's love and affection extend to all that surround her. She has a magnetic personality, and she is not merely a source of solace, but of rejuvenation too. Acknowledged for her feminine beauty, Mrs Ramsay has a stimulating

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[1] Virginia Woolf: To the Lighthouse, p. 13.

[2] To the Lighthouse (Virginia Woolf), Notes on English Literature (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), p. 77.

effect on her family and friends. Thus Charles Tansley, ostensibly her husband's admirer, turns to Mrs Ramsay for support. As he accompanies Mrs Ramsay to town, this dry, sarcastic and scientific soul, is revived by Mrs Ramsay's vitality: "Charles Tansley felt an extraordinary pride; felt the wind and the cyclamen and the violets for he was walking with a beautiful woman for the first time in his life" (18). Also Mr Bankes is affected by Mrs Ramsay's reviving powers (55-56), as is Lily, who seeks both physical and emotional union with Mrs Ramsay. Even Augustus Carmichael, self-sufficient and evasive, is happy to accept the Ramsays' invitation to stay at their summer house. But it is mainly in relation to her husband that Mrs Ramsay is made to exert her resurrecting powers. Intellectually frustrated, Mr Ramsay turns to his wife for reassurance: "It was sympathy he wanted, to be assured of his genius, first of all, and then to be taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed, to have his senses restored to him, his barrenness made fertile ..." (44). Mrs Ramsay's reviving power culminates at the dinner party which starts off in discord, each of the people gathered round the table cocooned within himself, and reluctant to relate without. Mrs Ramsay is equally reluctant to socialise, but as hostess she cannot allow herself to be governed by personal preferences and soon accepts that it is she who must remedy the situation: "They all sat separate. And the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her" (96). A word here, a smile there, and Mrs Ramsay is able to gradually draw the disparate selves together, to impose unity and harmony and a general sense of well-being.

But to view Mrs Ramsay in the light of her positive domestic role alone, as she is so often presented, is not only to misrepresent this

one particular character, it is also and perhaps more significantly to misrepresent Virginia Woolf's own concepts. Mrs Ramsay does not identify only with a pacifying and restoring, but also with a pitiless and remorseless light. She associates both positive and negative attributes with the lighthouse. And, while Mrs Ramsay is wont to reject, she is also wont to accept the negative side of the lighthouse: "she looked at the steady light, the pitiless, the remorseless, which was so much her, yet so little her."

The severity Mrs Ramsay associates with the lighthouse is to some extent foreshadowed by her very first impression of the lighthouse as distant and austere (16). While this impression of the lighthouse has been analysed as telling of Mr Ramsay, it is also revealing of Mrs Ramsay herself. For example, when Mr Ramsay passes by his wife communing with the lighthouse, he finds her removed and unapproachable, and suppresses his wish to intrude on her (75-76). The severe impression Mrs Ramsay cuts can be explained by her sombre mood at the time:

> How could any Lord have made this world? she asked. With her mind she had always seized the fact that there is no reason, order, justice: but suffering, death, the poor. There was no treachery too base for the world to commit; she knew that. No happiness lasted; she knew that. She knitted with firm composure, slightly pursing her lips and, without being aware of it, so stiffened and composed the lines of her face in a habit of sternness that when her husband passed ... he could not help noting ... the sternness at the heart of her beauty. (74-75)

But this is not the only occasion that Mrs Ramsay assumes a severe demeanour, and on several other occasions she is shown to inspire in Lily, in Mr Bankes, a feeling of respect and of awe. Mr Bankes senses something destructive in Mrs Ramsay. As he stops to reconsider his friendship with Mr Ramsay prior to and following Mr Ramsay's marriage, Mr Bankes relates to this other and dark side of Mrs Ramsay:

> William Bankes thought of Ramsay: thought of a road in Westmorland, thought of Ramsay striding along a road by himself hung round with that solitude which seemed to be his natural air. But this was suddenly interrupted, William Bankes remembered (and this must refer to some actual incident), by a hen, straddling her wings out in protection of a covey of little chicks, upon which Ramsay, stopping, pointed his stick and said 'Pretty, pretty' ... it seemed to him as if their friendship had ceased, there, on that stretch of road. After that, Ramsay had married. After that, what with one thing and another, the pulp had gone out of their friendship. Whose fault it was he could not say, only, after a time, repetition had taken the place of newness. It was to repeat that they met. (25)

The image of the hen is reminiscent of Mrs Ramsay's highly domesticated role, and inadvertently portrays her as the disruptive force in Mr Ramsay's otherwise tranquil life. Moreover, it appears that Mrs Ramsay's destructive power is at the heart of her very creative power inasmuch as her energy and fecundity pose a threat to and inhibit the creative power of others. The barrenness and sterility Mrs Ramsay so often associates with men is ironically induced by her. This is made quite clear by Mr Bankes who correlates Mr Ramsay's intellectual degeneration with his marriage. Also Charles Tansley regards Mr Ramsay's marriage as the source of Mr Ramsay's undoing. Forced to participate in the domestic ritual - the dinner party- Charles Tansley chuckles to himself: "Of course Ramsay had dished himself by marrying a beautiful woman and having eight children" (104). The view of Mr Bankes and Charles Tansley is further supported by Lily's metaphoric conception of Mr Ramsay:

> So she always saw, when she thought of Mr Ramsay's work, a scrubbed kitchen table. It lodged now in the fork of a pear tree, for they [Lily and Mr Bankes] had reached the orchard. And with a painful effort of concentration, she focused her mind, not upon the silver-bossed bark of the tree, or upon its fish-shaped leaves, but upon a phantom kitchen table, one of those scrubbed board tables, grained and knotted, whose virtue seems to have been laid bare by years of muscular integrity, which stuck there, its four legs in air. (28)

The image of the kitchen table carries the same sting as Mr Bankes's

image of the hen. The key to the sting is in the position of the table, interlocked as it were, in the bark of the tree. While the table is correlated with Mr Ramsay, the tree is correlated with Mrs Ramsay, visualised by James as "a rosy-flowered fruit tree laid with leaves and dancing boughs" (45), and generally referred to in terms of vegetation imagery (recall also Mrs Ramsay's preoccupation with the greenhouse bill). Lily's image of Mr Ramsay thus invariably stigmatises Mrs Ramsay as the smothering force of Mr Ramsay's intellect.

Mrs Ramsay is herself to confirm the remorseless beam of the lighthouse as true of her own character. Endowed with the very searching power she finds in the lighthouse, Mrs Ramsay looks within and confesses her faults. Her confession is triggered off by Mr Carmichael. Of the group of people surrounding Mrs Ramsay, Mr Carmichael alone remains indifferent to her presence. Otherwise secure in her relations, Mrs Ramsay is unsettled by Mr Carmichael's indifference and resolves to win his sympathy. But Mr Carmichael remains unmoved, and Mrs Ramsay is forced to reconsider her character:

> She had been admired. She had been loved. She had entered rooms where mourners sat. Tears had flown in her presence. Men, and women too, letting go the multiplicity of things, had allowed themselves with her the relief of simplicity. It injured her that he should shrink. It hurt her. And yet not cleanly, not rightly. That was what she minded, coming as it did on top of her discontent with her husband; the sense she had now when Mr Carmichael shuffled past, just nodding to her question, with a book beneath his arm, in his yellow slippers, that she was suspected; and that all this desire of hers to give, to help, was vanity. For her own self-satisfaction was it that she wished so instinctively to help, to give, that people might say of her, 'O Mrs Ramsay! dear Mrs Ramsay [...] Mrs Ramsay, of course!' and need her and send for her and admire her? Was it not secretly this that she wanted, and therefore when Mr Carmichael shrank away from her, as he did at this moment, making off to some corner where he did acrostics endlessly, she did not feel merely snubbed back in her instinct, but made aware of the pettiness of some part of her, and of human relations, how flawed they are, how despicable, how self-seeking, at their best. (49)

It is only in the disturbing company of Mr Carmichael, or under the hypnotic beam of the lighthouse that Mrs Ramsay reveals the other, unpleasant side of her personality. Mrs Ramsay is not what she seems. For, beneath her philanthropy, out-going, out-pouring love and affection for all she hides another self, vulnerable, vain, proud.

The incongruity inherent in Mrs Ramsay is externalised and mirrored in her looks. Even as her beauty is introduced, it is shown as equivocal :

> But was it nothing but looks? people said. What was there behind it - her beauty, her splendour? Had he blown his brains out, they asked, had he died the week before they were married - some other, earlier lover, of whom rumours reached one? Or was there nothing? nothing but an incomparable beauty which she lived behind, and could do nothing to disturb? (34)

The authorial doubt is further sustained by the characters who sense a certain ambiguity in Mrs Ramsay's looks. Thus, although he wrongly assumes that Mrs Ramsay is unaware of her beauty, Mr Bankes feels that "there was something incongruous to be worked into the harmony of her face" (35). Lily too finds Mrs Ramsay's beauty deceptive, a facade (59), while Mr Ramsay explicitly refers to "the sternness at the heart" of his wife's beauty (75). The description of Mrs Ramsay as "'The happier Helen of our day'" (32) is crucial in this context. Like her mythological double Mrs Ramsay is not merely a paragon of her sex and beauty, but also a core of conflict and of strife.

The correlation of Mrs Ramsay and the lighthouse is also expressed on a physical level. Mrs Ramsay is often described as upright and erect, and on several occasions her whole bearing assumes the impression of the lighthouse; "She bore about with her, she could not help knowing it, the torch of her

beauty; she carried it erect into any room she entered ..." (48). The assimilation of Mrs Ramsay and the lighthouse culminates at the dinner party when for a moment Mrs Ramsay is seen to actually realise herself as the lighthouse. Viewing the people gathered round the table, harmoniously united and enjoying the social gathering, Mrs Ramsay, previously taut and anxious, can at last triumph in her successful conduct of the evening. At this point she once again loses her self, but not to retrieve it from the lighthouse as she had previously done in her moment of privacy, but to herself become the very same: "It could not last she knew, but at the moment her eyes were so clear that they seemed to go round the table unveiling each of these people, and their thoughts and their feelings, without effort like a light stealing under water ..." (123). This forms the ultimate fusion of character and object, the culmination of Mrs Ramsay's association with the lighthouse.

While the lighthouse is the main object of scrutiny, the island too forms such a point of reference. The contemplation of the island is limited to Cam and is concentrated in the third chapter, "The Lighthouse." The chapter alternates between the voyage to the lighthouse and Lily painting on the shore, two processes which significantly concur.

The voyage starts off in discord. Cam and James, forced against their will to join Mr Ramsay on his trip to the lighthouse, swear to "resist tyranny to the death." However, as the trip progresses, both children lose their initial hostility towards their father, and the three are eventually reconciled. Just as James's reconciliation with his father is suggested in his changed image of the lighthouse, so is Cam's reconciliation suggested in her changing image of the island.

Initially, the island appears to Cam to have the shape of a leaf

(214, 217), then it assumes the shape of a rock (232), until at the end of the voyage the island all but fades into a blur (235). There is a simple explanation for the changing image of the island, namely the distance from which it is seen: the further the boat sails away from the island, the smaller and less real it becomes. But the physical voyage is but indicative of another, emotional voyage, and it is the latter which plays the predominant role in the changing image of the island.

The images used in the description of the island hold the key to the emotional factor. The leaf-shaped island recalls Mrs Ramsay, often described in terms of vegetation imagery. Island and Mrs Ramsay are associated with each other also inasmuch as they are both static. In the first part of the book, "The Window," Mrs Ramsay sits still at the window, posing for Lily's picture. The island too is static, surrounded by the eternal flux of the sea. On the other hand, the rock-shaped island recalls Mr Ramsay, recalls James's mature image of the lighthouse itself related to Mr Ramsay. Given the leaf-Mrs Ramsay, rock-Mr Ramsay correlations, the leaf-cum-rock shaped island suggests Cam's slackening consciousness of her mother on the one hand, her growing consciousness of her father, on the other. However, like James's mature image of the lighthouse, also Cam's changed image of the island does not entail the replacement of mother with father, but rather, Cam's mutual affinity with both. For, even as the island changes from the shape of a leaf to that of a rock, it still remains infused with Mrs Ramsay's presence:

> The island had grown so small that it scarcely looked like a leaf any longer. It looked like the top of a rock which some big wave would cover. Yet in its frailty were all those paths, those terraces, those bedrooms - all those innumerable things. But ... all those paths and terraces and bedrooms were fading and disappearing, and nothing was

> left but a pale blue censer swinging rhythmically this way and that across her mind. It was a hanging garden; it was a valley, full of birds, and flowers, and antelopes [...]. (231-32)

Even as Cam sees the island as rock-shaped, she still associates it with her mother, recalling that wonderful world which Mrs Ramsay had painted for her as a child. And Cam affirms Mrs Ramsay in more than one way. As the voyage progresses Cam becomes more and more submissive towards her father, thus assuming the role once fulfilled by her own mother, maturing to fulfil the very role of wife. Indeed, it is foremost Cam's maturation into womanhood which explains the final image of the island. Neither leaf nor rock, Cam's last glimpse of the island is a blur. Having grown into an adult herself Cam can dispense with both mother and father to assert her own identity instead.

The subjection of the object to the character's point of view leads to other reflections, on ambiguity, on change and relativity. The object changes from person to person, from one situation to the next. The lighthouse is seen differently by different people, and both lighthouse and island are seen differently by the one person himself. This is because within the single point of view the object is further subjected to such factors as mental age, time, space and emotion. Thus James has two versions of the lighthouse, one as child, the other as adolescent, but both of which he holds as equally true. Thus Cam has three versions of the island, versions which between them consolidate the girl's emotional growth. Then there is Mrs Ramsay's lighthouse which is associated with various and conflicting traits. Or, the affinity of lighthouse and island with the two Ramsays - double-fold correlations which set the object as a stronghold of ambiguity. And it is perhaps in these last correlations - of an essentially

ambiguous object with the human being, and of the one object with the two people - that the philosophical merges with the psychological significance of the object to establish the essential complexity of the human being, the essential ambiguity of the self. And indeed, neither Mr nor Mrs Ramsay are merely one thing. They are dissimilar but - as their mutual association with lighthouse and island must surely imply - they are also alike. Mr Ramsay is not merely a tyrannical Victorian patriarch as Herbert Marder views him,[1] but also "a usurped father-husband" as Glenn Pedersen observes.[2] Mrs Ramsay is not merely a safeguard and scapegoat of human (namely marital) relations,[3] but also a domineering, manipulative matriarch. On the surface Mr and Mrs Ramsay may indeed appear as opposites - he is dogmatic, harsh and uncompromising, while she is tolerant, loving and sympathetic - but their contrariety is merely on the surface and deceptive. In essence the two Ramsays are more alike than dissimilar: both are imposing figures; both are self-effacing yet self-seeking; proud and humble; apparently enduring yet at the same time also vulnerable.

But if lighthouse and island attest to the complexity of the human being, surely they attest the same to themselves? This point is often overlooked by critics too eager to categorise the lighthouse in particular. Thus Irene Simon writes that "the lighthouse stands for the Other, the not-self, that which remains above the movement and change."[4] This view is further reiterated by Margaret Church who writes:

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1 Feminism and Art, pp. 51-52.

2 "Vision in To the Lighthouse," p. 587.

3 See E.B. Burgum, "Virginia Woolf and the Empty Room," The Antioch Review, 3 (December 1943), 596-611; rpt. in The Novel and the World's Dilemma (New York : Oxford University Press, 1947), pp. 130-31.

4 "Some Aspects of Virginia Woolf's Imagery," p. 190.

"The Lighthouse is static in the midst of flux; it symbolizes the moment of eternity granted occasionally in the huge ocean of time,"[1] as well as by N.C. Thakur who interprets the lighthouse as a symbol of the "Eternal and the Immutable."[2] Winifred Holtby, on the other hand, correlates the lighthouse with Mrs Ramsay,[3] but Morris Beja reads it as a phallic symbol.[4] It is due to such critics as Herbert Marder,[5] S. Kaehele and H. German[6] who, by stressing its dualistic, ambiguous nature, salvage the lighthouse from over-simplification. Given the mutual affiliation of the lighthouse with both Ramsays, and, given its own multiple, ever-changing image, the lighthouse must invariably remain elusive, inconclusive, a stronghold of ambiguity.

It is W.Y. Tindall,who, in his observation that "The Lighthouse is a suitable goal; for in it each quester can see himself and what he wants,"[7] brings us back to the root of this ambiguity: the subjective viewpoint from which the lighthouse is seen. But the subjectivity-ambiguity connection is surely best summed up by the two Ramsay boys. For, does not Andrew's depiction of his father's philosophy as "Subject and object and the nature of reality" lay down the foundation to James's later realisation that "nothing was simply one thing?"

As in Mrs Dalloway, also in To the Lighthouse objects are used as external points of reference around which the characters' perceptions

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1 Time and Reality: Studies in Contemporary Fiction (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949), pp. 85-86.

2 The Symbolism of Virginia Woolf, p. 79.

3 Virginia Woolf (London: Wishart, 1932), p. 147.

4 Introduction, Virginia Woolf: To the Lighthouse, ed. Morris Beja, Casebook Series (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 29.

5 Feminism and Art, p. 138.

6 "To the Lighthouse: Symbol and Vision," Bucknell Review, 10 (May, 1962), 328-36.

7 The Literary Symbol, p. 160.

converge. The object of perception - the lighthouse, the island - is subjected to the character's point of view, and consequently the object acts as a refractor of the contemplating consciousness. Thus, just as in Mrs Dalloway, Clarissa, Rezia and Septimus are revealed in their perceptions of car and plane, so too in To the Lighthouse, Mrs Ramsay, James and Cam are revealed in their perceptions of lighthouse, of island. To the Lighthouse however, is philosophically more complex than Mrs Dalloway, a complexity which is indeed accounted for in the book's more complex use of objects of perception. In Mrs Dalloway the relation between subject and object is one to one: the object of perception reflects its immediate contemplator alone. In To the Lighthouse on the other hand, the relation between subject and object is many-fold: the object of perception is not only coloured by its immediate contemplator, it is also coloured by the contemplator's relation to other characters. Thus the lighthouse as seen by James is not only coloured by James's personality, but also by James's relation to his parents. The same applies to the island as seen by Cam: the island reveals Cam inasmuch as it defines her relation to her parents. The object acts as a nucleus of personalities, and at once becomes an important unifying force, useful both structurally and thematically.

1.3 THE WAVES

It is generally agreed, James Naremore writes, that The Waves is Virginia Woolf's "ultimate attempt to transform the customary world of the novel."[1] Thus Bernard Blackstone notes that: "In The Waves Virginia Woolf carries her mastery, both in thought and in technique, to its ultimate point."[2] J.O. Schaefer on the other hand attributes maturity to vision, The Waves marking in her view, the "culminating expression of Virginia Woolf's vision of 'reality,'"[3] while Joan Bennett draws attention to method: "The Waves is the fullest expression of the subjective aspect of Virginia Woolf's genius; in it the attention is wholly concentrated upon six people, and the human experience is revealed from within their minds."[4]

But innovative as The Waves may be, as the culmination of Virginia Woolf's experimental effort, it is invariably embedded in the Woolf tradition, and reflects many of Virginia Woolf's general literary traits. Thus form and content are once again inextricable from each other. Indeed, the assimilation of form and content is rooted in the very conception of The Waves, which Virginia Woolf describes as "an abstract mystical eyeless book: a playpoem."[5] In its generic fusion The Waves strongly echoes the future novel proposed in "The Narrow Bridge of Art," and conceived of as an amalgamation of prose, drama and poetry:

> It will be written in prose, but in prose which has many of the characteristics of poetry. It will have something

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1 The World Without a Self, p. 151.

2 Virginia Woolf: A Commentary (London: The Hogarth Press, 1949), p.165.

3 The Three-fold Nature of Reality in the Novels of Virginia Woolf, Studies in English Literature, 7 (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), p. 163.

4 Virginia Woolf: Her Art as a Novelist, p. 37.

5 AWD, p. 137.

> of the exaltation of poetry, but much of the ordinariness of prose. It will be dramatic, and yet not a play. It will be read, not acted.[1]

But while The Waves admittedly employs principles of prose, drama and poetry, it is to poetry that it owes most. And it is in the poetic context that form and content merge: for poetry does not only form the governing idiom, poetry also forms the essential vision of The Waves. Virginia Woolf's conception of poetry is not formalistic, but visionary in essence. By poetry Virginia Woolf means that rarefied world of the mystic, a world of contemplation, of the imagination, a transcendental world. But if the poetic perspective suggests a world of suspended reflection, the methodical perspective suggests the very same. The Waves is a supreme assertion of the voice of subjectivity, of the world of the self. And the world of the self is also meditative, contemplative in essence. Indeed, no where else in her fiction does Virginia Woolf come closer to a recapitulation of the subjective impressionism proclaimed in "Modern Fiction." The "incessant shower of innumerable atoms" strikes one from every page. The Waves is steeped in the ever-feeling, ever-recording consciousness.

But if The Waves comes dangerously close to sheer solipsism, it narrowly escapes it by including a world other than and outside the self. Each set of soliloquies is prefaced with an italicised section depicting a nautical scene. The seascape belongs to that world outside the self, a world composed of natural phenomena, and therefore also universal.

The double mood ingrained in the structure is further mirrored in the plot. The Waves is a group chronicle which follows the life of six friends from childhood to old age. But while the growth from

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[1] CE II, 224.

innocence to experience is shared by all six, each character experiences this growth differently, and in accord with its own essential being. Ultimately, the experience portrayed is both private and shared.

The joint yet separate mood is also held on a dramatic level. The Waves portrays two alternating movements: integration and disintegration; unity and disparity. The characters are seen merging together, then falling apart. Thus in the opening chapter, the six, still children, appear playing together in the garden, and they are yet indistinguishable from one another. But in the second chapter the characters already move apart: the boys are sent to one school, the girls, to another. The individualisation continues in the following chapter, and is broken in the fourth, when the six gather at a farewell party for Percival, their shared friend, who is going to India. In the fifth chapter the six once more separate, and they meet again only in the eighth chapter when they unite in a final meeting at Hampton Court.

Although the subjective mood is tempered with the collective, it is the voice of subjectivity that prevails and reverberates throughout. It is as though the characters were competing with each other to see whose voice it is that is going to reign supreme. There is no conversation, no dialogue in The Waves, but only the ever sustained soliloquy. The book diverges into six subjective viewpoints, equal in strength, equal in endurance. Each character is intent on asserting the one point of view, on advocating the one kind of experience. Thus Bernard sees life from the prism of art. His mind centres on the creative process, and he plays around with life as with words. But Neville's world is made of emotion and love. Unlike Bernard, Neville seeks fulfilment not in stories, but in friendship, relationships.

Louis on the other hand asserts the voice of alienation, of exile. Rhoda, Louis' female counterpart, is likewise intimidated, and she approaches life with fear and apprehension. Susan's world is primeval, biological, and it stands in contrast to Jinny's urban, pleasure-seeking self. Each character is committed to its world, and is all but oblivious to the others.

While each character is committed to a single point of view, there comes a point when all voices seem the same. One of the reasons for this is that all six characters draw on the same highly stylised idiom. It is true that certain images are idiosyncratic (such as Neville's image of the apple tree, Louis' image of the beast stamping, Rhoda's image of the leaping tiger, etc.) but on the whole there is little or no idiosyncrasy of speech. The sheer plethora of impressions likewise contributes to the diffusion of the voice of subjectivity. Each consciousness stretches over such a multitude of impressions that it ultimately dissolves away. At the end, the six streams of impressions seem one endless stream with no particular identity.

On several occasions however, the voice of subjectivity consolidates and is given more apparent coherence. These occasions are related to objects, places, and to Percival.

Like its predecessors, The Waves too employs objects and places as points of reference, which function both structurally and thematically. The garden and nursery of the opening scene; school in the second chapter; the mirror on the landing in the girls' school, variously commented upon by Susan, Jinny and Rhoda (33-36); the willow tree observed by both Neville and Bernard whilst at university (69-71); and Hampton Court where the six gather for a final reunion, are several such points of reference. Objects and places form shared sources of

experience, and provide a means of transition between the individual characters, thus contributing to the aesthetic cohesion of the book. But as a common denominator, the object or place also helps to clarify the differences between the individual consciousnesses; as a common denominator, the object or place provides a focal point for differentiation.

There is no doubt however that Percival - the shared friend of the six - is the main point of reference, the main source of common experience. Percival is "like" a place in the sense that he too is a shared experience. Percival is "like" an object inasmuch as he himself lacks an active consciousness, is latent and passive throughout, and is acted upon rather than active himself. Percival is basically a recipient of consciousness - the consciousness of his six friends, who comment upon and observe him. It is precisely in his passivity that Percival mirrors his friends: as a recipient of consciousness Percival at once becomes a reflector of the acting consciousness. Percival is a refractor of consciousness. He is used in much the same way as car and plane in Mrs Dalloway; as lighthouse and island in To the Lighthouse - used that is, as a starting point for examples of perception and cognition. For us he provides yet another model of Virginia Woolf's philosophical perspective.

Percival makes his début only in the second chapter. He is first introduced by Neville, during the chapel service attended by the three male protagonists at school:

> Now I will lean sideways as if to scratch my thigh. So I shall see Percival. There he sits, upright among the smaller fry. He breathes through his straight nose rather heavily. His blue and oddly inexpressive eyes are fixed with pagan indifference upon the pillar opposite. He would make an admirable churchwarden. He should have a birch and beat little boys for misdemeanours. He is allied with the Latin phrases on the memorial brasses. He sees nothing; he hears nothing. He is remote from us all in a pagan

> universe. But look - he flicks his hand to the back of his neck. For such gestures one falls hopelessly in love for a lifetime. (29-30)

The mode of perception is itself revealing of the biased perspective from which Percival is seen. Percival is noted with acute, meticulous detail, suggesting his percipient's jealous and keen eye. The qualities attributed to Percival, portrayed as a leader, hero, God-like figure, further suggest his percipient's respect and reverence. Although the actual qualities attributed to Percival are borrowed from the immediate context - the church service - the external event only provides the concrete imagery for the realisation of the subject's emotion. Also Percival's apparent indifference and self-sufficient air are rooted in the emotional perspective from which he is viewed. On the one hand it is possible that because Neville so reveres Percival he sees him as remote and aloof. But on the other hand it is possible that Percival's so-called indifference is a direct reflection of Neville's state of mind at the moment of contemplation. After all, Neville is totally engrossed in contemplation of Percival, and as a result oblivious to his surroundings. Percival, as seen by Neville, forms a projection of Neville's own emotion towards Percival, of Neville's immediate mood.

Neville's relation to Percival is not unambivalent however. For although Neville dotes on Percival, he is also contemptuous of his friend. Neville admires Percival's physical strength, but he despises Percival for his intellectual poverty:

> 'Percival has gone now,' said Neville. 'He is thinking of nothing but the match. He never waved his hand as the brake turned the corner by the laurel bush. He despises me for being too weak to play (yet he is always kind to my weakness). He despises me for not caring if they win or lose except that he cares. He takes my devotion; he accepts my tremulous, no doubt abject offering, mixed with contempt as it is for his mind. For he cannot read. Yet when I read Shakespeare or

> Catullus, lying in the long grass, he understands more than Louis. Not the words – but what are words? Do I not know already how to rhyme, how to imitate Pope, Dryden, even Shakespeare? But I cannot stand all day in the sun with my eyes on the ball; I cannot feel the flight of the ball through my body and think of the ball. I shall be a clinger to the outsidesof words all my life. Yet I could not live with him and suffer his stupidity.' (40)

Percival's attributes are again rooted in Neville's own personality. It is possible that because Neville himself lacks physical strength he admires Percival's performance on the sportsfield. But on the other hand, Neville's confidence in his own intellectual ability diminishes Percival's intellectual power. Indeed, it is possible that Neville compensates for his physical inferiority by upraising his intellect, and in turn, depreciating Percival's mind.

Like Neville, also Louis has an ambivalent attitude towards Percival. Louis too admires Percival, but he is contemptuous of his admiration. While Neville is jealous for Percival, Louis is envious of Percival. It is envy that colours Louis' portrait of Percival:

> Look now, how everybody follows Percival. He is heavy. He walks clumsily down the field, through the long grass, to where the great elm trees stand. His magnificence is that of some medieval commander. A wake of light seems to lie on the grass behind him. Look at us trooping after him, his faithful servants, to be shot like sheep, for he will certainly attempt some forlorn enterprise and die in battle. My heart turns rough; it abrades my side like a file with two edges: one, that I adore his magnificence; the other I despise his slovenly accents- I who am so much his superior - and am jealous. (31)

Louis is a foreigner who suffers from an acute inferiority complex, and from a deep yearning to integrate with the English society. Given his alienation, Louis idealises Percival who, in his carefree air and popularity represents the very social being Louis hopes to be. However, while Louis admires, he also envies Percival for the social integration he himself lacks. In his envy Louis deprecates Percival as "heavy," "clumsy," "slovenly." By deprecating Percival Louis is

able to compensate for his own vulnerability. Indeed, the fact that Louis sneers at Percival's unrefined idiom is significantly telling of Louis' inferiority complex. "My father is a Banker in Brisbane and I speak with an Australian accent" Louis doggedly repeats again and again. By sneering at Percival's accent Louis gives his own self away.

While Neville's and Louis' impressions of Percival are telling of each character individually, the impressions also have a universal significance. It is possible to interpret the idealisation of Percival as leader as revealing of the natural heirarchical development among school children in search of inspiration, of leadership. Percival the leader captures the school-boy's consciousness. Percival thus acts as a mirror of both the individual and the collective mood.

Percival's role in the consolidation of the subjective and the collective emotion is fully established only in the fourth chapter. The six friends gather at a farewell party for Percival who is leaving for India. At the same time the party also marks a milestone in the life of all seven, for they are all about to step into the world as adults. The party is thus also a celebration of initiation into adulthood.

As Bernard nears the assigned meeting place he refers to the forthcoming event and states: "We shall dine together. We shall say good-bye to Percival, who goes to India" (99). The remark is almost too banal to be considered significant, but it does capture, especially in tone, much of Bernard's personality. Straightforward and matter of fact, the remark is well in accord with Bernard's role as artist-writer. Bernard is the observer of facts, the collector of details. Life for Bernard is an object of contemplation, of observation, but he himself is never totally involved in life, forever somewhat detached.

In its impersonal, objective tone, the remark evokes Bernard's journalistic vision of life.

While Bernard remains indifferent to the forthcoming meeting with Percival, Neville is full of passionate intensity. Percival forms but a fleeting reference in Bernard's meditation, but he forms the exclusive focus of Neville's thoughts. For Bernard life has a new meaning because he is engaged to be married, but Neville's reality is totally coloured by the impending arrival of his friend. "If he should not come I could not bear it. I should go" (101), Neville exclaims, and his whole passionate soul is condensed in this cry. The same high-strung self is mirrored in Neville's hyperbolic exclamation on Percival's actual arrival: "'Now,' said Neville, 'my tree flowers. My heart rises. All oppression is relieved. All impediment is removed. The reign of chaos is over. He has imposed order. Knives out again'" (104).

But Bernard remains as composed, as unmoved as he was prior to Percival's arrival. He observes the scene with lucid indifference: "'Here is Percival,' said Bernard, 'smoothing his hair, not from vanity (he does not look in the glass), but to propitiate the god of decency. He is conventional; he is a hero.... Oh yes, that is not to be denied ...'" (105). Bernard does not judge, he merely observes. To him Percival's heroism is just a fact, that is all - a fact, like any other fact of life which Bernard seeks and stores, until it fructify into a story.

Following Percival's arrival, the six, initially resigned to the occasion, gradually warm to each other. Percival liberates his friends of time, of emotion, indeed, he releases their subconscious. Each character sums up its life, moving from childhood to the present, each

character voices its own essential being. And, even as the characters visualise the kind of India that awaits Percival, it is their own essential being that they display.

Bernard characteristically weaves a story around Percival in India. He creates an imaginary scene where Percival assumes the role of Western Hero, benefactor of the Orient. The imagined scene is described in great detail, marked by the same acute and observant eye, by a detachment true of Bernard at large.

Rhoda abandons Bernard's self-restraint and composure. Afraid, indeed horrified at life, Rhoda projects these emotions onto her own vision of India, which looms up ominously:

> remote provinces are fetched up out of the darkness; we see muddy roads, twisted jungle, swarms of men, and the vulture that feeds on some bloated carcass as within our scope, part of our proud and splendid province, since Percival, riding alone on a flea-bitten mare, advances down a solitary path, has his camp pitched among desolate trees, and sits alone, looking at the enormous mountains. (117)

This sombre and ugly vision of India reflects Rhoda's own despondency and apprehension of life. The portrait of Percival as solitary and desolate suggests Rhoda's own alienated self. It is Rhoda who is the hermit-wanderer, in flight from life - a ferocious tiger. And, as Rhoda proceeds to sweep the horizon, it is no longer Percival, but she herself who occupies the forbidding landscape:

> 'Yes, between your shoulders, over your heads, to a landscape,' said Rhoda, 'to a hollow where the many-backed steep hills come down like birds' wings folded. There, on the short, firm turf, are bushes, dark leaved, and against their darkness I see a shape, white, but not of stone, moving, perhaps alive. But it is not you, it is not you, it is not you; not Percival, Susan, Jinny, Neville or Louis. When the white arm rests upon the knee it is a triangle; now it is upright - a column; now a fountain, falling. It makes no sign, it does not beckon, it does not see us. Behind it roars the sea. It is beyond our reach. Yet there I venture. There I go to replenish my emptiness, to stretch my nights and fill them fuller and fuller with dreams.' (119)

Jinny, the bon vivant of the six, immersed in sensual pleasure, welcomes Percival as if he were one of her lovers:

> 'Rippling gold, I say to him, 'Come,' said Jinny. 'And he comes; he crosses the room to where I sit, with my dress like a veil billowing round me on the gilt chair. Our hands touch, our bodies burst into fire. The chair, the cup, the table - nothing remains unlit. All quivers, all kindles, all burns clear.' (119- 20)

Jinny affirms Percival through her body, applying the only language she knows.

But if Jinny affirms Percival, both Louis and Rhoda negate him. The two, later to become lovers, now join in a foreshadowing of Percival's death. Rhoda lingers on the death ritual, and Louis echoes after her: "'Death is woven in with the violets,' said Louis, 'Death and again death'" (120). In his repetition there is a kind of death wish, a conscious willing of doom.

The conspiracy of Rhoda and Louis in the foreboding of Percival's death is not coincidental. It suggests a certain affinity between the two.[1] And indeed, both Rhoda and Louis are outcasts. Rhoda is estranged from life; Louis is estranged from the English society. Their victimisation of Percival can thus be seen as a rationalisation and projection of their own predicament. Themselves unloved and unwanted, Rhoda and Louis seek to destroy Percival who, unanimously loved and admired, is a reminder of their own vulnerability. Themselves damned, Rhoda and Louis must damn the whole world with them. Their present victimisation of Percival also foreshadows the turn that their own lives will follow. When years later Rhoda commits suicide, she realises the death she now relates to Percival. Similarly, when Louis eventually establishes himself as an all-powerful businessman, he re-enacts the

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[1] For the affinity of Rhoda and Louis see Peter and Margaret Havard-Williams, "Mystical Experience in Virginia Woolf's The Waves," Essays in Criticism, 4 (January 1954), 71-84.

vindictive role he now assumes in relation to Percival, in relation to the English society as a whole.

Of the six only Susan whom, Bernard tells us, Percival loves, does not respond to Percival. However, Susan's lack of response is as telling as the others' responses. Of the seven friends, it is neither Rhoda nor Louis, but rather Susan who is the odd person out. For of the seven it is Susan alone who does not belong to the urban milieu. Susan's milieu is Nature, the others' city world is alien to her. Moreover, of the seven Susan is the only one who, even at this still early stage in life, is already fulfilled. While Percival must go to India to find himself, and while the other five must turn to Percival to find themselves, Susan need not turn to any external sources for completion, for she is already complete in herself. If Susan does not respond to Percival it is for the two reasons that Percival belongs to a world essentially alien to her, and because, already fulfilled, she need not turn elsewhere for fulfilment.

Following the affirmation of individuality, and still under the inspiration of Percival, the six for a moment behold themselves as a single unified consciousness. But even at the moment of collective affirmation the voice of subjectivity is still distinctly heard. The communal spirit is perhaps felt by all, but each character asserts the communion in its own self-image. Thus Jinny affirms the moment as "youth and beauty," but Rhoda reads in the moment gloom and isolation, and Neville construes the moment as happiness. Susan affirms the moment as part of Nature's cycle, and Bernard weighs the creative potential of the moment. The collective moment of being is thus but another opportunity for each character to assert itself.

The voice of subjectivity is at its most intense at the party:

a celebration of personality and selfhood. Full of the vitality of youth, and eager to step into the world, the six shrilly announce their presence. Percival, the raison d'être of the party, himself fades into the background, and it is his six friends who wholly occupy the stage. Percival is no main actor himself, he merely ignites the voice of subjectivity, and extracts from each character the essence.

The forebodings of Louis and Rhoda prove true and Percival meets a sudden death in India. But although dead, Percival continues to influence his friends. Even dead, Percival still acts as a catalyst to personality.

Neville mourns his friend with the same degree of passionate intensity which underlies his behaviour throughout: "All is over. The lights of the world have gone out. There stands the tree which I cannot pass" (128), Neville proclaims. The haunting image of the apple tree, Neville's private image of death, now returns in full force. Neville drowns himself in grief: "Come, pain, feed on me. Bury your fangs in my flesh. Tear me asunder, I sob, I sob" (130). Percival's death liberates Neville's emotional self completely, and it erupts as it is never to erupt again. With Percival's death Neville's emotional being reaches its climax, to be modified thereafter.

While Percival's death offers Neville a chance to indulge in emotion, to Bernard Percival's death offers a chance to intellectualise, to philosophise. Bernard does not really mourn, he analyses Percival's death. The death occurs simultaneously with the birth of Bernard's son, and Bernard considers the effect of the two events on his life:

> 'Such is the incomprehensible combination,' said Bernard, 'such is the complexity of things, that as I descend the staircase I do not know which is sorrow, which joy. My son is born; Percival is dead. I am upheld by pillars, shored up on either side by stark emotions; but which is sorrow, which is joy? I ask, and do not know, only that

> I need silence, and to be alone and to go out, and to save our hour to consider what has happened to my world, what death has done to my world.' (130)

As Bernard proceeds to examine the impact of Percival's death, he again displays the same unemotional and detached self, the same lucid and unflinching gaze as of old. Percival's death does not affect Bernard emotionally, it merely stimulates him intellectually. And it is from the intellectual point of view that Bernard soon accepts Percival's death as an inevitable part of life, as part of ordinary experience.

But although Bernard views Percival's death from an analytic, non-emotional perspective, his elegy is still significantly coloured by his own personality, and by personal circumstances. Thus when Bernard thinks of Percival's death and, addressing the passers-by declares that "one of you has lost happiness and children" (131), he is no doubt considering Percival's death from his own newly acquired role as father. Bernard's profile of his dead friend is no less biased:

> Being naturally truthful, he ... was borne on by a natural sense of the fitting, was indeed a great master of the art of living so that he seems to have lived long, and to have spread calm round him, indifference one might almost say, certainly to his own advancement, save that he had also great compassion. (133)

The reference to life as an art is obviously a projection of Bernard's own role as artist, of his aesthetic vision of life. Also the qualities that Bernard associates with Percival reflect his own character. It is Bernard himself who is characterised by calm, indifference, compassion. Even as a child Bernard appears as a fatherly figure, and is seen comforting and reassuring Susan who, having seen Louis and Jinny kissing, has run away feeling rejected and upset. At school both Louis and Neville look up to Bernard as their senior and better. To his

friends Bernard is a guru figure, a mentor. Bernard's obituary of Percival is highly charged with a sense of his own being.

In her reaction to Percival's death Rhoda certainly does not display any of Bernard's composure but rather, reiterates Neville's emotionality. As in Neville's case, the death has a traumatic effect on Rhoda, resurrecting her own haunting image of the puddle which she cannot pass. Like the transfixed apple tree, the puddle too acts as an objective correlative to the self, in this case to Rhoda's fear and horror of life. There is however an essential difference between the responses of Neville and Rhoda to Percival's death. Neville mourns out of a sense of a personal loss, the loss of a loved one. Rhoda on the other hand revels in Percival's death which confirms her vision of life, as sombre, terrifying:

> Look now at what Percival has given me. Look at the street now that Percival is dead. The houses are lightly founded to be puffed over by a breath of air. Reckless and random the cars race and roar and hunt us to death like bloodhounds. I am alone in a hostile world. The human face is hideous. This is to my liking. I want publicity and violence and to be dashed like a stone on the rocks. I like factory chimneys and cranes and lorries. I like the passing of face and face and face, deformed, indifferent. I am sick of prettiness; I am sick of privacy. I ride rough waters and shall sink with no one to save me.
>
> Percival, by his death, has made me this present, has revealed this terror, has left me to undergo this humiliation - faces and faces, served out like soup-plates by scullions; coarse, greedy, casual; looking in at shop-windows with pendent parcels; ogling, brushing, destroying everything, leaving even our love impure, touched now by their dirty fingers. (136)

Percival's death is a boon to Rhoda. It crowns her vision of a world ugly and violent. If Percival's death serves Bernard to re-affirm life, to Rhoda it serves to further life's negation. Rhoda triumphs in Percival's death.

Of the six friends, only Neville, Bernard and Rhoda offer extensive views of Percival's death. The remaining three refer to the

event only fleetingly, or not at all. However, in her own elegy for Percival, Rhoda considers the reactions of her friends to Percival's death. Let us examine Rhoda's view of the reactions of Louis, Susan and Jinny.

Rhoda imagines that Louis "will smooth out the death of Percival to his satisfaction" (137). This is soon verified by the portrait of Louis in the sixth chapter. Now an established business man, secure in the routine and order of his work, Louis no longer thinks of Percival with envy, or looks up to him as his better. On the contrary, having forced his way into the English society and secured himself a position, Louis can now discard Percival altogether. For, in a sense Louis has himself become the very ideal which Percival once represented to him. Moreover, in Louis' world there is no place for nostalgia, or for any emotion at all. In his struggle to assure his position in the English society, Louis has eliminated all emotion, and replaced it with the disciplinary code of work – the only safeguard for his social integration. Thus, when Louis refers to Percival, or to any of his friends, he does so unemotionally, mechanically. Louis subdues the human being to the same disciplinary code by which his own life is now ruled:

> Percival has died (he died in Egypt; he died in Greece; all deaths are one death). Susan has children; Neville mounts rapidly to the conspicuous heights. Life passes. The clouds change perpetually over our houses. I do this, do that, and again do this and then that. Meeting and parting, we assemble different forms, make different patterns. But if I do not nail these impressions to the board and out of the many men in me make one; exist here and now and not in streaks and patches, like scattered snow wreaths on far mountains; and ask Miss Johnson as I pass through the office about the movies and take my cup of tea and accept also my favourite biscuit, then I shall fall like snow and be wasted. (145)

Of Susan's reaction to the death of Percival Rhoda thinks: "Susan, engaged to her farmer in the country, will stand for a second with the

telegram before her, holding a plate; and then, with a kick of her heel, slam to the oven door" (137). Again, this is confirmed by Susan's portrait in the sixth chapter. Susan appears at the height of her primeval role as wife and mother. Having become a source of life herself, Susan is now totally self-fulfilled and need not turn any longer even to Nature for completion. Percival, always part of an urban, and to Susan alien world, can play no part in her own biological and self-contained world.

Finally, Rhoda imagines that "Jinny, pirouetting across the room, will perch on the arm of his chair and ask, 'Did he love me?' 'More than he loved Susan?'" (137). Here Rhoda captures Jinny's carefree and frivolous self. Percival's death can hardly affect Jinny who is solely intent on the pleasures of the moment. In Jinny's world only live and loving bodies have a function. In her hedonistic world the dead have no place.

Time, lost youth and approaching old age form the perspective from which the soliloquies in the seventh chapter unfold. It is also from this same perspective that Percival is recalled. Having lost much of their enthusiasm and stamina, the six now view life dispassionately. Percival, who was once admired, envied, loved, no longer forms a source of attraction, but is viewed as part of ordinary experience.

Thus Bernard, once eager to find the one and illuminating experience, has lost much of his alertness, and is now resigned: "Things have dropped from me. I have outlived certain desires; I have lost friends, some by death - Percival - others through sheer inability to cross the street" (159). Percival, who once could kindle a creative spark in Bernard, can no longer do so. Bernard has himself become like Percival - dead, inert matter. Susan reiterates Bernard's

resignation:

> I think sometimes of Percival who loved me. He rode and fell in India. I think sometimes of Rhoda. Uneasy cries wake me at dead of night. But for the most part I walk content with my sons. I cut the dead petals from holly-hocks. Rather squat, grey before my time, but with clear eyes, pear-shaped eyes, I pace my fields. (165)

Jinny voices this resignation as well. As she watches the London passers-by descend the stairs to the Tube station, Jinny catches a glimpse of her aging body in the looking glass and admits that she has lost much of her old command over life:

> But look - there is my body in that looking-glass. How solitary, how shrunk, how aged! I am no longer young. I am no longer part of the procession. Millions descend those stairs in a terrible descent. Great wheels churn inexorably urging them downwards. Millions have died. Percival died. I still move. I still live. But who will come if I signal? (165)

Neville, who once loved Percival, now fails even to recall him. He shares the acquiescence of his friends: "I have picked my own fruit. I look dispassionately" (168), Neville says. Louis and Rhoda express the same complacency, and Rhoda admits: "I seldom think of Percival now" (176).

The fact that the six now hold a uniform view of Percival is revealing of the resignation true to middle age. In their youth, the characters were adamant to individually assert themselves, and therefore each held a distinct view of Percival. But time has diminished their vitality and blurred their differences. The characters no longer care to passionately proclaim their presence. The diffusion of Percival marks the dissolution of selfhood.

In their last meeting at Hampton Court the six make a desperate last effort to salvage some of their former energy "selfhood." Drawing on this energy, the six recall their first celebration of selfhood years previously. For a moment they again behold themselves as a single

united consciousness. But the communion is fleeting, and Percival, who years ago had been their inspiration, is but a fleeting presence as well. The voyage has come to an end, and so has the effort "self-hood."

Percival is not a "character" as much as an object of perception, reflection, feeling. He has as many faces as his six friends, as many shades as the stages of life they go through. He mirrors each character individually, and also captures the underlying collective mood. Through Percival Virginia Woolf is able to highlight "the unity and multiplicity of personality,"[1] the exclusivity yet universality of character. Each of us, Virginia Woolf seems to suggest, is unique and unto himself, but at the same time we also share with each other. We are different yet we are also alike.

While Percival highlights the oneness and disparity of personality, this conception of selfhood is ingrained in the dramatic personae themselves. Bernard, Neville, Louis, Jinny, Susan and Rhoda, in their strict adherence to one point of view each, present different facets of personality, different aspects of human nature. Together however, they all merge to form a single if complex consciousness, a many-sided being.

And then there is Bernard who throughout philosophises, improvises on the theme of selfhood:

> What am I? I ask. This? No, I am that ... I am not one and simple, but complex and many. Bernard, in public, bubbles; in private, is secretive.... I have to effect different transitions; have to cover the entrances and exits of several different men who alternately act their parts as Bernard. (64)

His one self, Bernard notes, contains innumerable selves. The self

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[1] Guiguet, p. 286.

changes from situation to situation, from one moment to the next: "I am made and remade continually. Different people draw different words from me" (114), Bernard declares. And, as Bernard views his life over, he realises how much of himself there is in his friends, how much of them there is in him: "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" (237).

The theme of flux or multiplicity can finally be related to life itself. The sheer abundance of impressions bombarded from six concurrent directions at once suggests life's inexhaustibility. For elucidation we should again turn to Bernard. As he sums up the group's chronicle, Bernard suddenly realises the futility, indeed, the falsity of the structured picture he has been drawing:

> But it is a mistake, this extreme precision, this orderly and military progress; a convenience, a lie. There is always deep below it, even when we arrive punctually at the appointed time with our white waistcoats and polite formalities, a rushing stream of broken dreams, nursery rhymes, street cries, half-finished sentences and sights - elm trees, willow trees, gardeners sweeping, women writing - that rise and sink even as we hand a lady down to dinner. While one straightens the fork so precisely on the table-cloth, a thousand faces mop and mow. There is nothing one can fish up in a spoon; nothing one can call an event. (219)

"Life is always and inevitably much richer than we who try to express it" - it is this essential vision of Virginia Woolf that Bernard echoes.

This chapter has centred on the two-fold, epistemological and psychological use of objects of perception by Virginia Woolf. Various objects - the car and plane in Mrs Dalloway; the lighthouse and island in To the Lighthouse; Percival (who is "like" an object in the sense that he is acted upon rather than active himself, and lacks an active

consciousness of his own) in The Waves - were singled out as starting points for examples of perception, cognition and feeling. In spite of their obvious differences, the three books display a consistent use of objects, and establish a coherent epistemological and psychological pattern.

Whether it is Clarissa, Rezia or Septimus in Mrs Dalloway; Mrs Ramsay and her two children James and Cam in To the Lighthouse; or any of the six dramatis personae in The Waves - the characters all share a subjective and highly emotive view of their surroundings. The subjective, necessarily relativistic and fragmented outlook exemplified by the fictional characters is no doubt revealing of Virginia Woolf herself, of her ever doubting sensibility, deep sense of the fantastic and evanescent. The emotional interpretation of reality marks Virginia Woolf's lyrical, may be even religious sense of life.

Correlated with the philosophical is the psychological use of the object. Seen subjectively, from a biased and emotion-charged perspective, the object becomes an extension, reflection of the character by whom it is perceived. Seen subjectively, the object forms a consolidated image of the perceiver. For a better understanding and fuller appreciation of Virginia Woolf's characters, indeed, of her art as a novelist, one would do well to consider not only the inward, but also the outward turning sensibility. Virginia Woolf's characters are revealed and epitomised in the objects they perceive. Far from inhabiting merely a physical realm, objects in Virginia Woolf acquire a distinct psychological function, are used "to reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain."[1]

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[1] "Modern Fiction," p. 107.

2. OBJECTS AND HUMAN RELATIONS

Introductory

The present chapter seeks to explore the social use of objects, a use which mainly relates to aspects of human relations. However, the social consciousness of Virginia Woolf includes other interests and therefore, before proceeding with the immediate task, it is perhaps necessary to briefly sketch out the various other social concerns of Virginia Woolf.

Virginia Woolf's treatment of the social issue is not limited to any one particular medium but appears in the several contexts of her literary activity: the critical essays, the pamphlets and the fiction. The same may be said of her social consciousness at large: it is not confined to any specific field of interest, but is varied and eclectic.

Still, it has been suggested that feminism pervades Virginia Woolf's social consciousness.[1] Once again, feminism in Virginia Woolf involves multiple issues. For instance, in the various essays devoted to women, and in the two feminist pamphlets, A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas, feminism assumes its more blatantly political - almost militant - expression. On the other hand Orlando and The Years, to a lesser extent also Night and Day, offer a modified version of the political propaganda. If Orlando forms the whimsical illustration of androgyny - proposed in A Room of One's Own as the solution to the male-female antinomy - the other two books form the more serious

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[1] See Marder, p. 68.

modulations of the various social ills raised in the feminist pamphlets, such as the subjugation of women, their psychological and economical intimidation, male totalitarianism, etc.

In the other novels feminism loses its political fervour and becomes growingly diffuse. Indeed, when dealing with the fiction it is perhaps more appropriate to talk in terms of a feminine rather than a feminist consciousness. Especially in the lyrical novels Virginia Woolf hardly writes with any political cause or particular grudge in mind, but rather as a woman writer, writing about subjects near to her own heart, gleaned from her personal experience. Thus the fiction discloses a clear preference - topical as well as emotional - for female characters, and it is usually women who occupy the central and more attractive position. Rachel Vinrace and Helen Ambrose; Katherine Hilbery and Mary Datchet; Clarissa Dalloway; Mrs Ramsay and Lily Briscoe; Eleanor Pargiter; Miss La Trobe - overshadow the male sector which, perhaps with the exception of Septimus Smith and Mr Ramsay, lacks the vigour and vitality which characterises the female sector. Special attention is also given to the treatment of female friendship which is often imbued with sexual significance. Such is for example Rachel's relationship with Helen, her aunt and surrogate mother; the more explicit sexual tie between Clarissa and her youth-time friend Sally Seton; and the friendship of Mrs Ramsay and Lily.

But not all is reduced to a feminist or feminine point of view. Virginia Woolf also proves herself capable of taking a far more comprehensive - an historical view of society. One of the main charges against Virginia Woolf is that in her subjective lyricism she ignores the real world viz. economic and social realities. This charge seems to overlook the historical consciousness which underlies the criticism

as well as a considerable part of Virginia Woolf's fiction. And what is historical consciousness if not a form of social consciousness?

The historical consciousness is especially apparent in the literary criticism: in Virginia Woolf's concept of literature and in her critical method. Like Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf holds an organic view of literature which she regards as a live, ever-growing tradition.[1] The comparative approach is most strongly expressed in assessments of contemporary literature which is viewed in relation to the literature of the past. Virginia Woolf further believes that a time distance is essential for the literary appreciation:

> to write about a new book the moment it comes out is a very different matter from writing about it fifty years afterwards. A new book is attached to life by a thousand minute filaments. Life goes on and the filaments break and disappear. But at the moment they ring and resound and set up all kinds of irrelevant responses.[2]

It is precisely for lack of a temporal or historical perspective that Virginia Woolf refrains from judging her contemporaries. When she does it will be apologetically, as for instance in her essay on E.M. Forster, which opens with the statement that: "There are many reasons which should prevent one from criticizing the work of contemporaries. Besides the obvious uneasiness - the fear of hurting feelings - there is too the difficulty of being just."[3] Similarly, in her essay on Lawrence, Virginia Woolf begins by admitting to the "partiality, the inevitable imperfection of contemporary criticism...."[4] It is interesting to note that Virginia Woolf's criticism of contemporaries only confirms her own misgivings. She gives too little credit

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[1] For Virginia Woolf and traditionalism see Goldman, Ch. i.

[2] "Lockhart's Criticism," CE I, 183.

[3] "The Novels of E.M. Forster," CE I, 342.

[4] "Notes on D.H. Lawrence," CE I, 352.

to Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Lawrence and Forster - now acknowledged as the central literary figures of their era - and on the other hand gives undue praise to such a writer as W.H. Hudson who is all but forgotten today.[1] But then, there is always her own argument that criticism of one's contemporaries is doomed from the start ...

The historical concept of literature is also manifest in Virginia Woolf's belief that literature grows out of a given reality. Any literature, she maintains, must be viewed in relation to its times. While this principle strongly materialises in her defence of contemporary literature, explained as a product of a particular socio-political reality, it underlies the criticism throughout. As Jean Guiguet points out, Virginia Woolf is concerned with the totality of the creative process, and sets out to discover, indeed, to recreate the very conditions, historical and temperamental which shape the literary product.[2] Thus if it is Greek or Elizabethan drama, Chaucer or Donne, Defoe or Jane Austen, with a few quick strokes of her imagination, Virginia Woolf will resurrect the past and steep each work in its own particular historical setting.

But perhaps more interesting is the fictional assimilation of the historical perspective. Orlando, The Years, Between the Acts - are all infused with a sense of history. For example, in Orlando the hero's sexual adventures span from the Elizabethan to the present age, and the book as a whole can be regarded as an historical satire on sexual attitudes. History forms as vital a component in The Years where the disintegrating Victorian society is traced over several

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[1] See for example, "How it Strikes a Contemporary," p. 156. The bulk of Virginia Woolf's criticism of contemporaries (in the form of book reviews) is collected under the title, Virginia Woolf, Contemporary Writers (London: The Hogarth Press, 1965).

[2] Virginia Woolf and Her Works, p. 160.

generations, the author noting the mark of the changing times on the various members of the Pargiter family, itself a relic of the crumbling Victorian world. So too in Virginia Woolf's last novel where the Oliver family and their respective rural community appear but as a chapter in the great chronicle of England, a chronicle which is enacted in the village pageant through an historical parody of literary styles.

The historical view of society is not always as comprehensive and it often assumes a particular context. For example, much of the criticism raised in Night and Day and The Years, such as the decadence of the family institution, the intimidation of the individual and of the female sex in particular, the folly, indeed, hollowness of convention, are all very much part of the Victorian world, and no doubt of Virginia Woolf's own heritage. In Mrs Dalloway on the other hand, Virginia Woolf moves away from Victorian to Post World War I England, and the book has often been praised for its vivid evocation of London in the twenties.[1]

However, the historical reality portrayed in these books does not form an end in itself, but is merely a setting for a social comment. In each book the social commentary takes another form: Night and Day is, as many critics note, a comedy of manners in Jane Austen style; Mrs Dalloway comes closer to social satire, while The Years is a family saga and falls within the tradition of the historical novel. Still, all books unanimously voice a repugnance for a society ruled by custom and convention and based on false - material, political - principles. A recurring theme in these novels is the relation between the individual and society, a relation which often appears as a

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[1] See for example, Daiches, The Novel and the Modern World, p. 212, and Johnstone, p. 338.

conflict of two opposing wills. The individual - if it is Katherine Hilbery, Clarissa Dalloway, Septimus Smith or Eleanor Pargiter - struggles to assert his will in a society which restricts the freedom of the individual and subordinates his will to that of its own. Happily resolved in Night and Day when Katherine, disengaging herself from the bonds of propriety breaks off her engagement to William Rodney to attach herself to Ralph Denham, the man she truly loves, in the other novels the conflict between the individual and society follows a less optimistic turn. Clarissa succumbs to the system and by that commits herself to a death-in-life, while Septimus, who refuses to conform to society, is to all intents and purposes crushed by the social machine. So too in The Years. After a life-long devotion to family and public causes Eleanor Pargiter is all but public property herself, and there is little of her left which she can truly call her own.

The family often forms the target of much of the social criticism. The reason for this is twofold, historical and artistic. Perhaps the quintessential of all Victorian institutions, the family understandably forms a main focus in those books - Night and Day, The Years - which specifically deal with Victorian mores. Indeed, in these books the family is used as a microcosm of society, so that by merely centring on the family Virginia Woolf is able to contain the wider social circumference as well. But the most penetrating analysis of the family is undoubtedly to be found in To the Lighthouse. Here however, the socio-historical perspective of Night and Day and The Years all but disappears and is replaced with a psycho-philosophical perspective. Emotions, not manners or values are at the centre of To the Lighthouse, and the book offers an analysis of those emotions

which bind husband and wife, parents and children, self and other self, regardless of any given time or place, regardless of any social or political system. The movement away from social criticism towards a psychological and growingly abstract presentation of human relations culminates in The Waves. Here, even the basic family unit disappears. Human relations are stripped of external vestments and reduced to skeletal form of self in relation to self, in no time, in no place.

Indeed, in the final evaluation of Virginia Woolf and of her fiction in particular, it is the psychological and the poetic which may be said to form the more representative perspective of her social vision. As a novelist Virginia Woolf hardly belongs to the sociological or historical tradition, but to that rare, elitist tradition of psychological lyrical fiction. The social vision of Virginia Woolf mirrors the essential lyricism which characterises her work as a whole.

If Virginia Woolf does not offer much in the way of social or historical realism, it is only consistent with her aims to break away from the naturalistic tradition in favour of a lyrical exploration of the self. Just as she holds a psychological rather than sociological view of the human being, she holds a psychological rather than ethical view of human relations. It is the emotional, not the moral aspects of human intercourse which Virginia Woolf seeks to discover. Moreover, her social vision is itself but an approximation of the atomism, the fragmentation which characterises her philosophical perspective. The individual, not society is at the centre of her fiction, and he is portrayed as a lonely, alienated being, forever in quest of unity, of oneness with his fellow men.

The atomistic view of the human being forms the crux of the earlier apologies for Virginia Woolf. Such critics as David

Daiches,[1] R.L. Chambers,[2] and later A.D. Moody,[3] were able to vindicate Virginia Woolf from the charge that her work is devoid of social awareness and moral commitment by showing that in her portrait of alienated, dissipated man, Virginia Woolf captures the very essence of the modern experience.

Rarely set down explicitly, the social vision of Virginia Woolf is often only subtly conveyed, held within a tight artistic frame. Herbert Marder explains:

> after her first novels she rarely commented directly on social problems in her fiction. She confined such comments to the essays she regularly wrote. Works of art, she believed, should say what cannot be said by other means. They should reveal the hidden realities from which social problems spring, without engaging in social analysis.[4]

Although this study concentrates merely on a limited - the middle - section of Virginia Woolf's fiction, the three novels comprising the basis of the study nonetheless offer a representative model of the movement from a didactic to a growingly artistic approach to social problems. Thus the social criticism and covert didacticism of Mrs Dalloway is abandoned in To the Lighthouse which takes a philosophical view of human relations, while The Waves merely glimpses patterns of human relations and reduces them to their basic, most elemental form.

In spite of their varying perspective the three books offer a consistent vision of human relations. A deep sense of hollowness, of an unrequited intimacy is reiterated in book after book. The books likewise draw on common devices in the exposition of the social theme. In all three books there is a social gathering (Clarissa's party; the Ramsays' dinner party; the farewell party to Percival) which provides

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1 The Novel and the Modern World, Ch. i, and rev. of A Writer's Diary, The Twentieth Century, 154 (December 1953), 482-85.

2 The Novels of Virginia Woolf (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1947).

3 Virginia Woolf (1963).

4 Feminism and Art, p. 23.

a dramatic frame for, and which consolidates the otherwise scattered social theme. Here, the central character (Clarissa, Mrs Ramsay, Percival) fulfils a major social function and provides a significant perspective of the social mood. But perhaps the most important social role is fulfilled by the object, systematically employed in all three books as a means of highlighting human relations.

The present chapter is devoted to an exploration of this social function of the object.

2.1 MRS DALLOWAY

In Jacob's Room Virginia Woolf gave freedom to her visionary, ethereal sense of reality, and the result was a work at once too impressionistic and diffuse. In Mrs Dalloway, and following the none too favourable reception of Jacob's Room, Virginia Woolf set out to redress the balance between fact and vision, between the external social reality and the inner world of the self. Although the subjective sensibility is still very much at the centre of the work, it is forever steeped in a tangible world outside the self; the introspective lyrical mood is systematically counterbalanced with social realism. Indeed, the social pursuit of Mrs Dalloway is explicitly expressed by Virginia Woolf herself: "I want to criticise the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense," she writes in her diary.[1] Also the critical response to Mrs Dalloway attests to its strong social strain. Apart from the inevitable few critics who condemn the book's aesthetic and psychological sophistication, and lack of moral momentum,[2] Mrs Dalloway is on the whole acknowledged for its social merit. E.B. Burgum writes that : "Mrs Dalloway proved that the society novel need not remain within the shallow limits of Henry James's deceptive circumlocutions."[3] Later criticism, especially A.D. Moody's lucid treatment of Mrs Dalloway as social satire,[4] and Jeremy Hawthorn's more recent Marxist analysis of the book,[5] further support the view that - whatever its own circumlocutions - Mrs Dalloway is still very much of a society novel.

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1 AWD, p. 57

2 See for example, J.F. Holms, rev. of Mrs Dalloway, The Calendar of Modern Letters, 1 (July 1925), 404-5.

3 The Novel and the World's Dilemma, p. 139

4 Virginia Woolf, pp. 18-28.

5 Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway: A Study in Alienation, Text and Context (London: Sussex University Press, 1975).

The novel itself is constructed on a scenic basis. Each scene (for example, Clarissa's and the Smiths' morning walk; Clarissa's reunion with Peter Walsh; the Smiths' consultation with Dr Bradshaw; Lady Bruton's luncheon party; Clarissa's party) forms a basic frame, a structure for the social theme. In addition to the centralising scene, the social theme further coheres around various objects. Sometimes also a character (Clarissa, Peter, Dr Bradshaw) assumes a distinct social significance, but on the whole it is objects that are used to illuminate the social reality. The following discussion is devoted to an appreciation of this social use of objects. The discussion also hopes to establish that much of the social criticism raised in Mrs Dalloway is indeed significantly revealed by objects.

There are two social classes in Mrs Dalloway. The Dalloways and their peers - the Whitbreads, the Bradshaws, Lady Bruton, Sally Seton - represent the upper ruling class, while the Smiths, Miss Kilman and odd members of the London crowd represent the ruled and lower class. This class division is kept however in the background, and on the whole the book maintains a general rather than stratified view of society. The approach is not so much political as it is ethical: it is not the social structure, but the mores and values, and the psychological consequences of the social system that are brought under scrutiny.

The Dalloways and their peers are the propagators and guardians of the social system, and it is their code of values and manners that is at the centre of the social critique. The established social code is implied by Peter when he tells Clarissa that he prefers men to cauliflowers (5). As Gary Carey points out, "Peter is saying in effect that he prefers the company of men - human beings - to the non-

human."[1] That is, Peter is implicitly contrasting his own scale of values with that of the Dalloways. Peter's code is spiritual. He prizes the human spirit, emotion, above anything else. Contrasted with Peter's spiritual, is the Dalloways' material code which is best perhaps illustrated by Clarissa expressing a preference for roses rather than for people (133). In the Dalloways' circle money and power win precedence over the human being. Indeed, the human being has no value in himself and is estimated merely as a political and economical tool.

Peter, who is estranged from his own class, highlights its material code in his abrupt reunion with Clarissa. Peter is about to tell Clarissa about Daisy, his present mistress, whom he is planning to marry. But he is snubbed by Clarissa's aloofness and is forced to momentarily check himself. It is then that Peter considers the kind of code he is up against:

> Shall I tell her, he thought, or not? He would like to make a clean breast of it all. But she is too cold, he thought; sewing, with her scissors; Daisy would look ordinary beside Clarissa. And she would think me a failure, which I am in their sense, he thought; in the Dalloways' sense. Oh yes, he had no doubt about that; he was a failure, compared with all this - the inlaid table, the mounted paper-knife, the dolphin and the candlesticks, the chair-covers and the old valuable English tinted prints - he was a failure! (49)

The objects that surround Clarissa attest to the material code of her class. The Whitbreads are similarly identified by Peter with their material possessions. During his stroll through Regent's Park, Peter passes in the vicinity of the Whitbread house, and he recalls that:

> he had lunched there once in a house which had, like all Hugh's possessions, something that no other house could possibly have - linen cupboards it might have been. You had to go and look at them - you had to spend a great

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[1] Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse: Notes, Coles Notes (London: Coles, 1970), p. 18.

> deal of time always admiring whatever it was - linen cupboards, pillow-cases, old oak furniture, pictures, which Hugh had picked up for an old song.... And so there they lived, with their linen cupboards and their old masters and their pillow-cases fringed with real lace, at the rate of five or ten thousand a year presumably.... (82-83)

The Bradshaws too obey this materialistic code. Sir Bradshaw owns a large grey motor car whose upkeep "alone must cost him quite a lot" (109), speculates Septimus as the Smiths leave Bradshaw's clinic following their consultation with the doctor. Indeed, we are told that Dr Bradshaw charged a "very large fee ... for his advice" (105). As her husband goes on his rounds of patients, Lady Bradshaw waits in the car, wrapped in "grey furs, silver grey rugs," and contemplates "the wall of gold, mounting minute by minute."

In the materialistic society the material object not only forms a primary value, it ultimately generates a whole system and code of manners which centres around itself. Hugh Whitbread is well familiar with this code of manners:

> [He] observed punctiliously, even when not absolutely necessary, little courtesies, old-fashioned ceremonies, which gave a quality to his manner, something to imitate, something to remember him by, for he would never lunch, for example, with Lady Bruton, whom he had known these twenty years, without bringing her in his outstretched hand a bunch of carnations.... (114-15)

The materialistic society encourages transactional relationships. Human beings do not relate to each other spontaneously, they relate to each other through a network of ritual and ceremony. While decorum and propriety do not form an end in themselves, they are the means through which the transactional system is maintained. The human being is traded with, he is valued for his economical and political viability. Lady Bruton is influential in high circles. If Hugh Whitbread wishes to be included in her circle, to profit from her power, he must buy his way

in - as indeed he does, with a bunch of flowers. If he wishes to gain something from Lady Bruton, he must give something in return - as indeed he does, for he sells Lady Bruton his services, his "art of writing letters to the Times" (121). For services rendered, Hugh is repaid in the same currency with which he buys his way in. If at the beginning of the luncheon party, and preceding Hugh's services, Lady Burton discards Hugh's flowers beside her plate, following his services, she gives Hugh his due payment: "Lady Bruton, who seldom did a graceful thing, stuffed all Hugh's carnations into the front of her dress, and flinging her hands out called him 'My Prime Minister!'" (122). Hugh buys his way in with flowers, and is paid with flowers. In the materialistic society the material object is not only the principal value, it is also the principal means. People relate to each other through objects. The object acts as a means of communication, as a language.

The use of the material object as a means of communication is not confined to social intercourse, it also applies to personal intercourse, such as between husband and wife. Leaving Lady Bruton's, both Richard Dalloway and Hugh Whitbread go to buy presents for their wives. Richard's decision to buy Clarissa a present is an outcome of his awakened love for her. At the luncheon, reference was made to Peter's return. Consequently, Richard recalled Peter's former passion for Clarissa, a recollection which in turn rekindled Richard's own love for Clarissa. Richard's decision to buy Clarissa a present is a token of his - re-awakened - love:

> he wanted to come in holding something. Flowers? Yes, flowers, since he did not trust his taste in gold; any number of flowers, roses, orchids, to celebrate what was, reckoning things as you will, an event; this feeling about her when they spoke of Peter Walsh at luncheon; and they never spoke of it; not for years had they spoken of it;

> which, he thought, grasping his red and white roses together (a vast bunch in tissue paper), is the greatest mistake in the world. The time comes when it can't be said; one's too shy to say it, he thought, pocketing his six-pence or two of change, setting off with his great bunch held against his body to Westminster, to say straight out in so many words (whatever she might think of him), holding out his flowers, 'I love you.' (127)

Richard's emotion remains however suspended under the great canopy of flowers. When the time comes he fails to tell Clarissa he loves her. All he manages to do is present her with the flowers, a mean token of his love. Richard's mute gesture is however perfectly understood by Clarissa: "But how lovely, she said, taking his flowers. She understood; she understood without his speaking; his Clarissa" (131). Indeed, even as Richard, turning to go, is perhaps for a moment tempted to openly tell Clarissa that he loves her, she herself deems any further communication unnecessary: "He must be off, he said, getting up. But he stood for a moment as if he were about to say something; and she wondered what? Why? There were the roses" (132).

It is of course possible to interpret the Dalloways' non-verbal communication as a token of matrimonial rapport. Having been married for thirty years or so, the Dalloways can understandably communicate without having to actually speak out their thoughts. But if Richard's emotion is left unsaid, it is not only because of his tacit understanding with Clarissa. After all, Richard is strongly tempted to tell Clarissa that he loves her. If he fails, it is not because he does not want, but because Richard dare not, or indeed cannot transgress the code which the Dalloways and their class obey. It is a code which inhibits and socialises emotion, a code which discourages emotional contact, and where decorum and propriety win pride of place. Richard's emotion is curbed, curtailed by the ritual which asserts itself in place of the emotion. Of the emotion, only the ritual remains.

It is precisely to this discipline of sophistication and restraint that Peter, sensitive and romantic, falls victim: "It had been his undoing - this susceptibility - in Anglo-Indian society; not weeping at the right time, or laughing either" (167). Indeed, Peter's peers believe that there is something fundamentally wrong with him: "'Yes; Peter Walsh has come back,' said Lady Bruton. It was vaguely flattering to them all. He had come back, battered, unsuccessful, to their secure shores. But to help him, they reflected, was impossible; there was some flaw in his character" (119). Even Clarissa, presumably more sensitive than her peers, is repulsed by Peter's emotionality: "Think of Peter in love - he came to see her after all these years, and what did he talk about? Himself. Horrible passion! she thought. Degrading passion! she thought ..." (140).

Given the encouraged suppression of feeling, and given Clarissa's strict adherence to this code, it is hardly surprising that in Peter's reunion with Clarissa, emotions remain very much unexpressed. The object once again provides an insight into the kind of communication that takes place:

> 'And how are you?' said Peter Walsh, positively trembling; taking both her hands; kissing both her hands. She's grown older, he thought, sitting down. I shan't tell her anything about it, he thought, for she's grown older. She's looking at me, he thought, a sudden embarrassment coming over him, though he had kissed her hands. Putting his hand into his pocket, he took a large pocket-knife and half opened the blade. (45-46)

Clarissa resorts to similar means: "And she opened her scissors, and said, did he mind her just finishing what she was doing to her dress, for they had a party that night?" (46). While both knife and scissors - but especially Peter's knife - carry obvious Freudian sexual connotations,[1] they not only evoke the sexual, but also the psychological

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[1] For Freudian symbolism in Mrs Dalloway, see E.R. Steinberg, "Freudian Symbolism and Communication," Literature and Psychology, 3 (April 1953), 2-5.

tension between the former lovers. Embarrassed and unsettled by their sudden re-union, Peter and Clarissa turn to external means for support. They are able to steady their emotions by clutching onto objects solid and concrete. Knife and scissors offer Peter and Clarissa a sure grasp-hold in their otherwise agitated state of mind. The objects also act as the characters' means of defence. Both Peter and Clarissa feel threatened by each other. Each is called upon to apologise for and justify himself. Peter feels that Clarissa disapproves of his sentimentality and vulnerability, while Clarissa feels that Peter disapproves of her flashy life style. Mutually threatened by each other, both Peter and Clarissa resort to tactics of defence and attack. Peter as it were, wards Clarissa off with his knife, while Clarissa "barricades" herself with her sewing materials and "charges back" with scissors and needle.

The aggressive and defensive behaviour of the former lovers masks a mutual vulnerability. For both Peter and Clarissa still feel strongly for each other. The vulnerability is in their reluctance to and fear of exposing their emotions. The reason why Peter and Clarissa fail to express their emotions outright is partly circumstantial. It may be attributed to the fact that after a long separation the former lovers are understandably wary of each other, too embarrassed to be forthright and direct. But the main reason for the restraint of the two must be attributed to their social discipline. It is a discipline that prohibits expression of emotion, and allows only for refined, superficial intercourse. It is by force of this discipline that Peter and Clarissa remain apart. Indeed, the objects on which the two characters draw serve to the end of this discipline. The objects (knife, scissors) form a physical barrier between Peter and

Clarissa and keep them apart. Elizabeth, Clarissa's daughter, acts in a similar way. She intrudes upon the former lovers when they are on the brink of revelation, at the point of transgressing the social code, and forces them apart. The emotions of Peter and Clarissa are, by force of objects - of their discipline - successfully suppressed. Propriety prevails.

Virginia Woolf's indictment of the British ruling class is unequivocal. The freedom of the individual is sacrificed for the preservation of the system. Human relations are subjected to social indoctrination. Subsequently, human relations are reduced to a mimicry of gestures over emotion-barring objects.

Indeed, objects are essential to the preservation of the social discipline, of the system at large. The Dalloways and their peers relate to each other through objects. Their intercourse is thus non-immediate, at one remove. By relating to one another through objects, the characters are guaranteed a set distance, an impersonal intercourse. The object keeps both emotion and characters at bay. The suppressed emotion is necessary for the preservation of the transactional, materialistic society, where emotion has no value and no place. To the materialistic society emotion is useless, counterproductive, therefore also a threat. By suppressing emotion the threat is diminished, removed. By keeping the characters apart, the object also reduces the element of confrontation, and ultimately ensures a smooth-running system.

The social system which Virginia Woolf set out to criticise in Mrs Dalloway is a repressive, totalitarian regime. It is anti-life, for it negates any freedom of spirit, any freedom of expression.

Clarissa's party epitomizes this social system. Virginia Woolf

herself conceived the party as the climax of the whole book: "It is to be a most complicated, spirited, solid piece, knitting together everything...."[1] As such the party naturally forms the culminating point of the social satire.

Clarissa plays a crucial role in her party. She not only initiates, she also holds the party together. At its outset the party fulfils a unifying role for it draws together to a single point in time and place people who are otherwise apart. Clarissa further sustains the cohesive effect inherent in the very act of the party. As hostess, she flits from guest to guest, and, as it were, weaves a thread of unity around them.

However, as most critics agree, the party creates only a superficial sense of unity.[2] The intercourse is ceremonious and hollow. Clarissa feels so herself. Even at the height of her party, when she is escorting the Prime Minister, she thinks: "these triumphs ... had a hollowness; at arm's length they were, not in the heart..." (193). Other characters, such as Peter Walsh, and Clarissa's unwelcome cousin, Ellie Henderson, support Clarissa's feeling. Peter resents the whole scene. He feels intimidated by and estranged from his peers. Ellie Henderson is likewise intimidated by all the pomp and ceremony. She takes no active part in the party and withdraws to a corner from which she silently observes the guests, herself remaining unobserved and neglected. The sense of hollowness culminates in Clarissa's own withdrawal from the party following her learning of Septimus' death (recounted by Lady Bradshaw). Disunity is further evoked on the purely formal level. The party unfolds from multiple perspectives,

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[1] AWD, p. 66.

[2] See for example, Daiches, The Novel and the Modern World, p. 9.

the focus erratically shifting from the one point of view to the next. The disjointed, fragmented form suggests the lack of social cohesion.

If the party creates but a superficial feeling of solidarity, this is because the party itself stems from and strictly adheres to the code encouraged by the system. In its very conception the party is prestige bound. In her morning walk, when Clarissa is first shown thinking about her party, she meets Hugh Whitbread who reassures her that he will attend her party. He adds however, that he may be late, as he will be coming from another party, at the Palace. Following the appearance of the mysterious car whose occupant Clarissa identifies as the Queen, Clarissa recalls Hugh's reference to the party at the Palace, and subsequently remembers her own party. Clarissa associates the party at the Palace with her own party and is reassured of her own worth. The guests who attend Clarissa's party belong to the same class as Clarissa, and share her notions and code of values. The party, which brings together the powerful and the rich (the Whitbreads, the Bradshaws, Lady Bruton), offers these self-seeking selves an opportunity to indulge in their own glory. As Peter Walsh, observing his peers, remarks: "Lord, lord, the snobbery of the English! ... How they loved dressing up in gold lace and doing homage!" (190-1). Where self-interest rules there is little chance for compassion. Since it is quintessentially of the system, Clarissa's party is wedded to artificial, superficial intercourse.

Paradoxically, Clarissa's party, which sets the social system on a pedestal, seeks to remedy a malaise which is itself a product of the system. When challenged with the question: "What's the sense of your parties?" (134) Clarissa answers that her parties are a tribute to, a celebration of Life, and she explains:

> in her own mind now, what did it mean to her, this thing she called life? Oh, it was very queer. Here was So-and-so in South Kensington; someone up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair. And she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create.... (135)

For Clarissa the party is a ritual celebration of Life.[1] But (and Clarissa makes the discrimination herself) the party is not merely a sacrificial act, it also serves a social function. Clarissa's vision of Life relates to a social reality, to a separated, alienated existence. Her party is a reaction to the lack of unity Clarissa perceives between people. However, this social reality is itself wrought by the social system. The materialistic society that encourages transactional relationships and prohibits genuine spiritual contact inevitably forces people apart, necessarily breeds alienation. Given that Clarissa's party stems from and adheres to the social code, it is necessarily doomed.

And indeed, Clarissa's party merely creates an illusion of unity. Clarissa herself feels that the party has an unreal, dream-like quality about it (189). The party is a show, a performance. The artificial and flimsy unity that it creates lasts only as long as the party itself lasts. Outside the party, people remain cruelly, painfully apart.

Clarissa is happy creating an illusory sense of unity. She does not wish to really alter the separated existence set by the social code. Indeed, Clarissa welcomes the distance between people. It is precisely for this reason that she rejects Peter Walsh, with whom "everything had to be shared; everything gone into. And it was

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[1] For Clarissa's party: ritual and myth, see Love, Worlds in Consciousness, pp. 157-60.

intolerable, and when it came to that scene in the little garden by the fountain, she had to break with him or they would have been destroyed, both of them ruined, she was convinced" (10). Instead, Clarissa marries Richard Dalloway who guarantees her licence, independence, a distance which, Clarissa holds, is essential for her survival. The distance between self and self that is essential for Clarissa's survival is significantly bred by the social system. It is by staying within the social system that Clarissa can survive.

The same system that, by guaranteeing separation, ensures Clarissa's existence, destroys the Smiths. Septimus' madness is only ostensibly caused by the war (Dr Bradshaw diagnoses in Septimus symptoms of deferred shell-shock.) But Septimus' sanity is threatened long before the war, in his day to day existence in London:

> As for the other experiences, the solitary ones, which people go through alone, in their bedrooms, in their offices, walking the fields and the streets of London, he had them....
>
> London has swallowed up many millions of young men called Smith; thought nothing of fantastic Christian names like Septimus with which their parents have thought to distinguish them. Lodging off the Euston Road, there were experiences, again experiences, such as change a face in two years from a pink innocent oval to a face lean, contracted, hostile. (93-94)

The efficiency of London which Peter so admires, effaces the identity of the individual, dehumanises the individual. Septimus loses himself in the vast, impersonal city. However, as Jeremy Hawthorn points out: "It is not so much that the city causes alienation but rather that a particular form of social structure encouraged the development of a set of social relationships in the city, which then offered themselves as the perfect symbol of that basic structure."[1] The city is merely the structure in which the social system roosts, it is only the structure in which the alienated existence, encouraged by the system, is upheld.

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[1] Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway, p. 66.

The city is not the cause, it is the means through which the social system can be maintained. The real cause of Septimus' madness lies in the social system itself: the system that represses the freedom of the individual, and encourages impersonal, meaningless intercourse. In his madness Septimus is allowed (until the system catches up with him) the freedom of expression which is otherwise denied him in sanity. In his madness Septimus creates a compassionate, passionate relationship with the non-human world (birds, trees, flowers), the kind of relationship which, since the system disallows it, he cannot achieve with his fellow beings.

Septimus is driven mad by an impersonal, alienated existence. In turn however, Septimus' madness itself becomes a cause of alienation. Septimus' madness sets him apart from his fellow beings. His separation is quite clearly dramatised in the opening scene where Septimus' responses to car and plane are at variance with the responses of the other Londoners. While most Londoners recognise the car as a national symbol, and the plane as writing letters in the sky, Septimus maintains an idiosyncratic view of the objects which he interprets as prophetic, visionary symbols. Septimus' failure to conform to the norm marks him as an isolated figure, apart from society.

Septimus' madness does not only alienate him, it also alienates his wife from society. Rezia is embarrassed by Septimus' behaviour, and wishes to escape to a place where no one can witness her shame. Rezia is forced apart from society by Septimus' own inadequacy:

> People must notice; people must see. People, she thought, looking at the crowd staring at the motor car; the English people, with their children and their horses and their clothes, which she admired in a way; but they were 'people' now, because Septimus had said 'I will kill myself'; an awful thing to say. Suppose they had heard him? She looked

> at the crowd. Help, help! she wanted to cry out to butchers' boys and women. Help!.... She must take him away into some park. (18-19)

But it is not only that Septimus' madness sets Rezia apart from society, it also sets the Smiths apart from each other. Rezia fails to comprehend the obscure rambling of Septimus' imagination, fails to understand him altogether. Their lack of communication is suggested time and again in their diverse responses to mutually observed objects. For example, in the opening scene, Septimus' idiosyncratic view of car and plane sets him apart not only from the London crowd, but also from Rezia, for Rezia shares the majority's view of the objects. In a later scene flowers are used in a similar way to evoke the gulf between husband and wife:

> And Rezia came in, with her flowers, and walked across the room, and put the roses in a vase, upon which the sun struck directly, and went laughing, leaping round the room.
>
> She had to buy the roses, Rezia said, from a poor man in the street. But they were almost dead already, she said, arranging the roses.
>
> So there was a man outside; Evans presumably; and the roses, which Rezia said were half dead, had been picked by him in the fields of Greece. Communication is health; communication is happiness. Communication, he muttered.
>
> 'What are you saying, Septimus?' Rezia asked, wild with terror, for he was talking to himself. (103-4)

Rezia maintains a realistic and literal perspective of the flowers. For Septimus, on the other hand, the flowers have a visionary meaning, are a communiqué from his dead friend Evans. Husband and wife are as far apart from each other as are their contrary views of the flowers. Septimus muttering at this point about communication is no doubt used rhetorically to elucidate not only the immediate situation, but the central problem of Mrs Dalloway: the lack of communication, the need for communication.

Rezia's high hopes that Sir William Bradshaw will cure Septimus fall flat. She is shattered by the doctor's clinical approach and

totally despairs: "Never, never had Rezia felt such agony in her life! She had asked for help and been deserted! He had failed them! Sir William Bradshaw was not a nice man" (109). In this desperate state of mind the Smiths return home. Paradoxically, it is at the height of despair that the Smiths find happiness. The hat Rezia is sewing plays an important role in the Smiths' final moment of peace. Watching his wife at work, Septimus is filled with content. For the first time he is seen to maintain a realistic perspective of the object and does not lapse into hallucinations. The hat offers Septimus a departure point for an easy-going straightforward conversation with Rezia. For the first time the Smiths are seen to be actually communicating with each other. Their conversation is free of the strain otherwise effected by Septimus' twisted perspective and incomprehensible declarations. The hat not only provides a common verbal point of reference, it ultimately forms a basis for a shared activity, for eventually Septimus joins Rezia in the making of the hat. The hat, as it were, binds the Smiths together. Rezia's thoughts are rhetorically used to elucidate the centrality of the hat in the Smiths' union: "Yes, it would always make her happy to see that hat. He had become himself then, he had laughed then. They had been alone together. Always she would like that hat" (159).[1]

But the hat is only the means, not the cause of the Smiths' unification. Their rapport is primarily conditioned by their seclusion from the social environment, from society. Remove the social frame, and Septimus regains his sanity; remove the social frame, and the Smiths achieve a rapport. Septimus' regained equanimity, and the Smiths'

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[1] For a Marxist interpretation of the Smiths' rapport see Hawthorn, pp. 95-99.

moment of peace, significantly occur in a social void.

Septimus' sanity and the Smiths' rapport last however, only as long as the Smiths are secluded from the outside world. Once the outside world (society) invades the private territory of the Smiths, both sanity and rapport are destroyed. The little girl who has come with the evening paper, marks the first stage of the social invasion. The child distracts Rezia away from Septimus and, left alone, Septimus is overcome by a sense of isolation, and panics. Even as Rezia returns, the spell is already broken. Septimus becomes growingly aware of the threatening world outside. Dr Bradshaw, Septimus recalls, is sending him away to a rest home, forcing him apart from Rezia. Septimus' despair increases and culminates in the actual arrival of Dr Holmes, final proof of the ever imminent outside. Septimus realises that there is no escape, that he is cornered. Rather than sacrifice his individual freedom, and succumb to the system, he chooses to die. Society is no doubt at the heart of his final decision: "He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings?" (165).

The social system does not only breed Septimus' madness, it also drives him to suicide. It is only in madness that Septimus can escape the clutches of the system and gain a freedom which, as a sane member of the society, he is not allowed. But even this escape is blocked to him. Madness - that extreme form of idiosyncrasy, of individual expression - is a terrible threat to a system whose existence is conditioned by the strict adherence of all its members to a single - the materialistic - code. Such freedom as Septimus masters in his madness the system cannot tolerate. The two doctors, Dr Holmes, Dr Bradshaw - the guardians of society - must eradicate the germ of madness, the germ of freedom. They must convert Septimus back to sanity, and thus

back to the system. But it is precisely from the system that Septimus, in his madness, is trying to escape. In either case - in sanity or in madness - Septimus is cornered by the system. Suicide is the only way out that is left for him.

Mrs Dalloway offers a very bleak picture of society indeed. It is a society where individuality is effaced and the spirit of freedom crushed. The struggle for freedom is a doomed one, for at the end it is always the system that triumphs. Those who dare challenge the system - Septimus, Peter, Sally Seton - are silenced, destroyed. Septimus is forced to die, Peter must escape to India, and of Sally's youth-time rebellion nothing survives into middle age. The system swallows and curbs her as well, turns her into a Lady Rosseter, comfortably married to "a bald man with a large buttonhole who owned, it was said, cotton mills at Manchester. And she had five boys!" (201).

The system triumphs, the system prevails, curbing and moulding the individual person, the individual relationship, indeed, the whole of society, in its own image. The relationships within society as a whole can be gleaned from the series of formal links that are established between the two character groups, the Smiths and the Dalloways, and through which the narrative flow is sustained.

The first of these links is established by the car. As it stops outside Mulberry's where Clarissa is detained buying flowers, the car blocks the Smiths' path and thus brings the otherwise unrelated parties together, to a single point in time and place: "Mrs Dalloway, coming to the window with her arms full of sweet peas, looked out with her little pink face pursed in inquiry. Everyone looked at the motor car. Septimus looked" (18). Even as it progresses through the London streets

the car continues to act as a unifying agent. Wherever it passes, the car draws the attention of the passers-by who are united in a feeling of curiosity, in an effort to identify the obscure passenger, ultimately united in a shared patriotism:

> The car had gone, but it had left a slight ripple which flowed through glove shops and hat shops and tailors' shops on both sides of Bond Street. For thirty seconds all heads were inclined the same way - to the window. Choosing a pair of gloves - should they be to the elbow or above it, lemon or pale grey? - ladies stopped; when the sentence was finished something had happened. Something so trifling in single instances that no mathematical instrument, though capable of transmitting shocks in China, could register the vibration; yet in its fullness rather formidable and in its common appeal emotional; for in all the hat shops and tailors' shops strangers looked at each other and thought of the dead; of the flag; of Empire. (20-21)

The plane too acts as a means of drawing the otherwise unrelated Londoners together. Strangers are united in their effort to translate the smoke design drawn in the sky; united in their shared perplexity. As James Naremore comments:

> For a moment everyone is united by an elemental emotion of wonder and curiosity ... the skywriting plane creates or at least discloses a kind of ideal realm where the message has less to do with what is actually being spelled in the sky ... than with the emotions which unite the separate individuals.[1]

But while car and plane draw the characters together, they also set them apart. The objects elicit a multitude of different responses from the London passers-by, a diversity which, as Jeremy Hawthorn points out, suggests "the atomism of the crowd."[2] And perhaps the characters are more apart than together. After all, they are merely thrown together by circumstances, held together by artificial means. There is little doubt that once car and plane disappear, the characters assume their basic anonymity once again.

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[1] The World Without a Self, p. 83.

[2] Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway, p. 79.

The remaining formal links established between the two character groups, the Smiths and the Dalloways, similarly reveal an ambivalent relationship. Peter forms the next active link between the two narratives. Following his reunion with Clarissa, Peter wanders to Regent's Park. Here he sits next to the "grey nurse" previously mentioned in connection with the Smiths (25). Peter does not relate to the Smiths directly, but through a third agent, the nurse's child, Elsie Mitchell. Peter watches the child collide with the "lady" (Rezia), who in turn follows the child's course back to its nurse seated next to the "kind-looking man" (Peter). The generic nouns used in the characters' identification of each other suggest their mutual anonymity. Their relationship merely entails a recognition of each other's presence, but involves no emotional contact.

Peter and the Smiths next meet outside Regent's Park Tube Station. As in their former meeting, the characters once again relate to each other indirectly - through the beggar woman standing by the station, who is mutually observed by Peter and Rezia. There is no indication of a visual contact between the characters, and it is quite likely that in this encounter they remain totally unaware of each other.

The ambulance carrying Septimus to the hospital forms the next link between Peter and the Smiths. As it speeds past Peter, heading towards his hotel, the ambulance is included in Peter's visual stream of impressions:

> One of the triumphs of civilization, Peter Walsh thought. It is one of the triumphs of civilization, as the light high bell of the ambulance sounded. Swiftly, cleanly, the ambulance sped to the hospital, having picked up instantly, humanely, some poor devil; someone hit on the head, struck down by disease, knocked over perhaps a minute or so ago at one of these crossings, as might happen to oneself. (167)

The irony of the situation is obvious: the plight of one character is a source of admiration for another. The irony also marks out the essential separation of Peter and the Smiths, and indeed defines their relationship in general. For in spite of the fact that Peter and the Smiths share the same locations and sources of impressions, and in spite of the fact that they come very close to each other, they remain very much apart.

Sir William Bradshaw is the last in the series of links that tie the Dalloway-Smith narratives together. Septimus had attended Bradshaw's clinic earlier on in the day. In the evening the Bradshaws attend Clarissa's party, and Clarissa learns about Septimus' death from Lady Bradshaw. At this point however, the relationship of the two protagonists undergoes a significant change. So far Septimus and Clarissa have been related only indirectly and have maintained a mutual anonymity. Following the opening scene where they are brought together by the car, Septimus and Clarissa are related to each other through Peter, who himself relates to the Smiths through another agent. Until the party, Septimus and Clarissa are thus not only once but twice removed. But when Clarissa learns of Septimus' death she feels a strong rapport with him. She is able to understand the reasons for his suicide and identifies with him. Clarissa recognises Septimus' suicide as an act of defiance, as a protest against a society - her own society - where the human spirit is defiled and intimacy made impossible:

> A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death. (204)

Septimus' death offers Clarissa a perspective of her own life, it opens

her eyes to her own corrupt existence. But although Clarissa identifies with Septimus' act of defiance, and although she is enlightened by his death, she does not renounce her life. On the contrary, Septimus' death serves Clarissa to re-affirm her life. Septimus' death has a cathartic, rejuvenating effect on Clarissa. In the face of death, Clarissa returns to her party resolute on extracting from life its essence; determined to live life to the full. Ultimately even the rapport of Septimus and Clarissa proves abortive: Septimus' death perhaps opens Clarissa's eyes to her corrupt exitence, but it also leaves her dedicated to her life - by implication to the system - more than ever before.

Furthermore, while the final rapport of the two protagonists is not altogether unlikely, it is inconsistent, not only with their previous ties, but also with the social reality. Indeed, the majority of ties established between the two character groups mirror the very discipline encouraged by the system. Time and again the characters are brought to a single point in time and place, but they nonetheless remain apart. The agent (object or person) which brings the characters together also forms a physical barrier between them, thus invariably ensuring the encouraged separation. Some critics have suggested that the ties between the two character groups often seem contrived and artificial, inevitably superficial.[1] But it is precisely the artificial and the superficial tie that the system encourages. Given the prevailing lack of intimacy, the flash of empathy which Clarissa feels for Septimus, however aesthetically and morally satisfying, must remain in the realm of fiction alone. Characteristically, Peter Walsh can only detect a communal spirit in the London traffic: the human sector lacks it.

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[1] See for example, Brower, p.124.

2.2 TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

In To the Lighthouse the more prominent social arena of Mrs Dalloway all but disappears and is replaced by a sparse human sector composed of the Ramsay family and their few friends. Mrs Dalloway is a portrait of society, but To the Lighthouse is a family portrait, and while Mrs Dalloway engages in social analysis, To the Lighthouse engages in psycho-analysis - and more specifically, in the analysis of the complex emotions binding parent and child, husband and wife. Still, in spite of its somewhat constricted focus, To the Lighthouse is not altogether devoid of social comment, and human relations also acquire a significance other than that of family life.

The theme of human relations is established explicitly. Thus, even at the beginning of the book Mrs Ramsay observes: "Strife, divisions, difference of opinion, prejudices twisted into the very fibre of being.... It seemed to her such nonsense - inventing differences, when people, heaven knows, were different enough without that" (11). At a later stage she again thinks of "human relations, how flawed they are, how despicable, how self-seeking, at their best" (49). Lily shares Mrs Ramsay's view of human relations and thinks them "insincere" (107), but at the same time she is also fascinated by the sheer complexity of human relations: "How did one judge people, think of them? How did one add up this and that and conclude that it was liking one felt, or disliking? And to those words, what meaning attached, after all?" (29)

To the Lighthouse illustrates this complexity not only in the emotional entanglements drawn within the Ramsay family, but also in the no less intricate relations drawn between the two Ramsay adults and their guests, as well as among the guests themselves. While

concentrating on a select few characters, Virginia Woolf - a forerunner of Iris Murdoch? - all but exhausts their possible interrelations. The relations themselves often assume a sexual significance, and as Bernard Blackstone observes, To the Lighthouse is very much about "the relation of the masculine and feminine worlds."[1]

The network of human relations is consolidated in "The Window," section 17, the Ramsay dinner party. W.A. Davenport observes: "In the earlier sections we have gradually been shown the nature and relationships of the characters, one by one, and now they are all brought together and we can see the whole community which they form."[2] Indeed, it is foremost in this section that the group of characters acts, as David Daiches suggests, like "a microcosm of society"[3] and human relations acquire a truly social significance. Even Arnold Kettle who otherwise condemns To the Lighthouse as lacking "a basic conflict, a framework of human effort" acknowledges the merit of the dinner scene.[4]

While the dramatic setting - i.e. the dinner party - provides the initial frame for the social mood, it is through objects that the social mood is clarified. The use of objects in the "social dynamics" of the dinner party is the subject of the following analysis.

Mrs Ramsay's previous remark about the flawed nature of human relations is verified in the dinner party which begins in discord. Erratic shifts from the point of view of one character to the next suggest the underlying disunity which is further observed by the

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1 Virginia Woolf: A Commentary, p. 100.

2 To the Lighthouse (Virginia Woolf), p. 82.

3 Virginia Woolf, p. 84.

4 An Introduction to the English Novel, II, 95; 93-94.

characters themselves. Mrs Ramsay is the first to comment on the lack of communal spirit. Looking round the table at her family and guests, she notes: "Nothing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate" (96). Mrs Ramsay's discomfort is shared by Lily as well as by the male members of the group. Mr Bankes for example thinks "that friendships, even the best of them, are frail things. One drifts apart" (103), and Charles Tansley too feels that "nothing had shaped itself at all. It was all in scraps and fragments" (104).

The prevailing estrangement is on the surface sexual, and there is a strong sense of antagonism between the male and female sectors. As she takes on herself the responsibility for the warming up of spirits, Mrs Ramsay is reminded of her sexual identity. Otherwise proud of her domestic role, Mrs Ramsay now resents the "catering" role she is expected to perform, as woman, as hostess. Consequently she feels hostile towards the men whose sex exempts them from this duty, and senses their "sterility." Lily is a career, not a domestic, woman, and is thus more akin to the men than to Mrs Ramsay. However, during the party, and although reluctantly, Lily accepts Mrs Ramsay's implicit plea for support, and for a moment succumbs to the sympathetic and submissive role that as a woman she is expected to fulfil:

> There is a code of behaviour she knew, whose seventh article (it may be) says that on occasions of this sort it behoves the woman, whatever her occupation may be, to go to the help of the young man opposite so that he may expose and relieve the thigh bones, the ribs, of his vanity, of his urgent desire to assert himself; as indeed it is their duty, she reflected, in her old maidenly fairness, to help us, suppose the Tube were to burst into flames. (105)

Therefore, and in spite of her dislike for him, Lily proves attentive towards Charles Tansley, and together with Mrs Ramsay shares the brunt of female duty.[1]

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[1] For the female role see also Marder, pp.42-43.

Female sympathy is however met with male hostility. Mr Ramsay, Mr Tansley, Mr Bankes, resent the social event, resent the women dragging them into conversation. The men's thoughts are elsewhere, in their work. Take for example Mr Bankes's view of the situation, especially of the hostess:

> How trifling it all is, how boring it all is, he thought, compared with the other thing - work. Here he sat drumming his fingers on the table-cloth when he might have been - he took a flashing bird's-eye view of his work. What a waste of time it all was to be sure! Yet, he thought, she is one of my oldest friends. I am by way of being devoted to her. Yet now, at this moment her presence meant absolutely nothing to him: her beauty meant nothing to him; her sitting with her little boy at the window - nothing, nothing. He wished only to be alone and to take up that book. He felt uncomfortable; he felt treacherous, that he could sit by her side and feel nothing for her. The truth was that he did not enjoy family life. (102-3)

The prevailing discomfort is captured by a series of correlations established between Lily and the salt cellar on the table. Lily's antagonism is initially aroused by Mrs Ramsay pitying Mr Bankes for leading a solitary existence. Lily senses that by insinuation Mrs Ramsay's pity also applies to her, for like Mr Bankes, she too is unmarried. But, Lily argues, Mr Bankes is not in the least pitiable for he has his work, and she defends herself on similar grounds:

> She remembered, all of a sudden as if she had found a treasure, that she too had her work. In a flash she saw her picture, and thought, Yes, I shall put the tree further in the middle; then I shall avoid that awkward space. That's what I shall do. That's what has been puzzling me. She took up the salt cellar and put it down again on a flower in pattern in the table-cloth, so as to remind herself to move the tree. (97-98)

Later references to the salt cellar further establish its correlation with Lily's painting. But as such the salt cellar also relates to Lily's social self: to her sexual and social inadequacy.

Lily is not totally at one with her role as artist. Her career is to a certain extent a rationalisation of her failure to realise her

feminine identity. Indeed, Lily herself sets her artistic role against the domestic and realised sexual role of Mrs Ramsay: "Oh but, Lily would say, there was her father; her home; even, had she dared to say it, her painting. But all this seemed so little, so virginal, against the other" (58). Lily's inadequacy is yet again aroused during the party. When the newly betrothed couple, Paul Rayley and Minta Doyle, at last join the party, their love vibrates to the people around and as a result both Mrs Ramsay and Lily suddenly feel an intense frustration, jealousy. Lily wishes to partake of the lovers' emotion and be included in their circle. But Paul remains indifferent to her enthusiastic proposal to help him search for Minta's lost brooch, and she is invariably excluded. Lily assuages the pain of rejection by deflating the human emotion and replacing it with that impersonal world of art:

> He turned on her cheek the heat of love, its horror, its cruelty, its unscrupulosity. It scorched her, and Lily, looking at Minta being charming to Mr Ramsay at the other end of the table, flinched for her exposed to those fangs, and was thankful. For at any rate, she said to herself, catching sight of the salt cellar on the pattern, she need not marry, thank Heaven: she need not undergo that degradation. She was saved from that dilution. She would move the tree rather more to the middle. (118)

The passage quite clearly establishes that Lily channels her frustrated sexuality into art. But art is not only a form of compensation, it is also Lily's protection, a defence against her own vulnerability. This is illustrated through a similar use of objects in the third part of the book when, forced by Mr Ramsay to shed her artistic in favour of her sexual identity, Lily is seen to literally cling to the very utensils of her art:

> She set her clean canvas firmly upon the easel, as a barrier, frail, but she hoped sufficiently substantial to ward off Mr Ramsay and his exactingness. She did her best to look, when his back was turned, at her picture; that line there,

> that mass there. But it was out of the question. Let him be fifty feet away, let him not even speak to you, let him not even see you, he permeated, he prevailed, he imposed himself. He changed everything. She could not see the colour; she could not see the lines; even with his back turned to her, she could only think, But he'll be down on me in a moment, demanding - something she felt she could not give him. She rejected one brush; she chose another ....she fidgeted. That man, she thought, her anger rising in her, never gave; that man took. She, on the other hand, would be forced to give. (169- 70)

Art provides Lily not only with the psychological, but also with the physical means needed for her protection.

Like Lily's art, the salt cellar evokes her inadequacy on the symbolic as well as on the purely literal level. Lily relates to the salt cellar instead of relating to her friends. She withdraws from the world of human beings to the world of objects, substituting the one for the other. The act itself - Lily reaching out for the salt cellar - suggests that Lily is restless and uncomfortable; that in her restlessness she reaches out for the first object that catches her eye. Like canvas and brush, the salt cellar offers Lily a sure grasp for her agitated self.

The salt cellar may indeed relate to Lily's discomfort, but the feeling is not singular to Lily and is shared by her friends. Indeed, the talk in which the people engage establishes discomfort as the general mood. The talk admittedly "imposes some order, some uniformity" (104), but solidarity is only on the surface. The talk is forced, artificial, and hides beneath it a growing frustration. The characters' responses to Charles Tansley's abuse of the government illustrate the shared feeling of discomfort: "Lily was listening; Mrs Ramsay was listening; they were all listening. But already bored, Lily felt that something was lacking; Mr Bankes felt that something was lacking. Pulling her shawl round her, Mrs Ramsay felt that something was lacking"

(108). Mr Ramsay's anger, provoked by Mr Carmichael who has asked for another helping of soup, is all but the last straw in the already collapsing situation. But the party does not collapse. Through human and artificial means it is set aright, to finally end in success.

Mrs Ramsay who from the very start of the evening has exerted her powers of unification, is the first to initiate the turn. By asking the children to light the candles she is able to divert the attention away from the enraged Mr Ramsay. The candles have an immediate remedying effect, drawing the frustrated selves together to a single centre, effecting a solidarity which the people themselves have failed to create (111- 13). The fruit dish, set on the table and illuminated by the candle light, has a similar unifying effect. It forms a meeting point for Mrs Ramsay and Mr Carmichael. For, as Mrs Ramsay jealously contemplates the arrangement of the fruit, "she saw that Augustus too feasted his eyes on the same plate of fruit, plunged in, broke off a bloom there, a tassel here, and returned, after feasting, to his hive. That was his way of looking, different from hers. But looking together united them" (112). The serving of the main dish, the Boeuf en Daube, further contributes to the slackening tension. The pride of the hostess, the dish wins the admiration of the guests, and especially of Mr Bankes. When he praises the dish Mr Bankes indirectly praises Mrs Ramsay, and the two, previously estranged, are eventually reconciled.

Candles, fruit and meat dish, form a distraction, diverting the attention of the human being away from his fellow men by whom he feels threatened. The human being grows less conscious of his companions and subsequently more relaxed. W.A. Davenport sums up the significance of these objects in the social event:

> The result of lighting the candles is to bring the party together, to enclose the guests and to make a unified group from what had been individual personalities. At the moment when Paul and Minta are to join the group, and the great brown dish is to be brought in, a sense of harmony and communion is conveyed by this picture of the faces in the circle of light.[1]

But it is no doubt Mrs Ramsay who is the main unifying force in the party. Indeed, many critics believe that Mrs Ramsay's party role is the finest manifestation of her creative powers. Stella McNichol calls Mrs Ramsay an "imaginative and perceptive hostess,"[2] while Herbert Marder praises Mrs Ramsay as artist, priestess, and refers to the party as her creation, as "a sacrificial meal celebrating social union."[3] And in a sense the party is Mrs Ramsay's creation. Thus, at the successful climax of the party Mrs Ramsay appears "like a hawk suspended" over her family and friends, holding them together as in a trance, presiding over her creation.

But once the party ends and Mrs Ramsay leaves, disintegration sets in again. The significance of this disintegration is not only in that it highlights the central binding role fulfilled by Mrs Ramsay, but also in that it points to the essential frailty of the solidarity achieved. It is a superficial communion held together by artificial means rather than by genuine emotion. It is true that the people merge together also through sheer human effort - especially on Mrs Ramsay's part - but this again points to the fact that the solidarity is enforced and not spontaneous. In the final evaluation the party can hardly be considered a success. It is the sense of estrangement not of unity that prevails. The communal spirit is merely ephemeral and lasts only as long as the artificial means by which it is held are

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1 To the Lighthouse (Virginia Woolf), pp. 85-86.

2 Virginia Woolf: To the Lighthouse, p. 14.

3 Feminism and Art, p. 44.

present.

The second part of the novel, "Time Passes," moves away from the human sector and almost exclusively centres on Time and Nature. As such it offers a pause in the human drama which is allowed to mature, and is placed into perspective. The third part, "The Lighthouse," refers back to the various relationships which the first part had introduced but left unresolved. Human relations are once again held in an artistic frame and within that frame are epitomised by objects.

The voyage to the lighthouse is the basic structure for the reconciliation of James and Cam with their parents. Here the lighthouse and the island - as contemplated by James and Cam respectively - further consolidate the relation of child and parent, a use which has already been analysed in the previous chapter. Similarly, Lily's reconsideration of the Ramsay marriage, and to a lesser extent also of the other members of the Ramsay circle - the Rayleys, Mr Bankes, Mr Tansley, and Mr Carmichael - is held within the framework of her painting. The act of painting is itself made to coincide with the voyage at sea, so that when the Ramsays land at the lighthouse, Lily also completes her picture. At the same time the various emotional conflicts are resolved. James and Cam attain a balanced vision of their parents. Lily sets the Ramsay couple, as well as her other friends into perspective. As he completes the voyage which ten years previously had been a source of dispute with his wife, Mr Ramsay no doubt too has his share in the emotional equilibrium.

But even though human relations are set into perspective, they are not simplified. Indeed, the "message" of To the Lighthouse on this matter is quite clear. The complexity of human relations voiced by Mrs Ramsay, by Lily, and dramatised in the dinner party, is maintained

to the very end, and in spite of the fact that the various emotional ties between parents and children, husband and wife, self and other self, are eventually and ostensibly resolved.

"But it would be a mistake," Lily thinks of the Ramsay couple, "to simplify their relationship" (226). Her realisation is reflected over and over again - in James's double vision of the lighthouse; in Cam's three-fold perspective of the island; as well as in Lily's own picture. For even as Lily is about to complete her picture she still recognises that it is flawed and imperfect. The design is as intricate and as chaotic as ever. But this does not prevent Lily, possibly spurs her on to give the picture the finishing touch, to say: "I have had my vision." And given the network of correlations established between Lily's picture and the whole question of human relations as dramatised by the Ramsay couple, Lily's final view of her picture no doubt reflects the intricacy, the complexity which is at the heart of human relations themselves.

2.3 THE WAVES

The Waves is possibly the finest testament of Virginia Woolf's effort to free the novel of its sociological heritage, and to purify it of any mimetic traces. Indeed, as Joan Bennett observes, The Waves all but effaces the external world, offering nothing in the way of a live and active social milieu.[1] James Naremore emphasises the extreme "purification" of The Waves, where "the outer world is refined until it becomes ethereal," and where the dramatis personae function as in a void, "unmoored from an immediate circumstantial context."[2] The Waves is not only the most abstract, it is also the most poetic of Virginia Woolf's novels, a correlation explained by Jean Guiguet:

> If we remember what Virginia Woolf means by abstract, not only do we realize that there is no contradiction between abstraction and poetry, but we begin to see in what sense the latter term must be understood; and at the same time the substance, as well as the form, of The Waves becomes clearer. The word 'mystic', moreover, leads us in the same direction, implying a direct contact between sensibility and intelligence fused in a single act, that of apprehending a truth and a reality which eludes our ordinary awareness.[3]

Given the highly rarefied and mystical quality of The Waves, it would appear inconceivable that the book would lend itself to social analysis. For, if there is no society, no apparent human interaction, and the characters themselves ethereal presences rather than tangible human beings, where does one begin?[4]

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1 Virginia Woolf: Her Art as a Novelist, p. 111.

2 The World Without a Self, pp. 173; 189.

3 Virginia Woolf and Her Works, p. 284.

4 Virginia Woolf herself did not regard the dramatis personae of The Waves as characters and in her diary remarked : "Odd, that they (The Times) should praise my characters when I meant to have none." (AWD, p. 175).

It is precisely from the poetic act of The Waves that one should perhaps begin. The Waves is not concerned with a political, social or even a psychological interpretation of human relations. Indeed, the book cannot be further removed from such concerns. But what The Waves does offer is a purified and poetic view of human relations. Glimpsing a world beyond the self, The Waves deals only with the shades, the patterns of human intercourse.

The "social dynamics" of The Waves is itself quite simple and straightforward. It involves two principal movements - unity and divorce - movements which J.O. Schaefer explains on a metaphorical basis:

> The Waves, a novel in nine sections, is constructed on an analogy: the characters, like waves, alternately collect and break apart. In collecting they merge their individual selves and create a totally new organism, a party of people; in breaking apart they take on their own particular identities.[1]

But of the nine chapters of the book, only three portray the characters as a group: the opening garden scene, the farewell party to Percival, and the final reunion of the six at Hampton Court. In addition to these collective appearances there are several personal ties worth noting. Bernard and Susan have a special affection for each other, and in the opening scene for example, they appear conferring together, in a mutual exploration of the garden. Both Louis and Neville, but Neville in particular, view Bernard with respect and admiration. The third chapter shows Bernard and Neville together at the university. When Bernard visits Neville in his room and the two discuss poetry, this is one of the rare occasions in The Waves when human relations acquire a more personal and direct quality. It is suggested that the three male

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[1] The Three-fold Nature of Reality in the Novels of Virginia Woolf, p. 137.

protagonists, Bernard, Louis and Neville, have some kind of personal relationship with Jinny, but her relationship with Neville is probably the most substantial. Louis and Rhoda can also be paired off. They conspire together during Percival's party, and are at one time lovers. These relationships however, are never developed. They are merely hinted upon and mentioned in fleeting references. As Hermione Lee points out, the relationships "do not seem vital or impassioned."[1] The characters are only superficially involved with each other.

Indeed, on the whole the characters appear more apart than together. Except for the three occasions when they function as a group, they are divided sexually or individually. Thus, if in the opening scene the characters appear playing together in the garden, already in the next chapter they are separated when the boys are sent to one school and the girls to another. In the third chapter only Bernard and Neville are still together, at university, but the remaining four are already following different paths: Louis is a clerk in London, Susan is on her parents' farm, Jinny is enjoying city life, while Rhoda is already very much of a recluse. Momentarily broken in the fourth chapter when the six gather to celebrate Percival's departure to India, their separation lasts until old age when the six gather for a final reunion at Hampton Court.

But even on those three occasions when the characters apparently form a group, integration is not absolute. The six do indeed emerge into the world as a group, but already then their unison is incomplete. The very first sentences uttered by the children are delivered in the first person singular, which suggests that the drive for selfhood is there even at birth. The exploration of the garden is

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[1] The Novels of Virginia Woolf, p. 168.

common to all six, but each child makes his own observations and responds variously to his surroundings. Disunity is further evoked dramatically. Louis hides away from his friends and, pretending to be a flower, hopes to disguise himself and remain unseen. Susan runs away crying after she has seen Jinny and Louis kissing. She feels hurt, left out. Rhoda, for a moment alone in the classroom, solemnly declares her solitude. Nev ille, exempted on account of physical weakness from joining the children on their organised walk, indulges in an hour of solitude too. The children are only seemingly united, they form a group only on the surface. Beneath their shared activity there is always another urge - for selfhood - a fear and consciousness of separation. Moreover, if the children emerge as a group at all, it is not due to any act of will on their part. Their solidarity occurs in a state of unconsciousness. It springs from the fact that in this rudimentary stage the individual consciousness - while keen on asserting itself - is still not fully formed. It is by force of the still latent individuality that the children merge together. It is because the sense of identity is only in its nascent stage that they form a group.

Set in the opening chapter, the double social pattern of unity and disunity fully coheres only in the fourth chapter: the farewell party to Percival. As a social event per se, the party forms a natural framework for elaborating on social patterns. Percival himself plays a central role in the party: he is not only its raison d'être, he is also the instigator of the ambiguous social mood which, while epitomized in the party, underlies The Waves throughout.

The party is a break in the routine spearation of the six, divided since early childhood. For the first time in years the friends

gather together again. But until Percival's arrival the six remain very much apart. Each character remains enclosed within itself and refuses to respond to its friends. Although there is a physical closeness between them there is no sense of oneness.

The unfriendly mood changes however on Percival's arrival. Bernard highlights the positive effect Percival has on his friends:

> We who yelped like jackals biting at each other's heels now assume the sober and confident air of soldiers in the presence of their captain. We who have been separated by our youth (the oldest is not yet twenty-five), who have sung like eager birds each his own song and tapped with the remorseless and savage egotism of the young our own snail-shell till it cracked (I am engaged), or perched solitary outside some bed-room window and sang of love, of fame and other single experiences so dear to the callow bird with a yellow tuft on its beak, now come nearer; and shuffling closer on our perch in this restaurant where everybody's interests are at variance, and the incessant passage of traffic chafes us with distractions, and the door opening perpetually its glass cage solicits us with myriad temptations and offers insults and wounds to our confidence - sitting together here we love each other and believe in our own endurance. (105)

Until this point the characters have been separated from each other by the struggle for individuality. The future looms up unknown and threatens to separate them once more. But now, as the friends gather around Percival, both past and future are obliterated and they can rejoice in a communal celebration, in a unity of being inspired by Percival, their shared friend, unanimously loved and admired.

But while Percival inspires in his friends a feeling of solidarity and rapport, he also intensifies their disparate existence. For Percival also encourages his friends to individually assert themselves. He releases them of all inhibitions, and each character is aroused to shrilly announce its presence, challenging the others to do the same. Each character voices select memories from the past, unique to that one self alone, moving on to assert itself in the present, and

proclaiming the life that is yet to come. For a moment it seems as though the solidarity of being might collapse under the ever persistent cries for selfhood. Bernard, forever alert at his observer's post, arrests the subjective voice and draws his friends' attention to a mood far greater than any personal reality or private experience can be:

> 'But here and now we are together,' said Bernard. 'We have come together, at a particular time to this particular spot. We are drawn into this communion by some deep, some common emotion. Shall we call it, conveniently, 'love'? Shall we say 'love of Percival' because Percival is going to India?
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> 'No, that is too small, too particular a name. We cannot attach the width and spread of our feelings to so small a mark. We have come together (from the north, from the south, from Susan's farm, from Louis's house of business) to make one thing, not enduring - for, what endures? - but seen by many eyes simultaneously. There is a red carnation in that vase. A single flower as we sat here waiting, but now a seven-sided flower, many-petalled, red, puce, purple-shaded, stiff with silver-tinted leaves - a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution.' (108)

The seven-petalled flower is a symbol of the communion experienced by the six as they gather together to celebrate, not only Percival's departure to India, but more significantly, their own departure from innocence and initiation into adulthood. As a single flower made of seven petals the flower is a token of the unification of the six, with each other and with Percival. United in their love for Percival the six merge together with their friend to form a single collective consciousness. They are united by force of their youth, by force of their energy and vitality and belief in their power to endure.

Bernard's declaration passes however unnoticed. The characters are far too involved with themselves to heed the unique selfless moment created by Percival. The voice of subjectivity refuses to be silenced. Louis is quick to re-assert the subjective voice after its momentary lull: "'We differ, it may be too profoundly,' said Louis,

'for explanation. But let us attempt it'" (108-9). So Louis affirms himself and his friends follow suit. But throughout the proclamation of individuality there is a growing sense of a selfless world where all are held as one and complete. There is, as it were, an on-going fight between selfhood and selflessness, between individual and group consciousness. Louis, who had initially welcomed the individual voice, soon points to its falsity:

> '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. Something has been left out from fear. Something has been altered, from vanity. We have tried to accentuate differences. From the desire to be separate we have laid stress upon our faults, and what is particular to us. But there is a chain whirling round, round, in a steel-blue circle beneath.' (117)

Louis highlights the supreme selfless order bestowed upon the six by Percival. It is a transcendental moment of being, where each character loses its own individual self and merges with the rest to form a single united consciousness. This recognition of a collective existence beyond and outside the self gradually takes over the individual consciousness until the six unanimously voice themselves as one.

However, even at the height of the collective affirmation, the voice of subjectivity struggles to assert itself. For, as J.O. Schaefer explains: "Each one finds what he most persistently seeks in his own life suddenly made real in the communal feast."[1] While the six are bound together in the communal celebration, each character still asserts the shared moment as true of itself. The climax of communion coincides with the climax of individuality. In the rapport of the six with their

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[1] The Three-fold Nature of Reality in the Novels of Virginia Woolf, p. 149.

shared friend Percival, there is also a great sense of disparity and divorce.

There is no doubt that in his farewell party Percival plays a most crucial role in the unification of his friends, who are bound together by the love they bear him, and by their own youth and vigour. But it would be a mistake to regard the party and Percival as tokens of rapport alone. For the party is no more a celebration of comradeship than it is a celebration of selfhood. In their intensity, the communal spirit and the urge for selfhood are the same. The friends are no more together than they are apart. The two moods, of unity and individuality are equally inspired by Percival. And Percival is not merely a great unifier as he is often presented,[1] he is also a disruptive force. For, just as Percival encourages his friends to form into a group, he also encourages each character to individually assert itself. Percival is a kingpin of both unity and disunity, two moods which occur simultaneously, and which attain their equal climax at the party.

But while allowing for Percival's contradictory power of unification and individualisa tion, his unifying power should not be underrated. It is perhaps only after the party scene that Percival's role as unifier becomes fully apparent. After all, following Percival's departure to India, the six fall apart and remain so almost to the end of their lives. And, even as years later the six friends meet again, their meeting lacks all the intensity of their former communion. James Naremore explains the difference between the two meetings: "In the first the characters claim to be young and eager and expectant,

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[1] See for example, Blackstone, p. 171; Guiguet, pp. 291-92; Schaefer, pp. 147-48; and Bazin, p. 150.

insistent on the distinctions between them; in the second they are old, a bit sad, and weary of individuality."[1] Having grown old, the six now lack the enthusiasm to relate without. Having grown old, the six no longer possess the energy and will-power needed to bring them together. As Bernard notes: "Once we could break the current as we chose. How many telephone calls, how many postcards, are now needed to cut this hole through which we come together, united, at Hampton Court?" (185). But it is also possible to attribute the slack communion to Percival's absence. Neville encourages such a possibility when he remembers with nostalgia: "Change is no longer possible. We are committed. Before, when we met in a restaurant in London with Percival, all simmered and shook; we could have been anything" (183). Without Percival, the six lack the inspiration, lack the unifying emotion of love which years ago had enabled them to merge into one.

But even though Percival is not there to hold the six together, there is yet another force which inspires them to behold themselves - if only for a moment and for the last time - as a united consciousness. It is particularly through Bernard that the nature of this other binding power becomes apparent. As he responds to this last shared moment of being, Bernard exclaims: "The flower ... the red carnation that stood in the vase on the table of the restaurant when we dined together with Percival, is become a six-sided flower; made of six lives" (196). The flower - symbol of the unity of the six - once composed of seven petals, now contains only six. The reason for this is obvious: it is now the six alone who form the communion, Percival, long dead, is excluded. This suggests that it is not Percival or love of him that now holds the friends together. What is it then that holds them as one?

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[1] The World Without a Self, p. 184.

Is it not life itself? Note Bernard's description of the moment:

> 'Marriage, death, travel, friendship,' said Bernard; 'town and country; children and all that; a many-sided substance cut out of this dark; a many-faceted flower. Let us stop for a moment; let us behold what we have made. Let it blaze against the yew trees. One life. There. It is over. Gone out.' (196)

It is their shared voyage through life which now marks the six friends as one. Except as a faint echo of their past communion, Percival has no function in this last moment of the six together. He has not shared their struggle, it is they who have struggled through life and endured. It is the six alone who have rightly earned their final communion.

During their lifetime, Bernard, Neville, Louis, Susan, Jinny and Rhoda appear together on three occasions only: in the opening garden scene, at the farewell party to Percival and at Hampton Court. The three gatherings are related to different stages in life: childhood, adulthood and old age. Indeed, the unification of the six on the three occasions is significantly related to the time in life in which the gathering occurs. In their first appearance together the six are still children. As such their individual consciousness is not sufficiently developed. They are in a state of unconsciousness, and it is mostly due to this that they are held as one. They are bound, as it were, by a collective unconscious. The second gathering of the six occurs at the peak of youth. As the friends gather together in a farewell party to Percival, they are bound together not only by the love they bear Percival, but also by the vigour and vitality of youth. It is not only Percival but also confidence in themselves which makes this second communion possible. In the third meeting of the six it is Time - the voyage through life - which marks them as one.

On each occasion then there is a distinct reason for the formation

of the characters into a group. Needless to say that their finest moment together is at the farewell party to Percival. Nothing it seems, can equal the unifying power of the human emotion proper.

But even those few moments of solidarity experienced by the six friends are not altogether free of the urge for selfhood. Indeed, it is ultimately the effort "selfhood" which rings as the true note of The Waves. The drive for individuality prevails - in the unrelenting soliloquy, in the ever sustained monologue. All six characters are equally adamant to make themselves heard. In their struggle to assert themselves the characters inevitably break apart. It is this drive for individuality which ultimately undermines any possibility of sustained comradeship. The characters are far too busy asserting themselves to have any energy left to communicate without; they are too involved with themselves, and really care very little about each other.

It is perhaps in its egotistical appeal that The Waves is also the loneliest of Virginia Woolf's works. The lack of any verbal or physical interaction, the disjointed soliloquies delivered in a void and directed at no one in particular, point to the highly insulated form of existence which The Waves portrays.

But then, The Waves is not about a social but about a metaphysical reality. It is about a mystical world where the experience is, after all, very much a personal, private matter.

Virginia Woolf's social vision, like her philosophical perspective, is clearly marked by objects. Indeed, the philosophical (epistemological) and social concepts are invariably connected and tightly woven. The absence of a shared vision of reality, suggested in the fragmentation and disparity of the perceptions of Virginia

Woolf's characters, is also held as a social truth. We are, Virginia Woolf maintains, not only separated from each other cognitively, intellectually, in the way we respond to and apprehend reality, we are also separated emotionally, in the way we relate to one another. We form disparate selves not only as thinking, but also as social beings.

As we have seen in Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse and The Waves, Virginia Woolf's characters time and again draw together, converge around objects. But the solidarity of being does not last very long - only as long as there are objects to sustain the unifying emotion. The characters are held together by artificial means, and it is perhaps for this very reason that their rapport is frail and transitory. Indeed, the mere fact that the characters fail to respond to each other directly, and for intimacy depend on objects rather than on their own emotions, is incriminating in itself. The use of objects as a means of bringing people together in effect suggests that in essence human beings are strangers to each other.

"I am alone, I am alone!" Rezia cries in the midst of Regent's Park as she desperately tries to reach to a mad and incommunicable Septimus. Her cry reverberates throughout Virginia Woolf's fiction, from The Voyage Out to Between the Acts. This cry of loneliness is forever affixed by the object: a vital focal point around which the characters converge, but also, in its most literal sense, an actual physical barrier between self and self. It is the essential distance between people which emerges as the final truth about human relations.

3. OBJECTS AND HUMAN BEINGS: AN EXISTENTIAL APPROACH

Introductory

So far Virginia Woolf's use of objects has been analysed in relation to character, to her own philosophical standpoint and in a social context. The present chapter analyses objects in yet another, existential context.

Virginia Woolf's characters are never confined to a world that is totally human. Time and again they are made aware of another world, composed of non-human elements, where objects loom up, sound proof that man is not the sole inhabitant of this universe. Indeed, perhaps with the exception of Night and Day, the novels of Virginia Woolf systematically portray a metaphysical duality, where the human and the non-human appear side by side and as equally present.

In The Voyage Out, the Euphrosyne, alone and out at sea, fulfils a distinct symbolic function, and is clearly referred to by the author as "an emblem of the loneliness of human life" (85). But at the same time the ship has another, a metaphysical significance. While carrying a human cargo, the ship remains somewhat aloof from its passengers, occupying as it were, another level of reality. On the one hand the ship protects the human being from those elements of nature which threaten to destroy him. But on the other hand the ship itself belongs to the non-human world and is thus invariably set apart from and at variance with the human being. Self-sufficient and secure in its sheer physical mass, the Euphrosyne is a poignant reminder of that ever present and other than human reality; a scornful proof of man's flimsy, puny existence.

Later in the same book, the jungle is to fulfil a similar role to that of the Euphrosyne. Like the ship, the jungle forms part of a symbolic frame, where an external event - the voyage at sea, the river excursion through the jungle - reflects the heroine's, Rachel's, inner voyage from innocence to experience. The jungle is further aligned with the ship in that it too has a metaphysical function. It is true that there is a physical proximity between the jungle and the group of Europeans, its explorers. But, as in the case of ship and passengers, the physical closeness is deceptive and conceals another reality where man fails to merge with his surroundings. This dissociation is observed by Terence Hewet. Having just declared their love, Terence and Rachel return to their friends, and the group re-embarks on the boat. Dazed by the emotion of love, Terence's senses sharpen, and as he watches the jungle from the boat, he experiences a moment of being. He loses touch with the people around him, with the human reality and is entranced by that other world outside the self:

> Every word sounded quite distinctly in Terence's ears; but what were they saying, and who were they talking to, and who were they, these fantastic people, detached somewhere high up in the air? Now that they had drunk their tea, they rose and leant over the bow of the boat. The sun was going down, and the water was dark and crimson. The river had widened again, and they were passing a little island set like a dark wedge in the middle of the stream. Two great white birds with red lights on them stood on tilt-like legs, and the beach of the island was unmarked, save by the skeleton print of the birds' feet. The branches of the trees on the bank looked more twisted and angular than ever, and the green of the leaves was lurid and splashed with gold. (279)

Terence's view of the jungle is psychologically telling, his acute perception of the surroundings reflecting his heightened awareness following his emotional awakening. However, viewed with such a lucidity,

sun, river, birds and vegetation also acquire a significance which transcends the emotional correlation. The lucidity of Terence's perception lends the jungle a magnitude, an omnipotence and exclusivity. Thus seen, the jungle seems to deride and belittle the human being. The other members of the group share Terence's notion of a jungle self-sufficient and in its self-sufficiency hostile. Hirst, Terence's friend, protests against this self-sufficiency and dissociation, but Mr Flushing, another member of the group, approves explaining that:

> 'the absence of population to which Hirst objects is precisely the significant touch. You must admit, Hirst, that a little Italian town even would vulgarize the whole scene, would detract from the vastness - the sense of elemental grandeur.' He swept his hand towards the forest, and paused for a moment, looking at the great green mass, which was now falling silent. 'I own it makes us seem pretty small....' (279)

Mr Flushing's remark discloses the essential cause of Hirst's discomfort : it is not the self-sufficiency of the jungle as such that Hirst objects to, but rather that in its self-sufficiency the jungle seems to deride and scorn the human being. In the face of that "great green mass" Hirst suddenly realises that the world is not man-centred, that compared with the world about man counts very little indeed.

In its self-sufficiency and immensity the jungle highlights the spatial or physical relativity of the human being. But man is not only space, he is also time bound. It is once again Terence who draws attention to this existential fallibility of the human being. When Rachel dies, Terence, struggling to come to terms with this unexpected death, once more becomes aware of the world outside the self: "Suddenly he saw it all. He saw the room and the garden, and the trees moving in the air, they could go on without her; she could die" (353). Like the ship and the jungle, the non-human surroundings which Terence

beholds provide a perspective of the human being and mark out his temporality. This insight is made possible only in a state of dissociation: when man dissociates himself from both the human and the non-human environment. It is only by dissociating himself from himself, and at the same time perceiving his surroundings as apart from himself, as not human, that Terence gains insight into that which is singularly human. To perceive the world as apart from oneself, as not human, is perhaps painful in that it highlights man's limitations, but it is also essential in that it marks out that which is quintessentially human. Separation from the world is a step towards a richer, in the sense of a more fully realised humanity.[1]

But separation is not only a means, it is also, perhaps primarily a condition, which characterises not only man's relation to the world, but also his relation to his own fellow beings. After all, the love of Terence and Rachel is extremely short lived. It has been suggested that the relationship is necessarily doomed because of Rachel's reluctance to sacrifice her independence and freedom,[2] but another explanation is also possible. The divorce which characterises both metaphysical and human relations suggests that disunity is a universal condition: it is in this sense that the love of Terence and Rachel is doomed. If separation is accepted as the universal rule the failed rapport of the two cannot come as a surprise, nor should its failure be rooted in human factors. Human beings fail to converge with each other just as they fail to converge with the world.

In Jacob's Room Virginia Woolf similarly draws on objects to mark

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[1] This forms the crux of A. Robbe-Grillet's argument in "Nature, Humanism and Tragedy" (1958), rpt. in Snapshots and Towards a New Novel, trans. Barbara Wright (London: Calders and Boyars, 1965), pp. 75-95.

[2] Marder, p. 21.

out the human reality. The impressionistic presentation of Jacob Flanders in effect establishes the human being as insubstantial and ethereal. In contrast are non-human objects which are not only described with great clarity and precision, but which also appear as solid and enduring. For example, the following description of the Parthenon:

> The yellow columns of the Parthenon are to be seen at all hours of the day firmly planted upon the Acropolis....
> There they are again, the pillars, the pediment, the Temple of Victory and the Erechtheum, set on a tawny rock cleft with shadows, directly you unlatch your shutters in the morning and, leaning out, hear the clatter, the clamour, the whip cracking in the street below. There they are.
> The extreme definiteness with which they stand, now a brilliant white, again yellow, and in some lights, red, imposes ideas of durability, of the emergence through the earth of some spiritual energy elsewhere dissipated in elegant trifles. But this durability exists quite independently of our admiration. Although the beauty is sufficiently humane to weaken us, to stir the deep deposit of mud - memories, abandonments, regrets, sentimental devotions - the Parthenon is separate from all that; and if you consider how it has stood out all night, for centuries, you begin to connect the blaze (at midday the glare is dazzling, and the frieze almost invisible) with the idea that perhaps it is beauty alone that is immortal.
> Added to this, compared with the blistered stucco, the new love songs rasped out to the strum of guitar, and gramophone, and the mobile yet insignificant faces of the street, the Parthenon is really astonishing in its silent composure; which is so vigorous that, far from being decayed, the Parthenon appears, on the contrary, likely to outlast the entire world. (140-41)

The duality of a solid world immune to change on the one hand, of the human being, frail and illusory on the other, is at the centre of the book, and is inherent in the very title: Jacob's Room. Indeed, the book ends on the note of this duality: Jacob dies, defeated by the flux which is at the core of his being, while his room remains, sole relic of the man that was.

Human flux also forms a central theme in Orlando. The hero-heroine is subjected to a series of transformations through time and

sex. But amidst this inconstancy there is another world, sound and immutable. The tree under which Orlando flings himself is part of this sure, indomitable world:

> He sighed profoundly, and flung himself - there was a passion in his movements which deserves the word - on the earth at the foot of the oak tree. He loved, beneath all this summer transiency, to feel the earth's spine beneath him; for such he took the hard root of the oak tree to be ... for he felt the need of something which he could attach his floating heart to; the heart that tugged at his side; the heart that seemed filled with spiced and amorous gales every evening about this time when he walked out. To the oak tree he tied it and as he lay there, gradually the flutter in and about him stilled itself.... (20)

Unlike Orlando's agitated self, the oak tree stands solid and constant. In its solidity and durability the tree provides an anchor to his emotional, ever fluttering, tremulous self.

The house in Virginia Woolf's two last works, The Years and Between the Acts similarly fulfils a metaphysical-existential purpose. Human transience is denoted by focusing on successive generations of each of the Pargiter and Oliver families. While the human sector faces disintegration in time, not so the family house which outlasts generation after generation.

This vision of man in the context of his surroundings, this approach to the human being from the perspective of objects, strongly materialises in the existential literature of Sartre, Camus and Robbe-Grillet.[1] The association of Virginia Woolf with these writers may at first seem incongruous. It is not merely that Virginia Woolf precedes these writer-philosophers historically and belongs to a different literary era (she belongs to the early first half, they to the latter

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[1] See also Robert T. Chapman, "The Lady in the Looking Glass: Modes of Perception in a Short Story by Virginia Woolf," Modern Fiction Studies, 18 (Autumn 1972), 333; and "William Plomer," in Recollections of Virginia Woolf, ed. Joan Russell Noble (1972; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 124.

half of this century), it is also that she belongs to a different literary tradition altogether. Virginia Woolf is quintessentially an English, Sartre, Camus and Robbe-Grillet are quintessentially French writers, so where and how do they all meet? I suggest that the meeting point is both philosophical and artistic. The French writers whom Virginia Woolf in a sense anticipates in thought and in method,[1] share with her (and with each other) a basic metaphysical view of existence, as well as its artistic presentation. The metaphysical conception of existence relates to aspects of man's time and space bound condition, and it is artistically set by way of correlation or juxtaposition: man is presented in the context of his non-human surroundings, human beings and objects are made to contrast. The man-world duality forms an elemental framework, conceptual and methodical, for an existential inquiry.

Estrangement forms a central theme in Nausea (1938), which is possibly the finest artistic statement of Sartre's existential philosophy. Roquentin, the hero of the book, is estranged from his fellow men, from his non-human surroundings, even from himself. Roquentin's estrangement is metaphorically suggested as nausea and hence the title of the book. If it is men or objects, both are equally repulsive to Roquentin, inducing in him a feeling of disgust, of nausea. Roquentin's following reflection is characteristic of his state of mind in general:

> Objects ought not to touch, since they are not alive. You use them, you put them back in place, you live among them: they are useful, nothing more. But they touch me, it's unbearable. I am afraid of entering in contact with them, just as if they were living animals.

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[1] This particularly applies to Virginia Woolf's relation to Robbe-Grillet and the nouveau roman which forms a development of Virginia Woolf's own novel of subjectivity.

> Now I see; I remember better what I felt the other day on the sea-shore when I was holding that pebble. It was a sort of sweet disgust. How unpleasant it was! And it came from the pebble, I'm sure of that, it passed from the pebble into my hands. Yes, that's it: a sort of nausea in the hands.[1]

Roquentin cannot merge. He is a fragmented being, at variance with the world, an outsider.

Camus shares Sartre's vision of alienated man, and Roquentin's doubles appear in much of Camus's fiction, such as Meursault in The Stranger (1942), or as Jean-Baptiste Clamance in The Fall (1956). While in his fiction Camus describes the existential predicament in effect, in his philosophical essay The Myth of Sisyphus (1942) he analyses its causes. Camus describes man's plight as the Absurd. The Absurd, Camus argues, is neither in man nor in the world, but in their confrontation, a confrontation of two contradictory and irreconcilable forces. Man aspires to unity and clarity, he seeks to integrate with his surroundings, to explain the world about. But this wish is negated. Because the world is not human it eludes all lucidity and remains, in spite of science which ostensibly dresses the world in intelligible form, ultimately elusive and alien. In Camus's words:

> A step lower and strangeness creeps in: perceiving that the world is 'dense', sensing to what degree a stone is foreign and irreducible to us, with what intensity nature or a landscape can negate us. At the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman, and these hills, the softness of the sky, the outline of these trees at this very minute lose the illusory meaning with which we had clothed them, henceforth more remote than a lost paradise. The primitive hostility of the world rises up to face us across millenia. For a second we cease to understand it because for centuries we have understood in it solely the images and designs that we had attributed to it beforehand, because henceforth we lack the power to make use of that artifice. The world evades us because it becomes itself again. That stage-

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[1] Nausea, trans. Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 22.

> scenery masked by habit becomes again what it is. It withdraws at a distance from us.... that denseness and that strangeness of the world is the absurd.[1]

While Sartre and Camus agonise over man's divorce from the world, not so Robbe-Grillet who, on the contrary, draws sustenance from the independence, the separation of the world. Indeed, Robbe-Grillet insists on the dissociation of the world from man, on the "dehumanisation" of the world, arguing that only by dissociation will man be able to fully realise and fulfil his humanity.[2] In his writings Robbe-Grillet painstakingly maintains a distance between man and his inanimate surroundings and is careful to assert the equal presence, the equal validity of both man and objects.

The present chapter examines Virginia Woolf's own existential use of objects; her utilisation of objects to establish a perspective of human existence.

As a matter of interest it may be pointed out that the existential significance of Virginia Woolf extends well beyond the mere metaphysical view of the human condition, but given the aim of this study, the discussion is necessarily limited only to those existential attributes which are related to objects.[3]

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[1] The Myth of Sisyphus, in The Myth of Sisyphus, trans. Justin O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 20.

[2] See Robbe-Grillet, "A Path for the Future Novel" (1956), rpt. in Snapshots and Towards a New Novel, pp. 50-57; and "Nature, Humanism and Tragedy."

[3] Virginia Woolf's existentialist affiliations have so far won little critical interest, and the few critics who do draw attention to this affinity often do so in fleeting references. See for instance, Guiguet, p. 37; and Jean Alexander, The Venture of Form in the Novels of Virginia Woolf (New York: Kennikat Press, 1974), pp. 3-4. The more extensive existentialist appreciations of Virginia Woolf are: Robert G. Collins, Virginia Woolf's Black Arrows of Sensation: The Waves (Ilfracombe: A.H. Stockwell, 1962); and Lucio P. Ruotolo, "Clarissa Dalloway," in Six Existential Heroes: The Politics of Faith (Cambridge, Massachusettes: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 13-35.

3.1 MRS DALLOWAY

The epistemological relativism and social alienation ascribed to Mrs Dalloway in the preceding two chapters, already hint at the existential affiliations of the book. Clarissa's scepticism and deep sense of the mystery of life, Septimus' nihilistic vision of a world senseless and meaningless, combined with the sombre social portrait of the human being as a lonely, isolated creature, at variance with and estranged from his fellow beings, form sufficient grounds for calling Mrs Dalloway an existential work. But the existential affiliations of Mrs Dalloway (and, it might be added, of Virginia Woolf in general) extend beyond these epistemological and social observations, and involve also a metaphysical framework which defines man in relation to the non-human, and where human existence assumes its peculiar significance from its relation to the non-human world.

The opening scene of Mrs Dalloway (5-33) which acts as an overture to the whole book introduces the metaphysical theme. As it has been previously remarked, the scene centres around the mysterious personage's car, and the enigmatic skywriting plane. Both these objects have a marked, emphatic presence which establishes them as an unequivocal, irreducible reality. The Londoners (Clarissa, the Smiths, the odd passers-by) are perplexed and intrigued by these objects which defy a single explanation, and which retain an inscrutability until their final disappearance. The subjective viewpoint which dominates the characters' interpretations of car and plane suggests that the two objects form a source of bewilderment and intimidation. Seen subjectively, the object is established on a level with the human being, and can consequently be grasped and

understood. But the very subjection of the object to the characters' point of view presupposes that there is a rift, a divorce between them, that unless the object is reduced to the subjective, to the human point of view, it remains dense and inaccessible.

Big Ben which chimes the hour, and whose presence fills Mrs Dalloway from beginning to end, has the same aloofness and inscrutability as car and plane. It forbiddingly towers above the human being, its ineluctable physical mark serving as an acute reminder that the human being is not the sole inhabitant of this universe.

In Mrs Dalloway the human being is not viewed only in relation to society (although this does form the main focus), but also in relation to his non-human environment. Indeed, there is a strong correlation between the social and the metaphysical plane and the two often appear as interdependent. The correlation between social factors and man's relation to his non-human surroundings is most apparent in the case of Septimus. Forced apart from his fellow beings by the social rule, and by his own madness, Septimus turns to the world in search of the emotional contact he cannot establish with his own kind. The non-human world - Nature - replaces the social milieu which fails to provide Septimus with the home, the compassion he seeks. Septimus attaches himself to the non-human world which fulfils the role of surrogate friend and companion. Objects are humanised and charged with emotional power. Seen by Septimus, the smoke design drawn by the plane is interpreted as a communication of beauty and goodness destined for him ("So, thought Septimus, looking up, they are signalling to me." p. 25). Similarly, the flowers Rezia brings home are interpreted by Septimus as a communication from his dead friend Evans (103). Since he cannot communicate with human beings, Septimus

communicates with objects which replace the role of the human being, and endow Septimus with the compassion and affection he needs. Septimus constructs a whole metaphysical system where he and the world are united in a firm bond of friendship and beauty. The rapport which Septimus fails to achieve with human beings he forms with the world:

> He had only to open his eyes; but a weight was on them; a fear. He strained; he pushed; he looked; he saw Regent's Park before him. Long streamers of sunlight fawned at his feet. The trees waved, brandished. We welcome, the world seemed to say; we accept; we create. Beauty, the world seemed to say. And as if to prove it (scientifically) wherever he looked, at the houses, at the railings, at the antelopes stretching over the palings, beauty sprang instantly. To watch a leaf quivering in the rush of air was an exquisite joy. Up in the sky swallows swooping, swerving, flinging themselves in and out, round and round, yet always with perfect control as if elastics held them; and the flies rising and falling; and the sun spotting now this leaf, now that, in mockery, dazzling it with soft gold in pure good temper; and now and again some chime (it might be a motor horn) tinkling divinely on the grass stalks - all of this, calm and reasonable as it was, made out of ordinary things as it was, was the truth now; beauty, that was the truth now. Beauty was everywhere. (77-78)

Estranged from himself (his initial self having been replaced by a new persona) and from society, Septimus is able to mitigate his terrible loneliness by conceiving himself as physically and spiritually one with the world.

The metaphysical unity dreamed by Septimus serves as an indictment of society. It is because he cannot realise himself in society that Septimus must realise himself in relation to the world. It is because society is all but dehumanised itself that Septimus humanises the world; moulds it in the human image - an image otherwise defiled, corrupted by the human being himself.

Things however, are not as simple as that and Septimus' metaphysical system eventually proves frail and illusory. Ultimately, the world proves but a mean substitute for the human being; the metaphysical

relationship proves no recompense for the human relationship. Paradoxically, Septimus realises the frailty and falsity of his tie with the world only when he dissociates himself from the world and attaches himself to the human being instead. It is only when his tie with the world is broken, when Septimus perceives himself as apart from the world and achieves a rapport with his wife, that he realises that the world is no friend, no companion.

In the final chapter of the Smiths' drama, husband and wife for the first time are seen to experience a spiritual union. This union is encouraged by the Smiths' joint activity in the making of the hat and is rooted in their momentary seclusion from the social environment. The domestic harmony is soon interrupted however by Mrs Filmer's grandchild who has come with the evening paper. Rezia goes to attend to the child and Septimus is left alone. As he looks round the room Septimus no longer perceives himself as inextricably bound with, but as painfully apart from his surroundings:

> He started up in terror. What did he see? The plate of bananas on the sideboard. Nobody was there (Rezia had taken the child to its mother; it was bed-time). That was it: to be alone for ever. That was the doom pronounced in Milan when he came into the room and saw them cutting out buckram shapes with their scissors; to be alone for ever.
>
> He was alone with the sideboard and the bananas. He was alone, exposed on this bleak eminence, stretched out - but not on a hill-top; not on a crag; on Mrs Filmer's sitting-room sofa. As for the visions, the faces, the voices of the dead, where were they? There was a screen in front of him, with black bulrushes and blue swallows. Where he had once seen mountains, where he had seen faces, where he had seen beauty, there was a screen.
>
> 'Evans!' he cried. There was no answer. A mouse had squeaked, or a curtain rustled. Those were the voices of the dead. The screen, the coal-scuttle, the sideboard remained to him. Let him, then, face the screen, the coal-scuttle and the sideboard [...]. (160- 61)

Objects which had once bestowed on Septimus love and beauty suddenly appear dense and hostile. The plate of bananas, sideboard, screen (wall-

paper), and coal-scuttle, appear as things in themselves, devoid of any compassion. Septimus' terror springs from his perception of a world distant and indifferent. The world turns its back on Septimus and he experiences the full brunt of his alienated, isolated existence. Septimus' final vision is of himself as exiled man: estranged from himself, from society, from the world.

It is in the face of his total - social, metaphysical - alienation, that Septimus decides to commit suicide. In his suicide Septimus carries his alienated existence to its logical conclusion - for is not death an ultimate estrangement, a total severance of man from himself, from everything? In his death Septimus realises a life already divest of any hope, of all illusions.

But it would be wrong to view Septimus' suicide merely as an act of despair, of resignation. It is also an act of rebellion, of defiance, Clarissa thinks (204). It is an attempt to salvage the human spirit from its defacement and corruption by a system which curbs and represses the soul. "'I'll give it you!'"(165) Septimus cries as he flings himself to death. But the cry remains ambiguous. Is it addressed to Dr Holmes who has come to attend to his patient and from whom Septimus is fleeing? Is it addressed to the old man descending the staircase opposite who is accidentally caught in this tragic web of events? If the cry is addressed to Dr Holmes the suicide may be interpreted as an act of resignation wherein Septimus, realising that he cannot be master of his own life and must subordinate himself to the will of the system, carries this subordination to its bitter end by literally offering his life to the system. In this context the cry may be translated as: "Since you are after my life, here, have it." But the assertive nature of the cry seems to rule out that the

suicide is an act of surrender, of defeat. Hence it is more likely that the cry is addressed to the passer-by - by implication to us - and that Septimus dies in the name of life, for a humanity bereft of its own image.

Septimus is driven mad by an irrational world, a world that propagates cruelty and war and where individuality is effaced only to preserve a corrupt system. It is a system whose very guardians operate under false pretensions, for their own personal welfare rather than for the welfare of the individual and society which they ostensibly seek to protect. Rezia's consciousness is not as comprehensive as that of Septimus and is basically limited to her own private world. Septimus' suffering is philosophical and is related to the state of the world, of mankind. Rezia's suffering is psychological and relates to her own personal predicament.

Once composed and easy to understand, Septimus has become over a five year period following the end of the war totally vague and incommunicable. Rezia is bewildered by the change in Septimus and fails to understand its causes. Her suffering is mental: it is because she cannot explain the reasons for Septimus' breakdown that Rezia suffers. Her only source of consolation is the past - her youth in Milan, her former happy days with Septimus. Rezia draws on the past for solace, as well as in the hope of finding there an answer to her present predicament.

Although most of Rezia's reflections and reminiscences bear a personal mark and do not transcend the boundaries of her own private world, at times the author places her character in a wider metaphysical perspective. One of these instances occurs when the Smiths are at Regent's Park. Rezia, discouraged for having failed to elicit a coherent

response from Septimus, wanders off by herself. As she contemplates Septimus' irrational behaviour Rezia is filled with a sense of her own suffering and consequently recalls her own family and home-town:

> Far was Italy and the white houses and the room where her sisters sat making hats, and the streets crowded every evening with people walking, laughing out loud, not half alive like people here, huddled up in Bath chairs, looking at a few ugly flowers stuck in pots!
> 'For you should see the Milan gardens,' she said aloud. But to whom?

It is in the following passage that Rezia's suffering acquires a metaphysical significance:

> There was nobody. Her words faded. So a rocket fades. Its sparks, having grazed their way into the night, surrender to it, dark descends, pours over the outlines of houses and towers; bleak hill-sides soften and fall in. But though they are gone, the night is full of them; robbed of colour, blank of windows, they exist more ponderously, give out what the frank daylight fails to transmit - the trouble and suspense of things conglomerated there in the darkness; huddled together in the darkness; reft of the relief which dawn brings when, washing the walls white and grey, spotting each window-pane, lifting the mist from the fields, showing the red-brown cows peacefully grazing, all is once more decked out to the eye; exists again. I am alone; I am alone! she cried, by the fountain in Regent's Park ... as perhaps at midnight, when all boundaries are lost, the country reverts to its ancient shape, as the Romans saw it, lying cloudy, when they landed, and the hills had no names and rivers wound they knew not where - such was her darkness.... (27-28)

"Metaphor," writes Robbe-Grillet, "is never an innocent form of speech." To describe man in terms of nature (or vice versa) implies, Robbe-Grillet maintains, "a whole metaphysical system."[1] And the metaphysical system is dangerous because it invariably diminishes and obscures the essence of man. Man is no longer judged for what he truly is, on an independent basis, but on the basis of his contacts with the world. Ultimately man appears as a mere extension, an

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[1] "Nature, Humanism and Tragedy", p.78.

auxiliary of the world, himself devoid of any inherent value.

The present description of Rezia at first seems to assert the truth of Robbe-Grillet's argument. The analogy drawn between Rezia and the landscape sets them as accomplices in each other's fate and establishes them as one. Since Rezia's loneliness has its non-human correspondent in nature, loneliness no longer appears as a singularly human, but rather, as a universal condition.

Sound and convincing as Robbe-Grillet's argument may be, it perhaps makes too much of the hidden significance of poetic diction, too little of its purely practical use. For prior to any philosophical analysis poetic diction is essentially a literary asset, a means of elaboration and emphasis. Thus, the essential function of the analogy drawn between Rezia and the primeval landscape is to give depth and dimension to Rezia's agony. If there is any rapport between Rezia and the land it remains on a linguistic level alone. Indeed, as Rezia continues to ruminate about her fate, she soon confronts a world totally indifferent and hostile. The world does not share Rezia's suffering: "She was exposed; she was surrounded by the enormous trees, vast clouds of an indifferent world, exposed; tortured; and why should she suffer? Why?" (73). Whether trees and clouds are understood metaphorically, or whether they are understood literally, as physical presences actually perceived by Rezia as she wanders through the park, makes no difference. For in either case it is an unsympathetic relationship that is drawn between Rezia and her surroundings. Indeed, the unsympathetic world confronted by Rezia significantly intensifies her suffering. Sans accomplices Rezia must bear the full brunt of her fate alone.

Rezia's metaphysical isolation places her condition in a new

light altogether. Her loneliness no longer appears circumstantial, related to such factors as exposure to an alien culture, or to Septimus' madness and its subsequent undermining of the Smiths' marriage, but rather as a condition inherent in the very act of existence. The hostile world that Rezia confronts suggests that her isolation is rooted in man's being in a world not human, therefore incommunicable, therefore hostile. Rezia is condemned to suffer by force of her humanity.

It is impossible to fully appreciate Septimus' drama without taking into consideration social factors. Septimus' failure to realise himself in the human circle, the emotional repression imposed on him as a member of the society, are at the root of Septimus' insane vision of himself and the world as one. Also in the case of Clarissa there is an interdependency between social and metaphysical factors. The social reality plays an important part in Clarissa's transcendental theory and alternatively, Clarissa's metaphysical notions dictate the course of social action she follows.

Even as Clarissa celebrates and affirms life with her whole being, she is yet aware of the limitations inherent in the very act of existence, aware of the paradox inherent in life itself: that it is erosive and self-negating. Thus, in the midst of her morning walk, when she is fully savouring the upsurge of energy in the London streets, Clarissa is suddenly arrested by quite another feeling, is made aware of those forces which fight and corrode the human being. Clarissa's discomfort is induced by her actual physical correlation to the London traffic:

> She had reached the Park gates. She stood for a moment, looking at the omnibuses in Piccadilly.
> She would not say of anyone in the world now that they were this or were that. She felt very young; at the same

> time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxicabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. (10-11)

Clarissa refuses to define the self because to define implies to confine, to limit. Indeed, as Clarissa stands watching the taxicabs she becomes aware of the very limitations she resents. The reference to the taxicabs is significant, for it is in relation to these other than human presences that Clarissa is made aware of her own human reality, of her own human limitations. The taxicabs - by force of their non-humanity - place Clarissa, place the human being - in perspective. The taxicabs accentuate the human fallibility and remind Clarissa that man is not omnipresent, that his days are numbered. In the face of the non-human Clarissa is filled with an acute sense of loneliness, of estrangement. Confronting a non-human world, Clarissa feels snubbed and rejected - a stranger.

The intimidating and rebuffing power of objects is further illustrated in the scene where Clarissa, having returned home from her morning walk, retires to the attic. The feeling of alienation is this time induced by the furniture in the bathroom by which Clarissa pauses on her way upstairs, a feeling further sustained by the furniture of the attic-room:

> Like a nun withdrawing, or a child exploring a tower, she went upstairs, paused at the window, came to the bathroom. There was the green linoleum and a tap dripping. There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room. Women must put off their rich apparel. At mid-day they must disrobe. She pierced the pincushion and laid her feathered yellow hat on the bed. The sheets were clean, tight stretched in a broad white band from side to side. Narrower and narrower would her bed be. The candle was half burnt down and she had read deep in Baron Marbot's Memoirs. (35)

The bathroom and attic-room furniture has an existence separate from Clarissa's. In its self-sufficiency the furniture appears to negate

Clarissa. Forced apart from her surroundings, Clarissa feels acutely alone.

Clarissa's metaphysical alienation is related to another feeling, that of social alienation. Clarissa feels rejected not only by her surroundings, but also by her fellow beings.

When Clarissa returns home she finds a note informing her that her husband is dining at Lady Bruton's. Clarissa is deeply hurt by the fact that she herself has not been invited. She feels rejected and excluded. As she ponders on her exclusion Clarissa's thoughts soon revert to the human condition, to man's existential predicament. The one rejection by Lady Bruton reminds Clarissa of the other more fundamental rejection which is at the heart of life, namely man's continual erosion by Time. Indeed, in Clarissa's mind Lady Bruton soon becomes an emblem of man's irrevocable fate:

> Millicent Bruton, whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing, had not asked her. No vulgar jealousy could separate her from Richard. But she feared time itself, and read on Lady Bruton's face, as if it had been a dial cut in impassive stone, the dwindling of life; how year by year her share was sliced; how little the margin that remained was capable any longer of stretching, of absorbing, as in the youthful years, the colours, salts, tones of existence, so that she filled the room she entered, and felt often, as she stood hesitating one moment on the threshold of her drawing-room, an exquisite suspense, such as might stay a diver before plunging while the sea darkens and brightens beneath him, and the waves which threaten to break, but only gently split their surface, roll and conceal and encrust as they just turn over the weeds with pearl....
> She began to go slowly upstairs, with her hand on the banisters, as if she had left a party, where now this friend now that had flashed back her face, her voice; had shut the door and gone out and stood alone, a single figure against the appalling night, or rather, to be accurate, against the stare of this matter-of-fact June morning; soft with the glow of rose petals for some, she knew, and felt it, as she paused by the open staircase window which let in blinds flapping, dogs barking, let in, she thought, feeling herself suddenly shrivelled, aged, breastless, the grinding, blowing, flowering of the day, out of doors, out of the window, out of her body and brain which now failed, since Lady Bruton, whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing, had not asked her. (34-35)

It is immediately following the above meditation that Clarissa is overcome by a feeling of alienation induced by the furniture in the bathroom and attic-room. Given that the furniture-induced alienation immediately follows Clarissa's contemplation of her rejection by Lady Bruton we can assume that it is at least in part affected by Clarissa's pre-existing feeling of rejection. Thus we can say that the furniture-induced alienation is partly a product/projection of the pre-existing social alienation; that the taciturn objects intensify a feeling of rejection that is already there. But, given Clarissa's previously arrived at realisation that alienation is inbuilt into the very act of existence, the alienation experienced by Clarissa in the face of her surroundings should also be considered as non-circumstantial, as independent of the pre-existing mood of rejection, and as a manifestation of the rejection which Clarissa realises is inherent in life itself.

Clarissa's acute feeling of loneliness intensifies her need for intimacy and it is significantly when Clarissa's (social, metaphysical) alienation is at its most intense that she recalls her passionate relationship with Sally Seton, her youth-time friend. Alternatively, the recalled intimacy accentuates Clarissa's present feeling of alienation. Indeed, Clarissa distinctly contrasts her past moments of passionate love with her present feeling of hollowness, a hollowness which Clarissa explicitly correlates with her immediate non-human surroundings: "Against such moments," Clarissa thinks, "there contrasted ... the bed and Baron Marbot and the candle half-burnt" (37). The contrast is significant in that it implies that Clarissa believes that it is only with our own kind that we can hope to assuage, to momentarily overcome the terrible isolation which is at

the heart of life. It is only with our own kind, Clarissa senses, that we can hope to achieve an intimacy which the world, because it is not human, necessarily denies us.

Human intimacy is however, Clarissa realises, rare and ephemeral. Thus Clarissa's love for Sally Seton is undermined by Peter Walsh; his relationship with Clarissa is in turn undermined by Richard Dalloway. Realising the general lack of intimacy in man's relation to his fellow beings, as well as in his relation to the world at large, Clarissa devises a system which will ensure her of intimacy. She constructs a metaphysical system, timeless and spaceless, where all things, human and non-human alike, partake of each other and are held in firm union. Peter Walsh explains the evolution of this metaphysical system:

> Clarissa had a theory in those days.... It was to explain the feeling they had of dissatisfaction; not knowing people; not being known. For how could they know each other? You met every day; then not for six months, or years. It was unsatisfactory, they agreed, how little one knew people. But she said, sitting on the bus going up Shaftesbury Avenue, she felt herself everywhere; not 'here, here, here'; and she tapped the back of the seat; 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, or say that she believed (for all her scepticism), that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places, after death. Perhaps - perhaps. (168- 69)

By conceiving herself as inextricably bound with all things, Clarissa achieves an intimacy which compensates for the total lack of intimacy experienced by Clarissa in actual fact, in relation to her fellow beings, as well as in relation to her non-human surroundings. But the metaphysical system not only solves the problem of intimacy, it

also solves the perhaps more fundamental problem of man's essential fallibility: his time and space-bound existence. By conceiving herself as inextricably woven with all things Clarissa also attains a kind of immortality and omnipresence.

It is interesting to note that both Septimus and Clarissa share a transcendental vision and that their vision draws on similar sources. Septimus turns to the world in the hope of finding there the compassion the human sector lacks. Similarly, Clarissa's vision of an all-encompassing unity, where all things, human and non-human, partake of each other, is a rationalisation of the essential lack of intimacy which Clarissa perceives in man's relation to his fellow beings, as well as in his relation to the non-human world. In their transcendental vision Septimus and Clarissa do not only challenge man's social constrictions but also his ontological fallibility. Their vision of man as omnipresent, as immortal, is in defiance of man's confinement to the one kind of human reality, of his time-bound existence. In their metaphysical unity Septimus and Clarissa express a hidden wish to extend man's relations to the world outside his own, finding relations on the human level alone unsatisfactory and limited. It is also interesting to note that the transcendental vision is in the case of both Septimus and Clarissa significantly related to a private experience of death. Septimus is haunted by the death of his officer and friend Evans, killed in the war and in defiance declares "how there is no death" (28). Like Septimus, Clarissa too has had a traumatic experience of death, has witnessed the death of her sister (87). It is in her horror of death, Peter Walsh reflects, that Clarissa constructs a transcendental theory which asserts man as immortal.

Still, there is an essential difference between the metaphysical systems of Septimus and Clarissa. For while Septimus actually lives the metaphysical rapport, Clarissa only intellectualises about it. For Septimus the tie with the world is a reality, for Clarissa it is merely a speculative possibility. The non-materialisation of Clarissa's transcendental theory is significant and suggests that Clarissa does not sincerely believe in it.

Indeed, it is not on the metaphysical but on the social level that Clarissa combats - in effect - the antagonistic forces of life. It is mostly by engaging in social activity - in her party - that Clarissa assuages her fears, her resentments.

Again, like her transcendental theory the social action Clarissa takes is rooted both in social and in ontological factors. The more obvious motive for Clarissa's party is the lack of intimacy which Clarissa perceives in human relations. In her party Clarissa brings people together and, at least for a moment triumphs over the social reality. When Clarissa apologises for her party she argues that it is in celebration of, a tribute to life. She thinks of the party as a religious, sacrificial act in affirmation of life and thus by implication, in defiance of those forces that negate life. Indeed, in her apology Clarissa significantly correlates the positive with the negative forces of life:

> All the same, that one day should follow another; Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday; that one should wake up in the morning; see the sky; walk in the park; meet Hugh Whitbread; then suddenly in came Peter; then these roses; it was enough. After that, how unbelievable death was! -that it must end; and no one in the whole world would know how she had loved it all; how, every instant [...]. (135- 36)

It is the wonder and the mystery of life which Clarissa celebrates in her party, by that daring and challenging life's corrosive, antagonistic

forces. It is in her passion for life - epitomized in her party - in her defiance of time, of death, that Clarissa can be regarded as an existential heroine.[1]

The correlation between human relations and man's relation to the world is further apparent in the case of Peter. Following his abortive reunion with Clarissa, Peter wanders through London. Peter has been hurt, antagonised by Clarissa's aloofness. His antagonism is not merely psychological, it soon acquires a metaphysical perspective: "And just because nobody yet knew he was in London, except Clarissa, and the earth, after the voyage, still seemed an island to him, the strangeness of standing alone, alive, unknown, at half-past eleven in Trafalgar Square overcame him. What is it? Where am I?" (58). Like Rezia who, while walking through the park is overcome by a sense of an indifferent and hostile world, so does Peter feel rejected and snubbed by his surroundings. Standing alone in Trafalgar Square, set against this wide space, Peter invariably feels deprecated and intimidated.

The strangeness which overcomes Peter as he stands in Trafalgar Square arrests him again at a later stage. After a day's long meandering through London intermittently thinking about Clarissa, Peter returns to his hotel room. There he finds a note from Clarissa informing him of her pleasure in having seen him again. It is then that Peter suddenly notices the sterility, hostility of his surroundings:

> These hotels are not consoling places. Far from it. Any number of people had hung up their hats on those pegs. Even the flies, if you thought of it, had settled on other people's noses. As for the cleanliness which hit him in

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[1] For an analysis of Clarissa as an existential heroine see Ruotolo, pp. 13-35.

> the face, it wasn't cleanliness, so much as bareness, frigidity; a thing that had to be. Some arid matron made her rounds at dawn sniffing, peering, causing blue-nosed maids to scour, for all the world as if the next visitor were a joint of meat to be served on a perfectly clean platter. For sleep, one bed; for sitting in, one arm-chair; for cleaning one's teeth and shaving one's chin, one tumbler, one looking-glass. Books, letters, dressing-gown, slipped about on the impersonality of the horse-hair like incongruous impertinences. And it was Clarissa's letter that made him see all this. (171)

Clarissa's letter accentuates Peter's longings for her. It is at this point, when Peter's longings for Clarissa are at their most intense that he is struck by the hostility of his surroundings. It is an hostility that arises from the incongruity between want and have: between Peter's strong yearning for intimacy, for Clarissa, and the total negation, frustration of his wants, by his surroundings. In their opacity, in their non-humanity the objects that surround Peter negate, indeed snub his yearning for intimacy.

It is not altogether unlikely that the strong negation that Peter feels in the face of his surroundings contributes to his final resolution to attend Clarissa's party. The taciturn objects in his room, no doubt accentuate Peter's need for human contact, for Clarissa. Rejected and antagonised by the non-human world, Peter understandably turns to the human world in the hope of attaining there the intimacy, the compassion which the non-human world, precisely because it is not human, denies him. Estranged as Peter may be from his fellow beings, the human circle, for all its shortcomings, is ultimately the only place where Peter - or any of the other characters - can hope to feel at home.

Mrs Dalloway offers a sombre view of society. It is a materialistic society that devalues emotion, deprecates the human spirit, the human being. It is a repressive society that forces the human being

to retreat, to withdraw into himself, thus making intimacy impossible. The characters in Mrs Dalloway suffer from an acute loneliness, they are isolated, alienated figures, in search of love and human warmth.

It is not only man's relation to his own kind but also his relation to the non-human world that leaves him discontented and unfulfilled. The characters - Septimus and Clarissa in particular - turn to the world in the hope of finding there a cure for the social ills, in the hope of assuaging their fears and transcending their human limitations. Thus Septimus and Clarissa construct a metaphysical system where man and the world, man and man, are held together in a firm bond of friendship. It is a timeless, spaceless system that asserts the omnipresence and immortality of man. But the metaphysical system ultimately proves frail and illusory. The world remains stubbornly distant and hostile, refusing complicity, refusing intimacy.

Still, for all its pessimism Mrs Dalloway is affirmative in mood. The affirmation of Mrs Dalloway is not in the kind of human condition it describes, but rather, in the nature of the causes in which the human condition is rooted. It is in the correlation of the social and the metaphysical systems that the affirmation of Mrs Dalloway lies.

The estrangement which characterises human relations in Mrs Dalloway is a product of the social discipline, a discipline that represses emotion and discourages personal, intimate ties. The social malaise is circumstantial and dependent on the propagated social code.

Because the characters cannot realise their emotional needs in society they turn to the non-human world. They hope to attain from the world the intimacy society denies them. But the world fails to satisfy the characters' emotional needs, fails to provide a panacea

for the social ills.

The metaphysical system dreamed by Septimus and Clarissa is not only a means of combating social ills, it is also a means of coming to terms with ontological constrictions. The metaphysical system which asserts the omnipresence and immortality of man suggests a yearning to transcend the human reality, to escape the confining boundaries of human existence. But again, the metaphysical system proves false and fails to actually satisfy the characters' transcendental aspirations.

The failure of the metaphysical system to mitigate the human condition is perhaps not so much circumstantial as it is inevitable. The characters turn to the world in the hope of finding there a cure for ills which are after all man made, ills that have little to do with the world but everything to do with human beings. But the world is not human. How can it provide a cure for ills fundamentally human? Also the characters' aspirations to break through the circuit of their confined existence are doomed, futile. Man's relativity is inborn, inherent in his very existence. It is not in the power of the world to change the human reality. It is by force of their humanity, alternatively, by force of the non-humanity of the world that the characters fail to realise themselves in relation to the world.

The failure of the metaphysical system is significant. There is an element of escapism, of vanity in the metaphysical system. Man constructs a metaphysical system so as to escape from his own unpalatable human reality. The metaphysical system involves a rejection of the human world. The failure of the metaphysical system acts as its implicit condemnation.

The categorical failure of the metaphysical system shifts the

emphasis to the social system, to the human being himself. Moreover, given that the failure of the metaphysical system is to all intents and purposes innate and given that the failure of the social system is circumstantial, the "burden of proof" naturally falls on the social system.

The affirmation of Mrs Dalloway is in its humanistic vision, in its emphasis on the human being, in its implicit faith in human potential. The book decries the corruption of the human spirit by society, the book decries man's limitations, but it also makes it very clear that no metaphysical system can mitigate these ills. It is only within society, it is only through human effort that man's redemption is possible.

The affirmation of Mrs Dalloway is epitomised by Clarissa. She discards her transcendental theory in favour of a social activity. It is within the human, not the metaphysical framework that Clarissa tries to get - if only for a moment, if only superficially - the better of the social reality, the better of life's antagonistic forces. It is not coincidental that the book ends with Clarissa's party, and thus on the note of human activity, human effort.

3.2 TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

J.O. Schaefer writes that "the world Virginia Woolf creates in To the Lighthouse is the largest of all possible worlds, since it encompasses all time and all space, including in its perspective all humanity and, beyond that, the wider world of the non-human universe."[1] It is within this metaphysical framework that the existential inquiry of To the Lighthouse is set. There is a clear shift from the humanistic existentialism of Mrs Dalloway where the existential observations bear on the social criticism, to the metaphysical, indeed purely analytical existentialism of To the Lighthouse. In Mrs Dalloway the human being is set against society but in To the Lighthouse he is set against a dehumanised world, against the elements.

The following pages examine the use of the object in this rarefied perspective of the human being.

The three-part structure of the book serves as a guideline to the metaphysical intercourse. While "The Window" centres on the human sector and the relations therein, "Time Passes" magnifies the elements, asserting Time and Nature as universal patterns, cosmic forces. However, "The Lighthouse" forms a via media of the former two parts and centres on both man and his surroundings. While this formal pattern suggests that there is a movement from disparity to reconciliation in the man-world relationship, it also suggests that the relationship is somewhat ambiguous. Man and the world appear apart yet integrated, in an antithetic yet sympathetic relation to each other.

Indeed this ambivalence can be further gleaned from point of view, from the way the characters respond to objects of perception.

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[1] The Three-fold Nature of Reality in the Novels of Virginia Woolf, p. 116.

The subjective mode which dominates James's view of the lighthouse, Mrs Ramsay's view of the lighthouse, or Cam's view of the island, can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand the subjective mode of perception establishes a kind of rapport, a solidarity between man and his surroundings. Seen subjectively, the object appears to merge with its percipient, and the two become an integral part of each other. But on the other hand to see the object subjectively also implies a certain coercion. The object is subjected to the character's point of view, brought under the character's control.[1] The enforced human perspective raises the possibility that object and character are in an antagonistic relation to each other, that unless humanised, the object poses a threat. This is especially suggested in the lighthouse as seen by James the child. It is a sympathetic, whimsical lighthouse, which has obviously been modified, simplified, so as to be made comprehensible for the child. Once the lighthouse is translated into the child's language, it can be understood, grasped. A humanised is also a familiar, intelligible world.

That the world is not human is perhaps a good enough reason for man's discomfort, but it is not the only one. Indeed, it sometimes seems that the essential cause for man's discomfort has more to do with the fact that he is human than with the fact that the world is not. Man refuses to come to terms with the fact that he is time and space bound, refuses to accept his inbred limitations. It is in this context that the world becomes a threat. And it becomes a threat because as not human it has the power of highlighting that which is human. The non-human world reminds the human being of his own - unpalatable - human reality. A series of correlations drawn between objects and

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[1] See also Richter, p. 68.

human beings illustrates this power of the object to capture the limitations inherent in human existence.

One of these correlations involves Mrs Ramsay and the sea. Mrs Ramsay is seen attending to James when suddenly she dissociates herself from the task at hand and is overcome by a sense of the sea on the one hand, and on the other by a sense of her own being:

> But here, as she turned the page, suddenly her search for the picture of a rake or a mowing-machine was interrupted. The gruff murmur, irregularly broken by the taking out of pipes and the putting in of pipes which had kept on assuring her, though she could not hear what was said (as set sat in the window), that the men were happily talking; this sound, which had lasted now half an hour and had taken its place soothingly in the scale of sounds pressing on top of her, such as the tap of balls upon bats, the sharp, sudden bark now and then, 'How's that? How's that?' of the children playing cricket, had ceased; so that the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach, which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts and seemed consolingly to repeat over and over again as she sat with the children the words of some old cradle song, murmured by nature, 'I am guarding you - I am your support', but at other times suddenly and unexpectedly, especially when her mind raised itself slightly from the task actually in hand, had no such kindly meaning, but like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life, made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea, and warned her whose day had slipped past in one quick doing after another that it was all ephemeral as a rainbow - this sound which had been obscured and concealed under the other sounds suddenly thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror.
>
> They had ceased to talk; that was the explanation. (19-20)

Due to the momentary lull of human voices, the sea, formerly blurred by human sounds is now distinctly heard by Mrs Ramsay. As a result of this non-mediatorial correlation, Mrs Ramsay becomes aware of her own human reality, of her time bound existence, and hence her "impulse of terror." The accentuating power of the sea is conditioned by its dissociation from the human reality. Awareness of the sea as not human leads to awareness of that which is human. But the power of the sea to highlight the human reality is also rooted in its affinity with

the human reality, for Mrs Ramsay reads in the rhythmic beat of the waves her own destiny. The ever continuous roll of the waves reminds Mrs Ramsay of the essential flux of her - of all life. (It may be pointed out that the temporal relativity is itself induced by and conditioned by the spatial relativity: Mrs Ramsay-sea). Mrs Ramsay's confidence is restored however on the resumption of human voices. The sea is pushed back into the background and consequently loses its power to accentuate the human reality. The resurgence of human voices and its subsequent restoring effect on Mrs Ramsay is significant in that it suggests that the human being feels secure only in a world that is predominantly human. Once this balance is upset, man realises that the world is not anthropocentric, and in the face of his relativity, his limitations, is rebuffed.

Mrs Ramsay is obsessed with her time bound existence, and her anxiety, brought to the surface by the sea, is only for a short while inhibited by the resurgence of human speech. A moment later she looks around the sitting room and is again overcome by forebodings:

> She looked up ... and saw the room, saw the chairs, thought them fearfully shabby. Their entrails ... were all over the floor.... At a certain moment, she supposed, the house would become so shabby that something must be done.... things got shabbier and got shabbier summer after summer. The mat was fading; the wallpaper was flapping. You couldn't tell anymore that those were roses on it.... What was the use of flinging a green Cashmere shawl ove r the edge of a picture frame? In two weeks it would be the colour of pea soup. (31-33)

The decrepit state of the furniture is only the surface cause for Mrs Ramsay's despondency. The main reason for her dejection lies in the fact that the dilapidated furniture reminds her of her own predicament, of her similar subjection to the ravages of time.

While Mrs Ramsay is preoccupied with the limitations of human life, her husband is preoccupied with the limitations of the human mind,

of human understanding. A philosopher, Mr Ramsay approaches the question analytically and attempts to establish a rational explanation for the limitations he perceives - not only in his own mental capacity, but which he soon discovers as fundamental to the human condition:

> He stood stock still, by the urn, with the geranium flowing over it. How many men in a thousand million, he asked himself reach Z after all? ... 'One perhaps'. One in a generation. Is he to be blamed then if he is not that one? provided he has toiled honestly, given to the best of his power, till he has no more left to give? And his fame lasts how long? It is permissible even for a dying hero to think before he dies how men will speak of him hereafter. His fame lasts perhaps two thousand years. And what are two thousand years? (asked Mr Ramsay ironically, staring at the hedge). What, indeed, if you look from a mountain-top down the long wastes of the ages? The very stone one kicks with one's boot will outlast Shakespeare. His own little light would shine, not very brightly, for a year or two, and would then be merged in some bigger light, and that in a bigger still. (He looked into the darkness, into the intricacy of the twigs).... Mr Ramsay squared his shoulders and stood very upright by the urn. (41-42)

By invoking man's temporality Mr Ramsay is able to rationalise his own intellectual limitations. Since man is time bound, he argues, he is, whether genius or not, anyway doomed to pass into oblivion, so why worry about one's fame at all? But Mr Ramsay's realisation of the essential relativity of man is not limited to an argumentative level alone and is further demonstrated on an actual physical level. On several occasions Mr Ramsay's mental exercise is interjected with references to stone urn and hedge. These references are far from arbitrary. For the spatial correlations drawn between urn, hedge and man capture the very relativity which, on the other hand, Mr Ramsay philosophises about. The temporal and the spatial factors are invariably connected, for both define the limitations inherent in human existence: to exist means being in a given time, in a given place.

If the non-human world antagonises man by accentuating his limitations, why is it then that the non-human world still forms a

great source of attraction and fascination for the human being? James, Mr and Mrs Ramsay are all attracted to the lighthouse. Cam is drawn to the island. Mr Ramsay feels at home only when he is alone, surrounded by the vast seascape. Lily and Mr Bankes come "regularly every evening drawn by some need" to the same spot in the garden where they can overlook the bay.

Mrs Ramsay's meditations on her surroundings further illustrate the appeal which the non-human world has for the characters. When she communes with the lighthouse she thinks that "one could not help attaching oneself to one thing especially of the things one saw; and this thing, the long steady stroke, was her stroke" (73). She further explains this attraction: "It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone, one leant to things, inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one..."(74).This pull towards the non-human is explicitly set down when, the party having ended, and Mrs Ramsay disappears to attend to the children, she is yet again seen drawing on the outside for support:

> She felt rather inclined just for a moment to stand still after all that chatter, and pick out one particular thing; the thing that mattered; to detach it; separate it off; clean it of all the emotions and odds and ends of things. .... So she righted herself after the shock of the event, and quite unconsciously and incongruously, used the branches of the elm trees outside to help her to stabilize her position. Her world was changing: they were still. The event had given her a sense of movement. All must be in order. She must get that right and that right, she thought, insensibly approving of the dignity of the trees' stillness.... (129- 30)

As she continues on her way to the nursery, Mrs Ramsay further associates herself with the elements, as well as with the odd pieces of furniture she passes on her way. Her thoughts turn back to the newly engaged couple, Paul Rayley and Minta Doyle, and she assures

herself that:

> They would ... however long they lived, come back to this night; this moon; this wind; this house; and to her too. It flattered her, where she was most susceptible of flattery, to think how, wound about in their hearts, however long they lived she would be woven; and this, and this, and this, she thought, going upstairs, laughing, but affectionately, at the sofa on the landing (her mother's) at the rocking-chair (her father's); at the map of the Hebrides. All that would be revived again in the lives of Paul and Minta; 'the Rayleys' - she tried the new name over; and she felt, with her hand on the nursery door, that community of feeling with other people which emotion gives as if the walls of partition had become so thin that practically (the feeling was one of relief and happiness) it was all one stream, and chairs, tables, maps, were hers, were theirs, it did not matter whose, and Paul and Minta would carry it on when she was dead. (130- 31)

What is it that impels the human being to attach himself to his surroundings?

It is possible that man's attraction to the non-human world is motivated by what Camus calls a "nostalgia for unity," by a wish to be one with the world.[1] Prior to this wish is an awareness that the world is indeed not human, that there is a fundamental discrepancy between man and his surroundings. In a world that is not human man feels an outcast, a stranger. A world that is not human is also an unintelligible world, ultimately also a threat. In To the Lighthouse, the characters' many attachments to the lighthouse, sea, trees, the house, can be interpreted as telling of this inbred instinct on man's part to unite with the world, so as to understand it, so as to feel at home. Lily and Mr Bankes experience this drive for oneness when they overlook the bay:

> They both felt a common hilarity, excited by the moving waves; and then by the swift cutting race of a sailing boat, which, having sliced a curve in the bay, stopped; shivered; let its sail drop down; and then, with a natural instinct to complete the picture, after this swift movement, both of them looked at the dunes far

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[1] The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 23.

> away, and instead of merriment felt come over them some sadness - because the thing was completed partly, and partly because distant views seem to outlast by a million years (Lily thought) the gazer and to be communing already with a sky which beholds an earth entirely at rest. (24-25)

The nautical scene is devoid of any human element and is self-contained. Man is a mere onlooker, as such, an outsider, excluded from the scene he watches. The sadness by which Lily and Mr Bankes are overcome is as a result of this dehumanised seascape which, in spite of its beauty remains hostile, because it denies them participation. But there is another reason for the sadness of the two. The seascape is not only dehumanised, it is also vast. In its sheer vastness it intimidates the human being, indeed, deprecates him. In the face of the vast stretches of nature man realises his constrictions, his essential relativity. The sadness is in the perception of man's limitations.

But it is perhaps due to these very limitations that man attaches himself to the non-human world, as though by that he were to transcend his limitations. The attachment itself involves two conceptions of the human and the non-human, conceived as dissimilar on the one hand, alike, on the other. The two conceptions involve yet another concept of the self. Mrs Ramsay describes the self as "a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others," as "all dark ... all spreading ... unfathomably deep ..." (72; 73). This view of the self is again open to two interpretations which correlate to the two initial conceptions of the human and the non-human as dissimilar and as alike respectively.

On the one hand the self as ethereal and limitless can be interpreted as a weakness, as suggesting that the self lacks a coherent centre, a core of stability. Given this frailty, the human being turns to the non-human world in search of the solidity, stability, he himself

lacks. The human being is attracted to the non-human by force of his humanity, his frailty. This strongly transpires from Mrs Ramsay's communion with the lighthouse. It takes place when Mrs Ramsay is in a subconscious state, in a state of selflessness, of extreme fluidity. In this state she invariably latches on to the lighthouse which, in its solid, concrete presence offers her the "platform of stability" which, especially at that moment she most lacks. Mrs Ramsay's attraction to the elm trees is motivated by the same principle. The attachment occurs following the hubbub and turmoil of the party, when Mrs Ramsay is in an emotional, agitated state. The impersonal world outside offers her the equanimity she lacks.

It may be pointed out that the dinner party as a whole is open not only to a social, but also to an existential interpretation. It is possible to relate the agitation and unrest suffered by the characters during the party not only to the particular social situation, but also to the human condition at large. The salt cellar, candles, fruit and meat dishes shown to have a stabilising and solidifying effect on the characters can thus be interpreted not only as having a social, but also as having an existential significance; as telling of that complementary relation which exists between the "fluid" self on the one hand, and the "solid" object on the other. The effect which the candles have on the group of people gathered round the Ramsay table is a case in point :

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

> party together in a hollow, on an island; had their common cause against that fluidity out there. (112)

It seems that the characters are mostly united in a common effort to combat the fluidity without, within, indeed, in all things. The centre formed by the candles and around which the people converge has thus more than a mere socialising effect, for it forms the very core of gravity which the characters - as human rather than as social beings - lack.

But man's attraction to the non-human world is motivated by other reasons than the search for stability and solidity. The attachment is also a way of transcending his time and space bound existence. By partaking of that other than human world man hopes to taste of that freedom which as a human being he is denied. In this context the self as ethereal and limitless becomes an asset: for as such the self is in effect everywhere and in everything; as such it can never cease to be. By conceiving himself as part of a great universal state of Being, man ensures his eternity. The attachment to the non-human world is an expression of this wish to partake of the universal Being, and thus also to transcend the temporal and spatial limitations inherent in human existence. It is by force of this wish to go beyond human capacity that Mr Ramsay is drawn towards the lighthouse and the seascape. As not human, the lighthouse, the sea, are part of that world beyond the human, and to which the human being aspires. Does Mr Ramsay glimpse in the seascape the freedom, the transcendental power he knows he does not have ? And does not Mrs Ramsay ensure her eternity by weaving herself with the moon, the wind, the house? To conceive man and the world as one is to be free of all time, of all space.

The non-human world which on the one hand defines man's

limitations, also provides him with the very means by which these can be transcended. There is a paradox at the heart of man's relation to the world: the world constricts and antagonises on the one hand, but on the other it liberates and reassures.

But the relation between the human being and the non-human is not as one sided as it may seem. It is not only the human being who seeks the non-human, the non-human also needs him. "Time Passes," although ostensibly a glorification of the non-human world, illustrates precisely this interdependence.

The chapter begins by asserting the omnipotence of the elements. The dehumanised world glimpsed by Lily and Mr Bankes is here magnified to a cosmic perspective:

> The nights now are full of wind and destruction; the trees plunge and bend and their leaves fly helter skelter until the lawn is plastered with them and they lie packed in gutters and choke rain pipes and scatter damp paths. Also the sea tosses itself and breaks itself, and should any sleeper fancying that he might find on the beach an answer to his doubts, a sharer of his solitude, throw off his bedclothes and go down by himself to walk on the sand, no image with semblance of serving and divine promptitude comes readily to hand bringing the night to order and making the world reflect the compass of the soul. The hand dwindles in his hand; the voice bellows in his ear. Almost it would appear that it is useless in such confusion to ask the night those questions as to what, and why, and wherefore, which tempt the sleeper from his bed to seek an answer. (146)

Man is refused a complicity with his surroundings. Devoid of any human traces, nature evades him.

Man is not only estranged from, he also appears to be incongruous with his surroundings:

> At that season those who had gone down to pace the beach and ask of the sea and sky what message they reported or what vision they affirmed had to consider among the usual tokens of divine bounty - the sunset on the sea, the pallor of dawn, the moon rising, fishing-boats against the moon, and children pelting each other with handfuls of grass,

> something out of harmony with this jocundity, this serenity. There was the silent apparition of an ashen-coloured ship for instance, come, gone; there was a purplish stain upon the bland surface of the sea as if something had boiled and bled, invisibly, beneath. This intrus ion into a scene calculated to stir the most sublime reflections and lead to the most comfortable conclusions stayed their pacing. It was difficult blandly to overlook them, to abolish their significance in the landscape; to continue, as one walked by the sea, to marvel how beauty outside mirrored beauty within. (152-53)

Man intrudes upon, destroys a scene which without him is harmonious and complete.

Indeed, it seems as though the human and the non-human move on two different axes, obey different laws. For while Mrs Ramsay and two of her children die, the lighthouse and the house remain doggedly fixed in place. The transience, essential flux of the human being stands in direct contrast to the solidity, durability of the object. The house endures, but Mrs Ramsay ?:

> She was dead, they said; years ago, in London. There was the old grey cloak she wore gardening (Mrs McNab fingered it). She could see her, as she came up the drive with the washing, stooping over her flowers (the garden was a pitiful sight now, all run to riot, and rabbits scuttling at you out of the beds) - she could see her with one of the children by her in that grey cloak. There were boots and shoes; and a brush and comb left on the dressing-table, for all the world as if she expected to come back tomorrow. (She had died very sudden at the end, they said). (155)

But although Mrs Ramsay dies, her vision of a universal Being where all existents partake of each other proves true, for Mrs Ramsay somehow also endures - in the memory of the charwoman, in those very odd relics left behind.

Man and his surroundings are not as disparate as it first seems. The disparity is merely on the surface. The human and the non-human do not move on different axes, on the contrary, they share a single destiny and follow one set of rules. The man made war is not really incongruous with the seascape. The serenity and calm of the sea is

momentary, deceptive, for there is as much chaos and destruction in nature as there is wrought by man. The house too eventually comes to share the fate of the human being. It withstands the ravages of Time, of Nature, only at the beginning. Soon it too falls prey to the same universal forces by which the human being is destroyed. Decay and disintegration set in, the house does not seem to stand a chance of surviving.

But the house does survive, and not of its own accord. It is man (Mrs McNab sent by the Ramsays to put the house in order) who rescues the house from destruction. This final act on man's part reaffirms his pact with his surroundings. It is not merely a pact formed by a mutual subjection to the same universal forces and to a single destiny. It is a pact, perhaps chiefly formed by an interdependence. For if, as part of the non-human world the house assures man of transcending his time and space bound existence, it is man himself who ensures the power of the house to endure. S.P. Rosenbaum's observation that "the nature of reality is such that objects are not dependent upon subjects but subjects are affected, at least, by their objects"[1] is therefore questionable. Indeed, when towards the close of the chapter the house is reinhabited by man (the Ramsays, Lily, Mr Carmichael), surely the emphasis is on rapprochement, on the harmonious co-existence of man and his surroundings?

"Time Passes" is not as elegiac or as man-effacing as it is sometimes presented.[2] Although at the outset the chapter asserts the omnipotence of the elements, man is never totally excluded from the scene. He is forever there, to begin with, a mere shadowy presence

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[1] "The Philosophical Realism of Virginia Woolf," p. 343.

[2] See for example, Holtby, p. 148; Woodring, pp. 24-25; and McNichol, p. 16.

lurking in the background, but gradually growing in stature, until his full emergence at the end. The final resurgence of man is significant because it restores a balance to a scene predominantly not human, and establishes the human and the non-human as equally present. Moreover, "Time Passes" portrays a rapport between man and his surroundings. It is a rapport which springs from a mutual subjection to universal patterns - destruction, renewal - and from a mutual dependence. The once deserted house, rescued by man and eventually restored to its human occupants captures the movement of the chapter - as of the whole book - from initial antagonism to eventual reconciliation.

The final chapter, "The Lighthouse" carries this affirmation to its final conclusion. In the first part, "The Window," man was a mere onlooker of his surroundings and the two were kept apart. The lighthouse was viewed only from a distance, by Mrs Ramsay, by James. Also the seascape was merely gazed at, by Mr Ramsay, Lily, Mr Bankes. But now, as the Ramsays sail towards the lighthouse the initial distance between man and his surroundings is bridged and the two merge with each other and become one. Lily's view of the sailing boat highlights the eventual merging of man with his surroundings:

> The sea without a stain on it, thought Lily Briscoe, still standing and looking out over the bay. The sea stretched like silk across the bay. Distance had an extraordinary power; they had been swallowed up in it, she felt, they were gone for ever, they had become part of the nature of things.(213)

The Ramsays fuse within the nautical setting and become part of the sea. And when the lighthouse, once remote and aloof, is finally reached, no doubt it too becomes part of the human reality, is held on the same level as man.

The reconciliation, the integration of the human and the non-

human is maintained on another, mental rather than physical level. Lily, struggling to master the enigma of her dead friend, of Mrs Ramsay, first conceives her as: "Ghost, air, nothingness" (203). But as Lily's understanding of Mrs Ramsay progresses, Mrs Ramsay gradually gains clarity, assumes substantial form. From an ethereal, elusive spirit, Mrs Ramsay finally emerges as tangible and concrete:

> '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 to Lily - sat there quite simply, in the chair, flicked her needles to and fro, knitted her reddish-brown stockings, cast her shadow on the step. There she sat. (229- 30)

The materialisation of Mrs Ramsay is of course only metaphorical of Lily's understanding of her. It suggests that Lily has come to full grips with Mrs Ramsay. No longer surreal or inexplicable, Mrs Ramsay is now conceived by Lily as part of ordinary reality, no less perplexing, no less real than the chair or the table. The correlation drawn between Mrs Ramsay and these objects is significant because it suggests that Lily has in effect come to share Mrs Ramsay's vision of herself, of the human being, as inextricably one with the world.

And it is this vision of the world and man as one which ultimately triumphs. In spite of their sometime antagonistic relation, in the final evaluation man and the world appear more as one than as disparate. In the final count there are more correlations in favour than against the man-world rapport. Man and object are intricately woven together and appear inseparable. An emotional network binds the lighthouse with James, Mr and Mrs Ramsay; another binds the island with Cam, Mr and Mrs Ramsay. Then there is Mrs Ramsay's affinity with the trees, the flowers, the house. A kitchen table is distinctly associated

with Mr Ramsay. And finally there is the seascape, vast, perhaps intimidating, but somehow also all-embracing.

3.3 THE WAVES

The Waves, the most solipsistic and the most metaphysical of Virginia Woolf's works, should be considered also as one of her most existential books.

Virginia Woolf's comments on the book in her diary disclose a strong Nietzscheian strain. She writes that the "theme effort, effort, dominates: not the waves: and personality: and defiance...."[1] S.P. Rosenbaum calls The Waves a "drama of consciousness,"[2] but it is much more than that. The Waves is the largest pageant of human consciousness Viriginia Woolf ever wrote.[3] The action - the verbalisation of being - is almost exclusively rooted in the present, so that human consciousness is in effect affirmed perpetually. Not for a moment does the human voice slacken or shirk its narcissistic mission. The unrelenting delivery of the self resounds into a proud, defiant cry of human presence.

But The Waves is not as man centred as it may seem. The book does not contain only the one world of the self. It contains another world, of nature. Human consciousness is not seen alone, but in the context of its surrounding, non-human reality.

The purpose of this chapter is to determine the role of nature in the human reality. For the first time in this study, The Waves is

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1 AWD, p. 162.

2 "The Philosophical Realism of Virginia Woolf," p. 348.

3 Rosenbaum (p. 348) draws attention to the interesting fact that The Waves was indeed referred to as "pageant" in the dust jacket of its first edition, a reference which, Rosenbaum speculates, was most probably written by Virginia or Leonard Woolf. While "pageant" is telling of the formal and dramatic qualities of The Waves - a point emphasised by Rosenbaum - the word also suggests the grand and the spectacular. It is in this sense that the word "pageant" is presently used.

to be approached not from the perspective of Percival, who has so far formed the principal basis for analysis, but from the perspective of various objects of nature. It is in the light of nature, of the non-human world that the human reality as represented by the six voices of Bernard, Neville, Louis, Susan, Jinny and Rhoda, is to be examined.

As in Virginia Woolf's other works, form again serves as a key to content. The man-nature duality is firmly rooted in the two-fold structure, in the two-fold perspective of The Waves. As has already been pointed out, The Waves is composed of nine chapters of dramatic monologue portraying human consciousness, each of which is prefaced by a short italicised section, a poetic interlude describing a nature scene. There is a systematic alternation of the natural with the human scene. Indeed, with the exception of The Years, which like The Waves is also built on a rotating form , the focus falling now on nature, then on man, no where else in Virginia Woolf's fiction is a formal duality of man and nature so thoroughly maintained. The formal duality, the dogged conjunction in which man and nature appear, can be interpreted as telling of a metaphysical duality, of the correlation and co-existence of man and nature.

The correlation of man and nature is further maintained linguistically. Although man is never actually present in the nature scene, a human presence is nonetheless strongly implied. The suggested human presence is established by an anthropomorphic description of nature, as employed for instance, in the opening description of the seascape:

> As they neared the shore each bar rose, heaped itself, broke and swept a thin veil of white across the sand. The wave paused, and then drew out again, sighing like a sleeper whose breath comes and goes unconsciously. Gradually the dark bar on the horizon became clear as if the sediment in an old wine-bottle has sunk and left the glass green. Behind it, too, the sky cleared as if the white sediment there had sunk, or as if the arm of a woman

> couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp and flat bars of white, green and yellow spread across the sky like the blades of a fan. Then she raised her lamp higher and the air seemed to become fibrous and to tear away from the green surface flickering and flaming in red and yellow fibres like the smoky fire that roars from a bonfire. (5)

The anthropomorphic effect is most apparent in the description of the waves "sighing like a sleeper whose breath comes and goes unconsciously" which explicitly correlates them with the human being, and charges them with an emotional significance. The same humanising effect is produced by the analogical relation drawn between sky and woman. The sky is compared to a woman, very soon the sky becomes a woman. By sheer force of anthropomorphic diction man and nature are established as one and inseparable.

Many of the descriptions of the nature scene reflect this humanistic effort. Sun, sea, birds, garden, insects and plants are personified and injected with human qualities. The birds for instance, are at one point likened to "skaters rollicking arm-in-arm" (23). On another occasion the birds are charged with emotional, psychological depth:

> In the garden the birds that had sung erratically and spasmodically in the dawn on that tree, on that bush, now sang together in chorus, shrill and sharp; now together, as if conscious of companionship, now alone as if to the pale blue sky. They swerved, all in one flight, when the black cat moved among the bushes, when the cook threw cinders on the ash heap and startled them. Fear was in their song, and apprehension of pain, and joy to be snatched quickly now at this instant. Also they sang emulously in the clear morning air, swerving high over the elm tree, singing together as they chased each other, escaping, pursuing,pecking each other as they turned high in the air. And then tiring of pursuit and flight, lovelily they came descending, delicately declining, dropped down and sat silent on the tree, on the wall, with their bright eyes glancing,and their heads turned this way, that way; aware, awake; intensely conscious of one thing, one object in particular. (62)

Whether birds do in fact possess feelings or a consciousness is perhaps

a matter for dispute, what remains quite unequivocal however is that such properties are ordinarily associated with the human being. Therefore, the attribution of an emotional, psychological faculty - usually thought of as a human property - to the birds, in effect establishes birds and man as one. Like the birds, the waves are also charged with a human significance: "The wind rose. The waves drummed on the shore, like turbaned warriors, like turbaned men with poisoned assegais who, whirling their arms on high, advance upon the feeding flocks, the white sheep" (64). The sea is completely overshadowed by the human imagery. The prevailing impression is not of sea, but of human presence, of human identity.

The seascape is only seemingly devoid of human presence. In spite of the fact that man is not physically present in the seascape, the anthropomorphic descriptions of the seascape ensure a human presence in essence.[1]

The linguistic correlation of man and nature is however mutual. Just as a human imagery infiltrates nature, a nature imagery in turn infiltrates the human world. The human speech is coloured by a wide range of nature imagery which is often directly borrowed from the interludes themselves. The characters prevalently draw on the imagery of the seascape and the countryside described in the interludes, and the various images of sun, sea, garden and birds that recur in the interludes, also recur in the human speech. The overlapping of imagery is sometimes quite explicit. Thus, for example, Louis' reference to the beast stamping (6) recurs in the description of the waves (128), the image of turbaned warriors with assegais quoted by Rhoda (120)

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[1] For further comments on the anthropomorphism of nature see Lee, p. 167.

also appears in relation to the waves, as does the image of the flocks of sheep quoted by Bernard (64, 231). A whole network of images connects interludes and voices, a whole constellation of nature imagery accompanies the human speech. The mutual linguistic correlation of man and nature once again suggests a metaphysical duality, the interdependence of man and nature.

The formal assimilations of man and nature are substantiated in terms of a physical and emotional tie. The physical and emotional oneness of man and nature is especially apparent in the first chapter where the children are seen playing in and exploring the garden, set against the background of the sea. The very first impressions uttered by the children relate to their nature milieu. The sunlight, the song of the birds, the sound of the waves, the flowers and insects in the garden, catch the children's attention and set their imagination at work. The children are fascinated by the multitude of sounds, shapes and colours which nature throws out in abundance. They feel at one with nature and strongly identify with their surroundings. Louis' identification with the flowers, with the earth, is especially telling of the children's nature consciousness:

> 'Now they have all gone,' said Louis. 'I am alone. They have gone into the house for breakfast, and I am left standing by the wall among the flowers. It is very early, before lessons. Flower after flower is specked on the depths of green. The petals are harlequins. Stalks rise from the black hollows beneath. The flowers swim like fish made of light upon the dark, green waters. I hold a stalk in my hand. I am the stalk. My roots go down to the depths of the world, through earth dry with brick, and damp earth, through veins of lead and silver. I am all fibre. All tremors shake me, and the weight of the earth is pressed to my ribs.' (8-9)

In this nascent stage the human consciousness is still dormant, the sense of selfhood, of individual identity is rudimentary. The self is still unformed and incoherent. The child therefore confuses himself,

and is assimilated with his surroundings. Lacking individual identity, the child takes the world around him - a world tangible and real which the child can experience through his senses and grasp - to be part of himself. Just as the children, still lacking individual identities merge with each other, for the very same reason they merge with their surroundings. The children are in a state of selflessness, unconsciousness, where all things, both human and non-human alike, fuse with each other, are held as one. And indeed, the children seem an integral part of their nature milieu. Physically and emotionally they are at one with nature. There is a strong Wordsworthian feel to the first, the birth chapter. The children appear as nature beings, as spirits of nature. They are inextricable from the landscape.

The physical and emotional harmony with nature does not last long however. Except for Susan who establishes herself in the country, once the children mature they move away from nature. The primal nature milieu is replaced by a human, urban milieu. The emotional tie with nature slackens too. The reason for this is simple: the human consciousness, dormant at birth, matures and replaces the primal nature consciousness. The characters develop an individual and social identity which asserts itself in place of their primal nature consciousness. The humanisation, the individualisation and socialisation of the characters is evoked linguistically by the diffusion of nature imagery in the human speech, which is invigorated with individual and social nuances.

But in spite of the fact that as time passes the characters grow estranged from nature, neither is their physical nor emotional tie with nature totally severed. It is true that following the first outburst of voices which is abundant in nature imagery and where nature

also assumes a strong physical mark, the nature imagery decreases and nature is rarely present in an actual physical sense. But a basic nature imagery is still maintained throughout the human speech. The nature imagery is also sustained by the interludes which run in and out of the monologues and which accompany the human drama from beginning to end. It is the interludes which also ensure the ever sustained physical mark of nature. For, metaphorical as their function may be, the interludes still describe a very real world, an actual nature scene. The sustained nature imagery throughout the human speech, and in the interludes that accompany the human drama and which also sustain the physical mark of nature, suggest that the characters maintain some of the primal - physical, emotional - tie with nature throughout their life.

While the sustained metaphysical tie applies to the group as a whole it is most faithfully maintained by Susan. As it has been noted, unlike her friends who move to the city, Susan establishes herself in the country. She is thus able to preserve the primal tie with nature. Indeed, Susan is never "socialised" or "corrupted," and forever feels uncomfortable in a strictly human and urban setting. Like her friends, Susan too develops an individual identity. But while her friends' individual consciousness is not nature but man bound, Susan's consciousness remains true to its embryonic state. In a way, Susan's consciousness is but a maturation, a magnification of the primal consciousness of the characters. Susan is, as it were, a personification of nature, modelled on the primitive goddesses of ancient times. And thus Susan speaks:

> At this hour, this still early hour, I think I am the field, I am the barn, I am the trees; mine are the flocks of birds, and this young hare who leaps, at the last moment when I step almost on him. Mine is the heron that stretches its

> vast wings lazily; and the cow that creaks as it pushes one foot before another munching; and the wild, swooping swallow; and the faint red in the sky; and the green when the red fades; the silence and the bell; the call of the man fetching cart-horses from the fields - all are mine. (83)

It is true that as a mother, Susan is enclosed in her house and as a result is set apart from nature. But although her physical tie with nature slackens, Susan remains very much of a nature being. Indeed, in her domestication Susan is able to fully realise her primitive sentiments. As a mother, as a source of life and nurture, Susan becomes the very breeding, ever teeming world from which she is now shut off, but which on the other hand she now creates in her own home, by herself.

Of the six it is Susan whose tie with nature is undoubtedly the strongest. Interestingly, it is Louis, whose life is the most structured, who comes second to Susan in maintaining the metaphysical tie. Unlike Susan's metaphysical rapport which is unconscious, primeval, Louis' is circumstantial and a product of rationalisation. Susan's metaphysical rapport is primitive and relates to the rhythmic forces of nature. There is nothing earthy about Louis' metaphysical rapport: it is sophisticated, intellectualised and also much more comprehensive. Although Louis' primal metaphysical tie is to a large extent unconscious and inborn, it is also motivated by personal and social factors. Indeed, it is the personal and social factors that rule and explain Louis' ever sustained metaphysical tie. Louis, an Australian immigrant, feels inferior to and alienated from his friends. Since he fails to make society his home, Louis makes the earth his home. Like Septimus, Louis, similarly maladjusted, compensates for his social alienation by constructing a metaphysical system. The metaphysical system not only replaces the social order, but ultimately

enables Louis to transcend his social alienation. It is a system that includes all time and all place. It encompasses the whole of humanity, of civilisation, from its primal conception to eternity. Like the primal order experienced by the characters, Louis' constructed order holds all things together, as one and equal, human and non-human alike. There are no distinctions, no categories in this order. Most significantly, the universal order implies unity and oneness. It offers Louis the integration he cannot attain in the social order.

It is interesting to note that Louis asserts the universal unity either when he becomes aware of his social alienation, or alternatively, on those rare occasions when he does achieve social integration. When Louis senses his estrangement, belief in a metaphysical rapport, in a total unison of all things, assures him that he too forms an integral part of the social order, that he is inextricably interwoven with his fellow beings. On the other hand, when Louis does feel a rapport with his friends he takes it to be but a manifestation of the universal unity, which he is duly urged to re-assert. However, even the socially inspired metaphysical unity seems to include an element of rationalisation. It is as though Louis must will himself to believe in the actual reality of the feeling of comradeship, indeed, in the metaphysical unity at large. For why else need Louis so deliberate and insist on the solidarity of being, unless, that is, he were trying to convince himself of its truth? Louis protests too much, and it is despair rather than conviction that transpires from his declarations of unity. For example, when the boys are at school and gathered together on the grass, around Percival, it is significantly Louis who lingers on the unity of being inspired by Percival:

> 'Now let me try,' said Louis, 'before we rise, before we go to tea, to fix the moment in one effort of supreme endeavour. This shall endure. We are parting; some to tea; some to the nets; I to show my essay to Mr Barker. This will endure. From discord, from hatred (I despise dabblers in imagery - I resent the power of Percival intensely) my shattered mind is pieced together by some sudden perception. I take the trees, the clouds, to be witnesses of my complete integration. I, Louis, I,who shall walk the earth these seventy years, am born entire, out of hatred, out of discord. Here on this ring of grass, we have sat together, bound by the tremendous power of some inner compulsion. The trees wave, the clouds pass. The time approaches when these soliloquies shall be shared. We shall not always give out a sound like a beaten gong as one sensation strikes and then another. Children, our lives have been gongs striking; clamour and boasting; cries of despair; blows on the nape of the neck in gardens.
>
> 'Now grass and trees, the travelling air blowing empty spaces in the blue which they then recover, shaking the leaves which then replace themselves, and our ring here, sitting, with our arms binding our knees, hint at some other order, and better, which makes a reason everlastingly.' (32-33)

Is it not significant that rather than acknowledge his friends (and Percival in particular, who is the main instigator of the moment of unity), Louis acknowledges the trees and the sky as his partners in the supreme moment of unity? No doubt Louis feels more at one with the trees and the clouds than with his fellow beings. The metaphysical embrace which Louis so harps upon is but [illegible] of the human embrace which Louis cannot find.

The various formal and explicit assimilations of man and nature, as well as the more emphatic utterances of the metaphysical tie by Susan and Louis, are further attested for by the very aesthetic dynamics of The Waves. The nine chapters of the book follow through chronological order the several stages of a natural and human cycle, described in the interludes and monologues respectively. The two cycles correspond to each other in development and mood, and it soon becomes apparent that the main components of the nature scene - sun, sea, birds, garden, house - form the natural counterparts of the human

world as represented by the six voices of Bernard, Neville, Louis, Susan, Jinny and Rhoda. The position of the sun, the beat of the waves, the song and behaviour of the birds, the activity in the garden, the quality of the sunlight as reflected in the objects inside the house, parallel the stage of life and emotional development of the six characters. Both man and nature follow one course, obey the same universal forces, are held in one order.

For example, in the first seascape the sun is barely risen, the sea and the sky are indistinguishable from each other, the waves break lethargically on the shore. In the garden the birds sing a "blank melody," and in the house all is "dim and unsubstantial." The human sector is marked by a like incoherence. Although the characters are attributed certain individual nuances, their differentiation is rudimentary. Just as sea and sky still form a single undifferentiated mass, so do the characters, still lacking individual identity, merge with each other, fuse with their nature setting. A basic opacity defines both nature and man.

In the following four chapters the natural world growingly gains in clarity and in substance. The garden teems with the life of birds, insects and flowers. The birds challenge each other in song, and their song is shrill and passionate. The objects in the house are fully exposed under the glare of the sun. Also the spatial perspective widens. As the sun rises in the sky a larger slice of land is revealed, the focus extending from the immediate seascape to the countryside further inland, and to foreign lands beyond the sea. The accentuation and enlargement of nature corresponds with the maturation of human consciousness and the assertion of individuality. Just as the birds in the garden disperse to each sing its individual song, so

are the characters set apart by the struggle for identity. The vehement song of the birds parallels the vitality of the characters in youth, in adulthood. Just as the sun bares a larger and larger slice of the land, so are the characters bared to life, gain experience. As the sun reaches its zenith, so do the characters reach the climax of identity, the summit of their energy and power. At the same time also Percival dies. His death marks the extreme measure of life: its negation.

Decline is the motif of the following and last four chapters of The Waves. The decline motif is set by the reclining position of the sun: "The sun no longer stood in the middle of the sky. Its light slanted, falling obliquely" (141). The activity in the garden gradually subsides. The song of the birds falters and grows mute. The beat of the waves weakens. The land seems to fold within itself. In the house objects lose their sharpness, grow dim under the ever failing light. The ninth interlude brings this decline to its final conclusion. The sun sets and darkness covers the land. All dissolves in the darkness into nothingness. The landscape reverts to its embryonic state and sea and sky are once again indistinguishable. Similarly, the six characters diminish in strength and vitality. In time they lose their zest for life, grow passive and indifferent. Just as the natural cycle ends, and in ending returns to its primal opacity, so does the human cycle end - in death - and in death the human being too returns to his primal dissolution, to become once again part of that all encompassing reality outside the self.

The many-fold ties that are established between man and nature would support the view of rapport, of a metaphysical unity. Paradoxically, it is possible to draw precisely the opposite conclusion from

the various meeting points established between man and nature, and to interpret them in terms of dissention and opposition. In this context it is interesting to quote one of Virginia Woolf's own references to the interludes as "insensitive nature."[1] The reference has a negative connotation and supports the view of an antagonistic and hostile relation between man and nature.

Almost every tie established between man and nature can be interpreted negatively. For example, it is as equally possible to translate the two-fold structure of The Waves as disparity as it is possible to translate it as mutuality. For while man and nature appear in conjunction, they are still held in two separate and essentially self-contained structures. The technical separation of man and nature can be interpreted as a metaphysical divorce, as suggesting that, although man and nature co-exist, each remains a separate and self-contained reality.

Similarly, it is possible to discard the philosophical implications of the anthropomorphic descriptions of the nature scene on the one hand; the nature imagery used in characterisation, on the other, and to regard the metaphorical diction merely as an aesthetic tool. Once this is done, man and nature assume a basic self-sufficiency. One can argue that the anthropomorphic descriptions of the seascape merely imply a human presence, and that man is never present in the seascape in actual fact. From the purely physical point of view, the seascape is dehumanised. The same self-sufficiency applies to the human world. Nature hardly materialises, and is rarely present in a physical sense in the human speeches following the first utterances of the characters. On the whole nature is employed in a figurative

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[1] AWD, p. 153.

and not in a physical sense in the human speech.

Even the primal metaphysical tie experienced by the characters at birth can be refuted. After all, the rapport with nature is basically limited to the first chapter and is very short lived. Furthermore, just as it is possible to argue that the characters' tie with nature is inborn (in the sense that given the absence of human consciousness at birth, there is nothing to separate the characters from their surroundings) so it is also possible to argue that the characters' divorce from nature is inborn. The primal tie with nature is strictly conditioned by the absence of human consciousness. But once the human consciousness erupts, the tie necessarily slackens. Still, one can argue that the characters (Susan and Louis in particular) to a certain extent preserve the tie with nature throughout their lives. But then again, it is possible to interpret the implicit, as well as more insistent expressions of the tie with nature not only as an affirmation of, but also as a yearning for unity with nature. The characters' intermittent references to nature can be viewed as an attempt to regain the primal metaphysical unity, to recapture the lost paradise. For once the characters mature the paradise is indeed lost. Except for later two very brief experiences of metaphysical unity (at the farewell party to Percival, and in the characters' reunion at Hampton Court) the characters fail to substantially sustain the metaphysical unity, fully savoured perhaps only at birth.

Finally, also the dynamic course obeyed by both man and nature, and which therefore sets them as one, can be interpreted negatively. Although The Waves is to a large extent a glorification of the energy forces of life, it also expresses a negation of life. At times the

human being tires of the demands laid on him by life, grows reluctant to obey the eternal flux and onward pull of life. Bernard's concluding speech, which draws on the preceding scenes, quite distincly expresses this sense of resentment and conflict. Bernard is torn between the obligation to life, the will to be, on the one hand, and the temptation to opt out, to cease and free himself of the commitment to life on the other. It is in the context of man's rebellion that nature becomes a menace, a threat. For, as N.T. Bazin points out, the principal forces of life are that much more marked in nature.[1] Hence nature serves as a painful reminder of man's existential servitude. It is significantly on Bernard's visiting Susan in the country that he is arrested by the hostility of nature. The fecundity of the countryside offends Bernard and reminds him of his existential bondage. Bernard recalls: "I thought then how we surrender, how we submit to the stupidity of nature," and that he was overcome by a sense of "satiety and doom; the sense of what is unescapable in our lot; death; the knowledge of limitations; how life is more obdurate than one had thought it" (231). Nature is "insensitive" because in its perpetuity and abundance it serves as a rebuff to man's aspirations to gain control over life, over that "majestic march of day across the sky" (233), and to be master of his own fate. The eternal pulse of nature accentuates man's essential fallibility. Compared with the universal flow of being enacted in nature - in the perpetual rise and fall of the sun, of the waves - the human lifespan is ephemeral and irrelevant. Indeed, it is on the note of man's puny existence that the book ends. Bernard's challenging cry against death leaves nature unaffected, and the book concludes in that sardonic statement: "The

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[1] Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision, p. 154.

waves broke on the shore." The eternal flux of life continues. What mark could Bernard, Neville, Louis, Susan, Jinny and Rhoda have left - in their life, in their death - on a world timeless and boundless?

Paradoxically, it is in the culmination of man's limitations - in his death - that he also transcends his limitations. It is in his dissolution that the human being is freed of his confined and time bound existence and becomes part of that all encompassing world outside the self, and eternal.

Virginia Woolf's existential vision forms a logical development of her philosophical and social concepts as established in the preceding two chapters. Indeed, Virginia Woolf's depiction of man-in-the-world can be regarded as the logical conclusion and culmination of her attitudes to man as a thinking, feeling, and as a social being. The separation, the disunity associated with man's cognitive faculty, and which also defines man's social condition is, as this chapter has hoped to show, also existentially or metaphysically true. Disparity is inbuilt into the very act of existence: of man's being in a non-human universe. Man is doomed to isolation, alienation, by force of his humanity; by force of the non-humanity of the world. Disparity is an inherent condition, synonymous with being human.

A clear dichotomy defines reality as Virginia Woolf sees it. On the one hand there is man, on the other the non-human world of natural and inanimate phenomena. But while the basic structure of reality is clear cut, not so the relation of its constituents. At times sympathetic and complementary, man and the world also appear as hostile, antagonistic forces, at variance with each other. Not only the structure, but the very essence of reality is dialectical.

The man-world relationship often assumes a positive meaning. As we have seen in Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse and The Waves, the characters form numerous attachments to objects. The characters are time and again drawn towards their non-human surroundings, as it were magnetised by objects.

It is possible to approach the metaphysical attachments from three different yet interrelated perspectives: social, psychological and existential. Virginia Woolf maintains a pessimistic view of human relations. Her characters are lonely, alienated figures, forever in search of love, of intimacy which, even if achieved, proves ephemeral. The prevailing lack of solidarity between human beings can explain why Virginia Woolf's characters attach themselves to their non-human surroundings. The metaphysical tie (especially in the case of Septimus in Mrs Dalloway; of Louis in The Waves) serves as a substitute for the human tie; serves as a means of satisfying the unrequited human contact. The world offers man the compassion, the unity he fails to achieve with his own kind. Objects act as surrogate companions. The metaphysical tie can be further explained on a psychological basis. Virginia Woolf views man as quintessentially an emotional, feeling sensibility, as such in a state of flux and agitation. Solid and concrete, the object offers the human being the stability and security he, as an emotional being, invariably lacks. The stabilising and reassuring power of the object is perhaps most apparent in Mrs Ramsay's relation to the lighthouse. As a prime giver herself, as a source of love and solace for the people around her, Mrs Ramsay reaches a state of exhaustion and dissipation. It is in this state that she turns to the lighthouse: its sure and solid presence offers Mrs Ramsay the "platform of stability" she, in her role as giver, has exhausted in

herself. But it is perhaps man's existential fallibility which is at the root of his metaphysical attachments. Man is time and space bound. By attaching himself to the world outside the self, by conceiving himself as inextricably bound with all things (for example, the metaphysical system constructed by Clarissa and Septimus; Mrs Ramsay; Louis and Susan) man can hope to transcend his inbred limitations, his inherent relativity. By conceiving himself as an integral part of the world, man achieves a kind of immortality, an omnipresence.

But while the world is necessary (in that it enables man to transcend his human - social, psychological, existential - limitations) it is also a threat. As not human, the world accentuates that which is human, and it is in this context that the world becomes a menace. Set against the world, man becomes aware of his humanity, of his fallibility as a human being. The world places man in perspective and forces man to confront himself.

For all their many points of convergence, man and the world are ultimately refused a partnership, and remain stubbornly apart. Big Ben in Mrs Dalloway; the lighthouse in To the Lighthouse; the sea in The Waves, pervade these novels to the extent of deriding and scorning the characters themselves. For all her determination to free the novel of its material heritage, Virginia Woolf's novels ironically assert the supremacy of the object.

CONCLUSION

This study has concentrated on the use of objects in a selection of Virginia Woolf's fiction (Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, The Waves). The study has been limited to a conceptual investigation of objects, and has invariably excluded the wide range of formal and technical functions similarly associated with objects. Indeed, it may be said that the object has as marked a formal as it has a conceptual role. It is possible to carry the argument yet one step further and to say that given Virginia Woolf's governing aesthetic sentiments, it is all the more likely that the formal use of the object will outweigh its conceptual use.

Throughout her fiction Virginia Woolf employs objects aesthetically, as centralising images, as cohesive units. Even those of her books which most satisfy a conceptual appreciation of objects (such as the three books at the centre of this study) strongly attest to the use of the object as a formal device. The formal utilisation of objects is perhaps most apparent in Mrs Dalloway. Here Virginia Woolf copiously draws on objects (car, plane, Big Ben, etc.) to sustain a continuity in a narrative which, since it alternates between the perceptions of several and often unrelated characters, is otherwise disjointed and fragmented. In To the Lighthouse it is the lighthouse which is the main centralising image. The lighthouse is correlated with different characters (James, Mr and Mrs Ramsay) and acts as a linking thread between the individual consciousnesses. The lighthouse also maintains a solid presence throughout the book, thus contributing to the unity of the book as a whole. At the Ramsay dinner party, the candles, the fruit dish set on the table, and the main dish, the Boeuf en Daube, fulfil a similar purpose. Collectively responded to, these

objects serve to link the characters together. Percival in The Waves, re-exemplifies the role fulfilled by Big Ben and the lighthouse. A shared friend of the six dramatis personae, a shared point of reference, Percival is the nucleus around which the six points of view converge.

Central as Virginia Woolf's formal utilisation of objects may be - and it certainly leaves ample room for individual consideration - this study has chosen to neglect such a consideration in favour of a conceptual investigation. As we have seen, Virginia Woolf uses objects systematically. In Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, The Waves, objects recur in relation to certain ideas, in connection with distinct themes. Thus we can say that Virginia Woolf uses objects as leitmotifs. Objects recur in set contexts and form structural and thematic patterns. Because Virginia Woolf uses objects in this way, objects act as focal points, as a kind of index to her world, to her art.

Moreover, it is not only methodologically, it is also thematically that objects reveal a coherent system. From whichever direction objects are approached, whether it be from an epistemological, psychological, social or existential point of view, there is one ingredient which remains constant and unchanging, and which asserts itself over and over again. That ingredient may be defined as the subjective, the private, the disparate. It is a solipsistic and highly insulated world - the world of the self - that is thematically (to a large extent also formally) suggested in Virginia Woolf's use of objects.

Virginia Woolf uses objects as starting points for examples of perception, cognition and feeling. The object is viewed subjectively,

it is subordinated to the character's point of view. The psychological, the emotional make-up of the character, in turn determines the make-up of the object. As a result, the object offers us a psychological insight into the person by whom it is perceived. The object furnishes the character with psychological depth. The subjective or emotional perspective from which the object is viewed suggests that we are imprisoned in our self, controlled by a subjective sensibility, which determines and defines the quality of our experience and understanding. The emotional interpretation of reality should not however be taken to a Berkeleian extreme, as denoting that there is no reality outside the mind that perceives it; that objects do not exist except in a mental, spiritual sense. Objects are indeed variously interpreted by Virginia Woolf's characters. In Mrs Dalloway different people offer different views of the car's occupant, and of the smoke design drawn by the plane. The lighthouse as seen by James the child is romantic and placid; seen by James the adolescent, the lighthouse is stark and forbidding. Percival means something different to each of his six friends. But the actual reality, the actual existence of objects is never brought into question. What is challenged is the meaning, not the being of phenomena. It is the quality of the experience, not the existence of reality that is challenged. "Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing" for Virginia Woolf is best perhaps summed up by one word: sensibility. Would it be too presumptuous to say that objects of perception capture the essential lyricism of Virginia Woolf?

The subjective interpretation of reality does not only have philosophical, it also has social implications. If we are confined to and governed by a subjective sensibility, it means that by force of

our very psychological constitution we are set apart from each other. If we differ in the way we see things, if we do not even operate from a shared basis, how and where do we meet? The social portrait that evolves from Virginia Woolf's use of objects reiterates the disunity, the disparity which is otherwise established epistemologically and psychologically. There is little solidarity or unity of being amongst Virginia Woolf's characters. Objects draw characters together, but the communal experience never lasts for long. Once the object, the means of unification is removed, the characters return to their initial separation. By using objects as a means of drawing people together Virginia Woolf is suggesting that human beings themselves lack the binding power; that in essence man is estranged from his fellow men. And indeed, Virginia Woolf's characters are isolated, alienated figures, in search of intimacy, in search of a centre which does not evade them for any mystical reasons as Clarissa is wont to believe (204), as much as for reasons inbuilt, inborn.

Is it because man fails to achieve intimacy with his fellow beings that he turns to the world? Is it because human ties are frail and unsatisfactory that man ties himself to objects instead? The sense of isolation and loneliness that pervades Virginia Woolf's fiction would encourage such a view. It is significantly Septimus, Clarissa, Mrs Ramsay and Louis, who are all deeply aware of the terrible isolation of the self, who construct a metaphysical system where all things, human and non-human alike, are held in firm unison. By conceiving himself as inextricably one with the world man attains the intimacy, the unity negated by his own kind. But it is not only man's social, it is also his psychological condition that motivates him to form attachments with objects. Possibly due to her own unstable, volatile

psyche, Virginia Woolf conceives man as a fluid, faltering being, lacking a coherent centre, a core of stability. The world outside the self, the solid and concrete world of objects, offers man the fixity, the durability he, as an emotional fluttering being, lacks. By attaching himself to objects man rights and balances himself. Man's attraction to objects can thus be explained on the principle of complementary opposites: sure and substantial, the object equilibrates the self, amorphous and ethereal. It is possible however to interpret man's social and psychological limitations as true of his existential fallibility in general, and it is ultimately the latter that is at the root of the metaphysical attachment. There is a vulnerability inherent in human existence, and which may be defined as man's ontological contraints: his time and space bound existence. It is by force of this vulnerability that man ties himself to the world. To be one with the universe is to be free of one's humanity, of the relativity therein. By conceiving himself as intricately bound with all things man ensures that he is in fact everywhere and eternal. There is a strong Faustian drive behind man's pledge of solidarity with the world. Still, the world is not only necessary, it is also a threat. The liberating is also the destructive power of the world: it is in its non-humanity that the world both liberates yet destroys. Because the world is not human it offers man an escape from his constricting humanity; because the world is not human it also accentuates that which is human, accentuates that is, the essential fallibility of man. Alternatively, it is possible to relate the metaphysical antagonism to man rather than to the world. As Virginia Woolf's treatment of objects of perception suggests, we are committed to the subjective, hence to the human point of view. It is because we are confined to the singularly human point of view that the world

outside and beyond appears threatening and hostile. Only on rare occasions does man transcend his humanity, overcome the hostility of the world. Metaphysical unity is seldom granted. The rapport between Septimus and the world ultimately proves illusory, and disillusioned, Septimus is driven to suicide. No doubt Clarissa senses the falsity of her transcendental theory, for rather than cultivate the metaphysical solidarity, Clarissa resorts to social measures and creates a solidarity between human beings. In The Waves the six characters are at one with nature only at birth. Once the characters mature and acquire an individual consciousness the primal equilibrium is drastically unsettled. On the whole the world remains stubbornly apart, stubbornly abstruse.

"Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small," declares Virginia Woolf in "Modern Fiction." Her argument does not only have a philosophical, or, as she meant it, a literary validity, it is also valid from a critical, really structuralist point of view. For even in her use of objects we can discern the subjective sensibility which is so often associated with Virginia Woolf, and which controls and defines her art and her vision. Objects and human beings appear in dogged conjunction, but the final emphasis is on man, on human nature. Variously employed, on an epistemological, psychological, social and existential level, objects establish that man, cognitively or emotionally, as a social or quite simply as a human being, is in a state of disparity and disunity, is emphatically and ultimately alone.

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