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NAME OF AUTHOR/*NOM DE L'AUTEUR* ANN ZORICHAK

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NAME OF SUPERVISOR/*NOM DU DIRECTEUR DE THÈSE* DR. N. A. PAGE

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A SENSE OF PROPORTION IN VIRGINIA WOOLF

by

© ANN ZORICHAK

A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled A Sense of Proportion in Virginia Woolf submitted by Ann Zorichak, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English.

N A Page
.....
Supervisor

Marjorie Faulkner
.....

D F Rodway
.....

.....
External Examiner

Date 19 July 1976

ABSTRACT

The subject of this thesis is a sense of proportion in Virginia Woolf. It explores polarities in her novels and relates recurrent themes suggested by these polarities to biographical and autobiographical material. Taking A Room of One's Own as a central statement, I have followed Virginia Woolf's ideas on women in fiction, on solitude and sharing, sanity and suicide.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

Virginia Woolf as Woman and Writer

Virginia Woolf is not a name that rests easy on the mind. Queen of Bloomsbury, feminine, feminist, fantasist and pamphleteer; melancholy recluse and vivacious party goer; brilliant, effete. There are many labels but the character of the writer and her work escape in the very scope which they afford. Such terms can serve as signposts only, not explanations, and it is the limitation of such tags that I propose to explore.

The partial truth of each label can best be understood when seen balanced against an opposing argument and it is such a sense of proportion that I hope to establish. Virginia Woolf's own life has been well documented by way of her own diaries, her husband's autobiography, and her nephew's two-volume biography. Given her own humanistic approach to literature and the interesting relationship between her life and books, it seems justifiable to study certain recurring themes in her work with a perspective which includes biographical material. The fact that she was a woman and was consequently reviewed, criticized and appraised as a woman writer was something she was very sensitive to. The priorities she set herself as an artist necessarily restricted her sociability, and the mental exhaustion which her writing aggravated often submerged her in the solitude of insanity. The balance and harmony which she strove to achieve between these different conditions and desires is what I mean to suggest by 'a sense of proportion in Virginia Woolf'.

1. Biographical Introduction

As a young woman, Virginia Woolf received a more liberal education than was generally afforded her peers. Leslie Stephen's conservatism was more closely related to the intellectual and moral integrity of the Clapham Sect that it was to Victorian convention. It is true that the girls did not join their brothers at university, but they were allowed unusual license in that Vanessa studied art and Virginia was given the freedom of her father's library. Other young women painted and read; but their sketches were drawing room watercolours, and their books most often novels which had been as casually written as they were read. Vanessa, however, drew from live models at the Slade, and Virginia began to discriminate between authors, learn Greek, and make her own attempts at writing. The usual accomplishments considered suitable for Victorian girls were not altogether neglected, although dancing and the piano were abandoned when neither Miss Stephen showed facility or enthusiasm.

Following their mother's death in 1892, the patriarchal atmosphere of the home became both more evident and oppressive. Leslie called upon his daughters to furnish him with the comfort and reassurance he had been accustomed to receive from his wife. He frequently gave vent to his grief at bereavement, his loneliness and fear of destitution, all of which accompanied by tears and groans appeared melodramatic and made the giving of sympathy a duty exacted rather than freely given. As Leslie became increasingly deaf and self-absorbed, the sisters' half-brother, George Duckworth, took it upon himself to introduce the girls to London society. The experience was painful for both: they found themselves ill-equipped to shine in such gatherings and unimpressed by the shallow nature of the entertainment. Virginia would sooner read In

Memoriam in a corner than venture on to the dance floor or engage a young man in the expected style of conversation.[1]

> However, there are more important things in this life— from all I hear I shan't be asked to dance in the next, and that is one of the reasons why I hope to go there.[2]

But if Virginia held aloof from states of being she could not assume as her own, she was nevertheless drawn toward them. Her capacity for ambivalence was a feature of her adult life and is illustrated by a letter written a year after that quoted above. In it she claims:

> I would give all my profound Greek to dance really well...[3]

People were quick to extol George's generosity and to invite the girls' gratitude, but aside from not caring for the parties to which he escorted them, they suffered from his night-time embraces which were warmer than avuncular affection allowed but which they were too ashamed to report.

Virginia grew up observing the Victorian codes of behaviour but with quite different interests and desires at heart. The death of her father and George's timely marriage freed the young Stephens from familial authority; and whilst Virginia was plagued with guilt which aggravated her first major breakdown, fraternal loyalty and compatibility knit the young Stephens into a group determined to live independent of those relations and values which held no meaning for them. Virginia's elder brother, Thoby, had recently come down from Cambridge and together they set up house in what was considered the unfashionable and rather suspect district of Bloomsbury. Aunts and cousins who had been bewildered by the change of address became outraged as reports of goings on at 46 Gordon Square filtered into their respectably circumspect ears. It was alleged that young men frequented the house till the early hours of morning, that whiskey was drunk and all manner of subjects discussed without the

reserve deemed necessary in the company of well-bred young women. Subsequent accounts of abandoned parties where Vanessa shed most of her clothing in a riotous dance, and reports of the sexual irregularities of various guests, led to a severance of relations--a deprivation which the young Stephens were more than willing to accept.

To outsiders Bloomsbury came to represent a daringly risque community of friends. Virginia Woolf resented the public's label which made of her acquaintances a group, descrying that Bloomsbury was in itself no more special than Richmond or Charing Cross. It was not a club in the sense of formal membership, shared programs or professions, but the fact remained that certain people used to meet for general discussions and that their concern for one another and for certain intellectual and humanistic values distinguished them from any other gathering which they might at times be part of. Balanced against the accusation of licentiousness was another of Ivory Castle aestheticism--that Bloomsbury was a circle of self-congratulatory snobs whose ethereal preoccupation was grossly irresponsible in a world rift with social difficulties.[4] A cursory glance at those considered most closely identified with Bloomsbury dispels such a sweeping condemnation: Maynard Keynes revolutionised international economics; Leonard Woolf, a committed socialist, was active in provincial politics and in the formation of the League of Nations; and Clive Bell's penchant for the life of a country squire scarcely fits the shape of the general target. Others have written about Bloomsbury as if it were a 'closely knit association' with shared leftist political sympathies;[5] whilst J.K. Johnstone believed the ethical pronouncements of G.E. Moore underlay 'a common respect for things of the spirit' which brought together this group of individuals.[6] It is

clear from the range of grievances filed against Bloomsbury that there was a much greater diversity of sympathy and occupation than there was uniformity: but the general level of intelligence, an interest in the arts and affection for one another does represent something which makes the term a useful reference.

Virginia Woolf's relationship to Bloomsbury changed with the years as did its composition and the frequency with which the friends met, but in the early years it was very much a relationship with Cambridge represented by Thoby and his friends, and her feelings were mixed as they were for her elder brother, Thoby. Like everyone else she adored Thoby, who was affectionately nicknamed the Goth on account of his splendid physique, and whose character people loved for its decency: he was a reliable friend, honest and just, perhaps, like Percival in The Waves, a little dull, but eminently desirable. Virginia's earliest contact with Cambridge was through letters written to Thoby. In his replies she glimpsed a life of cloisters and cosy rooms, midnight discussions on poetry and life, friendships made to endure. She was both fascinated and antagonized--excited at the thought of meeting other people both interested in and able to talk about Shakespeare, but alienated by the institutional exclusion of women and by a certain reticence in their male conversation--to her at least, Thoby never confided what he felt or hoped for, and in the same way she could never freely express to him her frustration at being confined at home and having to be a daughter to her father. Her reservation persisted when Thoby's friends first came to Thursday evenings at Gordon Square; the limp handshake, wide-eyed unsmiling countenance and sphinx-like silence were in part due to shyness, but the unease she instilled in many young men stemmed from a criticism

they sometimes suspected and which was often implied. Desmond MacCarthy was a scintillating conversationalist, Saxon Sydney Turner was a mausoleum of an extraordinary range of useless information, Lytton Strachey brilliantly witty, and Clive Bell showed promise, but take away the confidence bred from debating at college and the self-esteem nourished by election to the Society of Apostles, were they really so different, so much better read or better able to write than she was?--the verdict was a self-defensive negative. If she felt awed by them and harboured secret expectations of their literary skills, she was nevertheless curt in her criticism of their combined publication of poems in 1905. In her essay on Euphrosyne, Virginia dismissed the verse as slight and the contributors as self-satisfied melancholics.[8] In their moderation and self-absorption she detected posturising, and her envy for missed opportunities was tempered by relief that she had escaped such debilitation:

> ...there is much to be said surely for that respectable custom which allows the daughter to educate herself at home, while the son is educated by others abroad.[9]

But on this subject Virginia showed a characteristic duality which sometimes seems contradictory. She wanted the educational opportunities which young men had before them yet despised the use to which they put them. She wanted to enjoy the same freedom as men but to achieve different results. Altogether she was filled with the odd mixture of love and hate which runs through the characters in her novels and which underlies A Room of One's Own.

The interest of this short book lies in Virginia Woolf's statements about the artist and the world in which he or she writes. Virginia Woolf insists that no work of art may be considered as springing independent of the artist's society and economic condition. The marked difference

between the feminine and masculine sides of her own heritage was something which shaped her perspective and which remains an important concern throughout her work. But whilst she wrote as a woman, she did not use her sex as a weapon and was more interested in relationship than in partisan distinctions. In A Room of One's Own, she urged young women novelists to write about men with imaginative curiosity rather than anger, and it is a similar sense of proportion which she brings to her own memoirs of experience and her fictional creation of reality.

2. A Room of One's Own

Virginia Woolf, like the Duchess of Newcastle and Lady Winchelsea before her, was fortunate in having a husband who was sympathetic to her literary creativity. Leonard's devotion to Virginia was exceptional and whilst other men have loved their wives, what made the Woolf's relationship singular was the importance with which Leonard credited her writing. To be recognised as a special human being independent of wifehood and motherhood was in itself unusual for a woman, even in the early part of the twentieth century, but it was far more unusual to be respected as a writer. In her essay A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf explores the peculiar position of women writers. She begins with a professed confusion as to what exactly her topic, Women and Fiction, means and how it should be approached.

> The title women and fiction might mean, and you may have meant it to mean, women and what they are like; or it might mean women and the fiction that they write; or it might mean women and the fiction that is written about them; or it might mean that somehow all three are inextricably mixed together and you want me to consider them in that light. But when I began to consider the subject in this last way, which seemed the most interesting, I soon saw that it had one fatal drawback. I should never be able to come to a conclusion.[10]

Her pose as a muddled and inadequate but well intentioned speaker is a frequent characteristic of her style, and here as elsewhere is an engaging veil under which lies a professional control of subject and argument. Her tone is light and humourous, but if Virginia Woolf is sometimes a witty writer she is almost never comic. Her essay has much the same charm as those of Charles Lamb, whom she admired, but hers is underpinned with a seriousness which we do not find in Lamb and which we miss in her if we allow her ingenuous disguise to convince us. In her introduction

she belittles the usefulness of the term 'I' and proposes instead that she be known as Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or any other name. The three Marys are figures from the Child ballad about a fourth Mary who is hanged for having borne a child to the King:

> Last night there were four Marys,
> Tonight there'll be but three,
> There was Mary Beton, and Mary Seton,
> And Mary Carmichael, and me.

The names she proposes so casually are a constant reminder of the misery and injustice which women have suffered in the past, the history of which they must come to terms with in the present.

In order to gather material for her address, she visited the oldest seat of learning at Cambridge. The contrast she draws between lunch at a men's college and supper at the women's college of Fernham becomes emblematic of the different opportunities afforded either sex. At lunch she dined on sole swimming in cream, partridge, and a 'confection which rose all sugar from the waves.'[11] When one was mellow with wine and uplifted by the smoke of a good cigarette, life seemed marvellously good; one's self-confidence was enriched, one's friendships delightful and the future secure. The Fernham diet of gravy soup, utilitarian beef and greens, followed by prunes 'stringy as a miser's heart'[12] was a meal to be endured rather than indulged--sustenance derived grudgingly with none of the amenities which made food and life in general so agreeable at the men's college. The difference in satisfaction and well-being after such a meal corresponds to the meagreness of the menu, and after dinner conversation comes precariously close to expiring and is only just saved by a timely recourse to the softening comforts of a squat bottle and little glasses. In exchange for magnanimity, ease and assurance which had made

luncheon so delightful, supper suggested a muddy market bargain, the outcome of which lay uncertain in the balance: instead of being lit with a subterranean glow, the individual soul sputtered and fluttered undecided between hope and despair. That such a dubious state of mind was directly related to the dullness of the food was clear, but what, asked Virginia Woolf, was the reason behind such disparate standards.

Her inquiry led her into an investigation of the finances of both colleges and of the comparative poverty and newness of Fernham. This evidence was supported by the knowledge that not only had a woman been barred from rewarding employment, she had not even been allowed to own independent wealth, since any money she was bequeathed passed into the hands of her father, husband or current male guardian. The incentive for woman to work was minimal if she knew the proceeds of her labour would be spent by others in ways she might not choose. Even when the Property Act of 1880 made it possible for women to keep their own money, their activity remained restricted by the burden of frequent confinements which were the accepted fate of most married women, and by traditional prejudice which allowed them insufficient education to compete with men for the kind of wealth which wielded power. Pampered if she was pretty and pliant, a daughter or wife could be beaten close to death with impunity if a father or husband found her conduct displeasing. A middle class woman was given from her father's drawing room into that of a husband who had been chosen for her. The comfort of her prospective sitting room depended on her physical attractiveness and her social class: women were desired and given with much the same consideration as governed any saleable commodity. Such had been the condition of women for centuries--poor and passive, never allowed the means for an independent existence

nor encouraged to develop independent minds. It was clear to Virginia Woolf in 1928 that England was under the rule of a patriarchy: "His was the power and the money and the influence."[13]

Man the father, man the son and husband was everywhere visible as the holder of offices which established him ranked above others, and if one was in any doubt as to an individual's relative merit, one need only consult Whitaker's Almanac and the Table of Precedency to be told that rank was accorded synonymously with worth. Hierarchies proliferated in the anxiety to prove one man's value in relation to another and it was in the interests of all to be continually striving to reach the next rung on the ladder from which they might look down upon some poor unfortunate lower down the scale.[14] A pugnacious ambition to improve one's status mixed with a respectful admiration for one's superiors ensured both the success of the individual within the system and the perpetration of the system itself.

That women did not participate in this elaborate game was evident from their absence even among the most modest echelons: clearly the drawing room occupations of young ladies did not prepare them to become Foreign Secretaries, editors, stock brokers, judges or even cricketers. Surveying a paper which mentioned men involved in all these activities, the only reference Virginia Woolf finds to a woman is one concerning the shamelessness of woman as observed by Mr. Justice in the Divorce Courts, and another referring to an actress who had been lowered from a peak in California and suspended in mid-air. The man who held the actress swinging at the end of a rope did so for his own and others' entertainment: if women are pretty they serve to be looked at. Pretty or not they are useful about the house and in such a powerless capacity command the pro-

tection of the houseowner. But a woman who spurns both the role and protection which have been assigned her becomes in the eyes of authority, shameless and unnatural. Woman compliant can be petted and praised; nonconformist she must be condemned and crushed. Patriarchy, Virginia Woolf argued, is not only strong, it is tyrannical; and the vehemence with which women are confined to their limited sphere is central to its ethos.

But why, she asked, should it be so dear to men's interests to preserve this state of affairs? She concludes that given such assumptions about reality, even the most inferior of men may feel superior in the presence of a woman:

> Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.[15]

A man who opens the door upon his wife in a scene of pleasant domesticity is charmed by the pretty picture of his children playing and his wife embroidering or perhaps playing the piano. To him it looks peaceful and his wife in her most natural milieu. Neither she nor her entertainments present any challenge to his life nor criticism of it. Her gratitude for his support and her admiration for his worldly business gratify his self-esteem. As he shuts the door she fills him with renewed self-confidence in his superior strength and ability to accomplish things. As such, this is an accurate description of those women who cultivate a childlike dependence so as to attract a man who sees in them a female who is fully mature sexually and yet not intellectually adult or equal to himself.

Literature and life offer numerous supporting portraits. What is interesting in Woolf's portrayal is the self-knowledge with which she credits such performances, an ironic awareness of woman's role as a magnifying glass for masculine importance which exposes both the man's

inflated self-esteem and the thinking person who lives behind the woman's mirror mask. She suggests that it is hostility towards masculine emotional oppression, as well as resentment of men's monopoly of material wealth and power, which accounts for the anger which surges through the writings of women. The minds of women writers, she contends, are disturbed by fear and hatred; thus Lady Winchsea's poetry is 'harassed and distracted with hates and grievances,'[16] whilst that of the Duchess of Newcastle is 'disfigured and deformed'[17] by rage at her situation. Woolf faults Charlotte Brontë for similar shortcomings and finds that expressions of anger intrude in her work and disrupt the sequence, lingering in the reader's mind as flaws which jerk her novels out of shape. Virginia Woolf reckons that angry writing cannot find a place amongst the literature which we acknowledge as great and to which we turn again and again for renewed pleasure--Lamb, Browne, Thackeray, Newman, Sterne, Dickens, DeQuincey. And yet great as they are, these authors are not suitable models for an aspiring authoress: the masculine sentence does not fit the feminine thoughts which she should express, and George Eliot's ungainly imitations are a lesson in ill-adapted style. Only Jane Austen wins Woolf's unreserved approval for being a woman who wrote like a woman instead of trying to be a man. The world of her novels is admittedly smaller than that which Eliot or Brontë attempted to portray, but because her sentences are so finely shaped to fit her drawing-room experiences, her novels are better written. Nor is Jane Austen hampered by suppressed rage.

Mrs. Woolf's position here is devious. Her analysis of women's social status, their economic poverty and the unequal odds against which they must battle to win a meaningful independent existence is carefully substantiated; the charm of her fantasies and the good humour with which

she colours her exposition lighten her touch without making light of her subject. Women, it seems, have good reason to feel angry. And yet she apologizes for feminine anger in the women writers she reviews and finds it a limitation in their work. However, the very outbursts which she quotes are directed at the same oppressions and insufferable conditions which she has been at pains to reveal. Can one, then, take her criticism of them very seriously when it is anger which makes the writing of these women so alive and close to the 'reality' of experience which Virginia Woolf valued so highly in literature? Moreover, her own anger is very definitely operative here, although indirectly couched in ironic urbanity.

Spaced throughout her essay are comments by men in opposition to women composing music, preaching religion or writing. In each case the woman's desire to make a creative contribution is regarded unnatural and likened to a dog dancing on its hind legs--an object of vulgar curiosity open to ridicule. The anger of each woman Virginia Woolf identifies stems not simply from being a woman but from being a woman who writes and finds her way barred by men simply because they consider her presumptuous.

> Alas! a woman that attempts the pen,
> Such a presumptuous creature is esteemed,
> The fault by no virtuve to be redeemed.
> They tell us we mistake our sex and way;
> Good breeding, fashion, dancing, dressing, play,
> Are the accomplishments we should desire;
> To write, or read, or think, or to inquire,
> Would cloud our beauty, and exhaust our time,
> And interrupt the conquests of our prime,
> Whilst the dull manage of a servile house
> Is held by some our utmost art and praise.[18]

It is difficult to read these lines and believe, as Virginia Woolf invites us to, that they are marred by the author's anger which is their very substance and passion. Virginia Woolf is rarely so explicit in her own writing, but her dissatisfaction manifests itself obviously in the voices of

men who deplore the shallowness of women's minds, men who deny that women can paint or write, ribboned and titled patriarchs who have lost touch with human values, and women who have become crabbed and cramped by circumstances they can neither deny nor surmount.

In her conclusion Virginia Woolf suggests that all great artists are androgynous, since one-sidedness is out of proportion and inevitably sterile. Shakespeare and Coleridge are man-womanly, and if a woman will write with comparable greatness she must become woman-manly. In this context androgynity implies neither asexuality nor bisexuality, but rather a keen awareness of the relationships between the sexes and a willingness to embrace as far as possible the experience of the other sex.

Such an awareness is never absent from Virginia Woolf's work. It is not her style to be crudely overt or pugnacious, and one does not finish a survey of her books with the conclusion that she was an arrant feminist with an axe to grind. Political labels have to be used so carefully that they are often more trouble than they are worth. Virginia Woolf never felt comfortable in clubs or on committees which professed to serve a common interest, since she generally felt averse to certain propositions and bored at having to accommodate what interested others. She certainly had some sympathies which may be conveniently called feminist, but it is equally true that she had no inclination for speeches or rallies and that in life and in her fiction she ridiculed women who did.[18a]

What is indisputable is that she was a woman and very conscious of her sex. She did what she advised Mary Carmichael to do, and wrote unfettered by masculine standards of what constituted suitable matter for fiction; that is she wrote as a woman with a curiosity in the male

sex which makes her books woman-manly. The ways in which man and woman live together is not the only recurring theme in her work, but it is an important one and helps us examine her work by providing an external scaffold on which to group certain aspects. Taking A Room of One's Own as a central statement by Virginia Woolf on women as artists, on the differences between men and women and their need for one another, I propose to examine these themes more fully with reference to the novels.

3. Women as Artists

> Who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet's heart when caught and tangled in a woman's body?[19]

According to Virginia Woolf's fictional portrayal of artists, and her own experiences as recorded in A Writer's Diary, the joy of every artist is mixed with the anguish of creation and the anxiety as to whether his or her work will be appreciated and understood now, later or never. But given the existing social conditions, Virginia Woolf maintained it was infinitely more difficult for a woman to be an artist than it was for a man. Woman's impotent status in past history made artistic work difficult and public recognition impossible: unless it is as anonymous poets and painters, centuries have passed with negligible contributions from women. Even when she had access to a moderate education and could settle herself in a corner of the sitting room, conditions were far from ideal; as Miss Nightingale complained: 'women never have half an hour . . . that they can call their own';[20] she was always interrupted.

If the young women with whom Virginia Woolf was acquainted, and those whom she fictionalized, led much more liberal lives than that which would have been possible for Shakespeare's sister, or was suffered by Elizabeth Barrett before she became Mrs. Browning, more subtle restraints were nevertheless manifold. Expectations of decorum and demands for self-sacrifice were shaped for daughters with a sweeping scope that was never imagined for their brothers. In Night and Day, although younger than his sister, Ralph Denham was guided towards professional training for a solicitor whilst Joan remained at home taking care of domestic duties:

> Her face was round but worn, and expressed the tolerant but anxious good humour which is the special attribute

> of elder sisters in large families ... Whereas he seemed to look straightly and keenly at one object, she appeared to be in the habit of considering everything from many different points of view.[21]

Katherine Hilberry's family is different from Joan's by virtue of class and size, but she too has to preside over tea tables and make polite conversation. Her concerns are not those which occupy the eldest daughter of a large working-class family, but the enervating boredom which attends an unchosen routine has a similar effect on both young women.

> Circumstances had long forced her, as they force most women in the flower of their youth, to consider, painfully and minutely, all that part of life which is conspicuously without order; she had had to consider moods and wishes, degrees of liking or disliking, and their effect upon the destiny of people dear to her; she had been forced to deny herself any contemplation of that other part of life where thought constructs a destiny which is independent of human beings.[22]

Katherine's mother is a product of the domestic responsibility of adjusting personal relationships and taking care of things. Mrs. Hilberry is an eccentric old lady whom Katherine loves but has no wish to emulate. Her mother is a charming hostess with an acute intuitive sense which enables her both to know and help people, but she is unashamedly scatterbrained and relies on Katherine to discharge the tiresome business of teacups and bread and butter. Katherine tries to stem the flood of emotions to which she is exposed, and in which she participates, by the counter-effect of disciplined study. Mathematics has become almost a desperate vocation for her to balance 'all that part of life which is conspicuously without order.'[23] Katherine's desire for an objective system of thought is quite foreign to her mother. There is a polarity between their natures, an opposition which is suggested in the title and which recurs throughout Virginia Woolf's work. Mathematics is an intel-

lectual pursuit not commonly studied by women, who were supposed to be more naturally inclined to arranging flowers and dinner parties. Katherine's cousin is temperamentally her opposite. Cassanda is more like Mrs. Hilberry with her whimsical forgetfulness, her emotional response to music and literature, and her impressionability, particularly in the company of a self-assured man.

When Katherine becomes engaged to William Rodney, Lady Otway recommends a course of giving way to one's husband as being the surest foundation for a happy marriage. Katherine has serious misgivings about sharing her life with anyone, but especially Rodney. His first appearance in the novel is at a gathering of young people to whom he delivers a paper on the Elizabethan use of metaphor in poetry. He takes his subject and himself very seriously, but his prominent eyes, red face and general physical awkwardness predispose his audience to laugh because he looks so irresistibly ludicrous. A stammering delivery with allusions and assertions tripping over one another does little to modify his audience's first impression, and William's erudition fails to come alive or to communicate itself to his listeners. It is clear that he cares very much for poetry but in his criticism, and in his own verse, it is skill rather than passion which strikes one. His essay is scholarly and the metrical competence of his poetic drama masterly, but both tend to send people to sleep rather than carry them along on a creative wave. Katherine is overcome by a chilly stupor as she listens to Rodney read from his manuscript, but she reflects that perhaps she's not the best judge since the skills he practises are 'almost exclusively masculine';[24] women neither share them nor know how to value them. She doesn't care for literature in general, which for her represents the same kind of

threat of emotional muddle as does a life officiating over tea parties. Intimations, shades of feeling and meaning make her impatient. In Rodney's case she concludes that the mystification which envelops his proficiency might serve as a basis for her to respect him. She is not convinced that this is an inevitable corollary, nor even especially eager that it should be; rather her attitude to William's poetry is similar to her attitude to marriage with William--she submits to his repeated proposal because she exhausts her strength to resist. She resigns herself as she presumes most women do, and unhappily promises William she will try to make him happy. In doing so she fulfils people's expectations but feels appalled inside:

> She wanted to go away by herself, preferably to some bleak northern moor, and there study mathematics and the science of astronomy.[25]

Marriage with William means children and servants, 'the dull manage of a servile house,'[26] which is not only distasteful to her but oppressive because it means sacrificing the privacy and freedom she needs for mathematics. Solitude is essential for an artist or thinker: the life of society which marriage implies for Katherine means a dissolution in sharing at the expense of her independence as a creative individual.

The problem is similar for Rachel Vinrace in The Voyage Out, but she realizes that such a conflict exists only as she begins to emerge from her sheltered background, and in becoming more social, sees more clearly the value of her former solitude. Rachel has been brought up by two maiden aunts in Richmond. Looking back over her life it seems that every day was divided in four by meals, divisions so absolutely rigid that they throw a shadow of four black bars across her memory. Her only relief had been to play the piano for hours and hours: indeed, besides feeding

rabbits and sitting down to meals she can recall doing little else. She had received no formal education; instead,

> Kindly doctors and gentle old professors had taught her the rudiments of about ten different branches of knowledge, but they would as soon have forced her to go through one piece of drudgery thoroughly as they would have told her that her hands were dirty.... There was no subject in the world which she knew accurately.[27]

Music is the only thing she really knows well, having taught herself through dedicated private practice. It has, moreover, become the vessel into which she has poured all the enthusiasm and energy of youth which is usually spread more liberally on life. Unaware of other possibilities, Rachel has made of music something so precious that her piano playing is the most important part of her existence.

She leaves the seclusion of Richmond to join her father's ship on a voyage to South America. The title makes clear from the beginning that this is a voyage of discovery, for several people, but especially for Rachel. Also on board are Rachel's aunt and uncle, and a Mr. and Mrs. Dalloway. Richard Dalloway is a member of the class of ribboned successful men who belong to and maintain patriarchal hierarchies. By profession he is a Conservative politician with an uncomplicated, self-confident view of life. When he thinks of English history, he visualizes King following King, Prime Minister Prime Minister, and Law Law.[28] Contemptuous of artists, whom he considers irresponsible, he busies himself with what he believes is the essential business of life and finds in Parliamentary proceedings a fullness which is missing in art. Artists, he claims, cannot live in the real world unless others make allowances for them, whilst he doesn't need anyone to make any allowances for him. He is proud of his own importance, of his physical strength; he

is proud of being a man. It is not incidental that he is opposed to women's suffrage nor that when he visits Rachel in her cabin he sits upon her Bach, her volumes of Cowper's letters and Wuthering Heights. Lamenting the fact that one is only allowed a single life which will necessarily prove too short for him to accomplish all that he would wish, he waxes upon what Rachel herself might do: 'You have beauty,' he tells her--at which point the ship lurches and Richard engages her in a rough embrace. The shock of her first sexual encounter, however mild in reality, fills Rachel with amazement which becomes an uncomfortable exaltation. Later that night her sleep is troubled by a sinister nightmare.

> She dreamt that she was walking down a long tunnel, which grew so narrow by degrees that she could touch the damp bricks on either side. At length the tunnel opened and became a vault; she found herself trapped in it, bricks meeting her wherever she turned, alone with a little deformed man who squatted on the floor gibbering, with long nails. His face was pitted and like the face of an animal. The wall behind him oozed with damp, which collected into drops and slid down. Still and cold as death she lay, not daring to move, until she broke the agony by tossing herself across the bed, and woke crying "Oh!"[29]

Richard's kiss, which seemed to hold promise of wonderful possibilities undreamt of till then, brings instead an obscene horror. What Mrs. Ambrose considers a morbid over-reaction on her niece's part is in fact a not unreasonable response to a lifetime crisis. Rachel's voyage out brings her in touch with new fears and oppressions as well as new joys. Helen determines to take Rachel's social education in hand and casually makes it clear that men desire women and one mustn't allow the fact to get out of proportion. However personally satisfactory her own marriage might be, Mrs. Ambrose appears to be another in that legion of women whom Woolf describes elsewhere as having submitted to the appeals of men.

Her advice to Rachel contains little to suggest that women too may have desires or that pleasure may be mutual. Instead she dismisses the sometimes unwelcome attentions as being as insignificant as the noises people make when they eat, or men spit. Men are seen as takers to be tolerated and taken care of; and Katherine Hilberry's frustration upon being told, 'It doesn't follow that if a man can do a thing a woman may too,'[30] begins to work a similar effect upon Rachel.

> 'So that's why I can't walk alone!' By this new light she saw her life for the first time a creeping hedged in thing, driven cautiously between high walls, here turned aside, there plunged in darkness, made dull and crippled forever--her life that was the only chance she had--the short season between two silences.[31]

To her resentment of physical restriction is added the insult of a young Cambridge man's assertion that women are infinitely simpler than men and probably lack the capacity for serious conversation. St. John Hirst is kin to Charles Tansley[32] and the Professor X in A Room of One's Own, who was engaged in writing his momumental work entitled The Mental, Moral, and Physical Inferiority of the Female Sex.[33] All three men arrogantly pronounce women inferior and thereby insulate their own pride and sense of superiority. Rachel feels insulted but unconvinced of the validity of Hirst's attack. Like Katherine and Lily Briscoe she turns instead to her own special art with an energy all the fiercer for the denigration she has been subject to.

Her music is not merely a refuge, it is what she identifies herself with most closely and wherein she finds her worth as a person. She plays well and she knows it; thus, armed with the self-confidence of achievement, she reprimands her fiancé for interrupting her when she is trying to practice. In fact Terence has been reading to her from his

creation, which is to be a novel exploring the relationship between men and women. For him her music is 'merely like an unfortunate old dog going round on its hind legs in the rain,' not at all the kind of nice, simple tune which he finds helpful to composition.[35] She has been playing a late Beethoven sonata which to her seemed to spiral up from under her hands, sound which was by definition superior to what might ever be expressed in words. Books were too earth-bound, concerned as they were with the lies and feelings of everyday life. Music escapes from that mundane muddle and makes of it all vast blocks of matter which state the truth about things--a truth which is not easy to understand but in which one's belief is implicit. Terence finds a similar transcendence in literature and reads Milton to Rachel, confident that the words have a shape and substance of their own which makes understanding unnecessary; it is almost unnecessary even to listen, for such words find their way into the mind and nestle there in perfection. Neither can understand the other's art nor share in its appreciation. Milton's poetry brings on Rachel's headache, which is a prelude to her fatal illness and is perhaps symptomatic of other barriers which they could not surmount and which Rachel was not willing to surrender.

For all of Virginia Woolf's women artists, marriage presents a threat to the independence wherein they see the strength of their creativity. Of the three, Lily Briscoe's in To the Lighthouse, is the most deliberate refusal to risk a compromise which might endanger her art. With her Chinese eyes and puckered-up face she is also the least easy on the eye, a fate which has spared her both admirers and the problems they pose. Past thirty, she still lives at home with her father some-

where off Brompton Road. Although hers is a life which Virginia herself had anticipated with dread, Lily appears to feel neither restriction nor resentment in her life. Perhaps looking after Lily's father was less of an emotional burden than Virginia foresaw in the aging Leslie Stephen. Lily is at least sufficiently free to take her own holidays and to pursue her painting without paternal criticism. Circumstances have set certain limits on Lily's life but she does not regard them as limitations. Instead she actively embraces the life which is open to her, and through her art attempts to re-shape experience into some meaning of personal validity.

Her relationship with Mrs. Ramsay is complex. Although Lily is a woman in years, she is reduced to a state of girlishness in Mrs. Ramsay's presence. Not only is Mrs. Ramsay Lily's senior, she is a wife and the mother of eight children; it is in her house that Lily sees her and in the garden which belongs to her that Lily paints. It is Mrs. Ramsay's domain and Lily exists within it only as an observer who is another suppliant to Mrs. Ramsay's presence. Mrs. Ramsay exerts a tremendous influence over everyone in that household: she contributes herself in the interest of their happiness and thereby unites them in their devotion to her. But Mrs. Ramsay's self-sacrifice is not entirely unselfish, because mixed with her genuine concern for the well-being of others is a desire to control them. By taking care of their needs she assumes the privilege of directing their lives, which is something Lily both realizes and resents. She guesses accurately enough that Mrs. Ramsay does not care a fig for her painting and sees Lily as an unmarried woman rather than an artist. As such she is not fully female in Mrs. Ramsay's view, and must be married off as expeditiously as possible if she is not to miss the best

in life. Mrs. Ramsay insists that life shared with a husband and a house-full of children is the only complete fulfilment or justification for women, and yet at other times she feels fatigued with the very things she purports to elevate above all others in importance. There is something a little malicious in her propensity for matchmaking, as if she doesn't like that other women should be free from the responsibilities of bedding down children and comforting husbands. Lily does not expect Mrs. Ramsay to understand why she prefers to be alone, but neither can she hope for Mrs. Ramsay's acceptance. When Lily resists the elder woman's efforts to control her destiny, Mrs. Ramsay simply dismisses her as a little fool. Mrs. Ramsay's presumption and childlike value judgements make Lily hysterical. She laughs at Mrs. Ramsay's ridiculous self-confidence in matters where she has so little understanding; she laughs also at Mrs. Ramsay's incomprehension of what causes her laughter, but her hysteria is tinged with a desperate sadness which stems from its own source.

Mrs. Ramsay's inability to understand Lily maintains a wall between their two selves despite their immediate physical intimacy. Lily sits on the floor with her head on Mrs. Ramsay's lap and her arms around her knees as 'close as she could get,'[36] but the distance between them obstructs the intimacy Lily desires. Mixed with her impatience at Mrs. Ramsay's manipulation is the love which Lily feels for her and which longs to be let in to the chambers of the mind and heart of the loved one. The private mystery of the soul remains concealed, and all Lily can do is give it imaginative shape. To Lily's eyes Mrs. Ramsay wore 'an august shape; the shape of a dome,'[36a] which transcribed on to her first canvas becomes a purple triangle. Her feelings for Mrs. Ramsay must find expression in paint to become meaningful to her; she wants to stretch

the brilliant colours of a butterfly's wing upon the steel frame of cathedral-like arches. She wants the transitory and insubstantial caught in time, and to give shape and meaning to experience through significant form. But the painting she holds in her mind's eye is not the one she paints, and the flatness of her purple shadow loses the dome-like fullness of her vision. Her personal anguish is aggravated by Charles Tansley's contemptuous assertion that 'women can't paint, women can't write.'[37] The failure of her painting is not due to Tansley, but his criticism is insufferable on top of her own sense of inadequacy; so she always paints with a wary eye for intruders, ready to turn her canvas to the ground if Tansley, or practically anybody else, should approach. The only person she can suffer to look at her picture is William Bankes. He too is in love with Mrs. Ramsay, so that seeing her reading a fairy tale to her little boy he feels barbarity has been tamed and chaos subdued. He is surprised to find mother and child reduced in Lily's picture to a purple triangle, and asks her to explain it to him.

> She took up once more her old painting position with the dim eyes and the absentminded manner, subduing all her impressions as a woman to something much more general; becoming once more under the power of that vision which she had seen clearly once and must now grope for among hedges and houses and mothers and children--her picture. It was a question, she remembered, how to connect this mass on the right hand with that on the left.[38]

William understands a little better and Lily is exhilarated by having shared her art and thereby made a closer friend. She had painted it as a tribute to Mrs. Ramsay and it is to her and her husband that Lily mentally gives thanks for the treasure she has found with Bankes.

It is Mrs. Ramsay who inspires Lily to make of the moment something permanent through her painting, and it is in memory of her that Lily returns to the island ten years later and paints a picture closer to the

one she had wanted many summers before. Her finishing brush stroke coincides with Mr. Ramsay's arrival at the lighthouse. Both are related to Mrs. Ramsay. Mr. Ramsay makes the journey almost to expiate the guilt of ten years ago, when his harsh adherence to truth crushed his son's hopes for a boat trip with a brutality Mrs. Ramsay found inexcusable. As they approach the lighthouse, Mr. Ramsay praises James' helmsmanship and thereby creates a bond between them which wipes out former enmity. Their reconciliation is the kind of thing which Mrs. Ramsay had forever been engineering during her lifetime, and it is her legacy of love and unity by which she is remembered and through which she continues to live in the minds of others. On the lawn with her canvas, Lily concludes Mr. Ramsay has landed and with 'a sudden intensity as if she saw it clear for a second,' puts the last line to her picture. Her comment 'It was done; it was finished,'[39] echoes her recognition of the completion of the voyage to the lighthouse. Both are moments of triumph, and yet doomed to be effaced in the midst of chaos just an instant after they are felt. Thus Lily's closing comment, 'I have had my vision,' is a triumph tinged with pathos. One searches and searches for the meaning of life, for the perfect picture or absolute knowledge of one's friend, but instead of the great revelation there were 'little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark.'[40]

> It seemed now as if, touched by human penitence and all its toil, divine goodness had parted the curtain and displayed behind it, single, distinct, the hare erect; the wave falling; the boat rocking, which, did we deserve them, should be ours always. But alas, divine goodness, twitching the cord, draws the curtain, it does not please him; he covers his treasures in a drench of hail, and so breaks them, so confuses them that it seems impossible that their calm should ever return or that we should ever compose from their fragments a perfect whole or read in the littered pieces the clear words of truth. For our penitence deserves

a glimpse only; our toil, respite only.[41]

As Rhoda makes of a Beethoven sonata the shape of a square upon an oblong,[42] Lily makes of her celebration of Mrs. Ramsay a picture that would be hung in the attic. The aesthetic interpretation of both is an effort to find a satisfying pattern behind the arbitrary shapelessness of life. But all patterns exclude something and leave one yearning for the wholeness which escapes. The best one can manage is to make a mystery out of the muddle, which is both a triumph and a consolation. It is in this way that Lily's art brings her flashes of illumination and something to catch hold of, just as Mrs. Ramsay in another sphere makes of the moment something permanent, saying, 'Life stands still here.'[43] But in order for Lily to pursue truth through art it was essential for her to withstand Mrs. Ramsay's attempts to marry her off. She preferred her art which depended on her privacy: besides, relationships with men were so often disturbing to one's equanimity and composition, men like Charles Tansley who 'upset the proportions of one's world.'[44] She is not insensitive to the splendour and power of love between men and women, nor to the possibility of beauty in marriage, but for herself such union threatens a disgusting immolation by fire and she is relieved to escape and content herself with the milder pleasure afforded by friendship with William Bankes. Marriage was antithetical to Lily's art.

For each artistically creative woman in these three novels, marriage seems to endanger that part of their lives which depends on solitude for reflection. However, none of the three is insensitive to the special joy and richness which may accompany marriage and it is their struggle to find a sense of proportion in their lives and relationships wherein lies the interest of their portrayal in Night and Day and The Voyage Out.

Virginia Woolf suggests to what an extent such struggles may be resolved in her depiction of marriage, particularly in the fantastic Orlando, and in Mrs. Dalloway.

4. Marriage

> Some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the art of creation can be accomplished. Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated.[45]

Most of the action in Night and Day concerns Katherine Hilberry's engagement to William Rodney, her dissatisfaction with the prospect of married life with him, and her final renunciation of what social convention expects of her, which she realizes threatens to cause her spiritual death. The life William offers corresponds very closely to that of her mother--a repetition of social duties which Katherine is disinclined to accept and execute. William is frustrated with Katherine's unpunctuality and inattentiveness, and disappointed that she doesn't respond with sympathy to his writing, but he cannot see that these facets in Katherine's character make her quite unsuitable for the partnership he wants her to share. He is slow to realize that Katherine is not the woman suited to be his wife but that her cousin, Cassandra, is. Cassandra is also disorderly, but hers is a chaos that willingly submits itself to the guidance of a man such as Rodney and becomes malleable under his direction so that he may make of it and her just what he will. Katherine and Cassandra 'represented very well the manly and womanly sides of the feminine nature,' and it is infinitely more fitting that William should marry Cassandra.

Katherine is relieved to be free of William but remains haunted by the spectre of marriage itself. Convinced that one's knowledge of another person is necessarily limited and imperfect, she despairs of any relationship which holds pretensions of continuity and consistency. She believes that people substitute illusion for the real understanding of

one another which escapes them. Wishful thinking becomes in itself a substitute reality, so that disillusionment is inherent and inevitable and brings with it pain and loss disproportionate to the temporary ecstasy of romantic delusion. She is sure that flux and change disrupt what people try to make permanent and that life is less complicated and affords greater creative possibilities when lived untrammelled by emotional involvement. She explains to her mother:

> (It's) as if when we think we're in love we make it up--we imagine what doesn't exist. That's why it's impossible that we should ever marry. Always to be finding the other an illusion, and going off and forgetting about them, never to be certain that you cared, or that he wasn't caring for someone not you at all, the horror of changing from one state to another, being happy one moment and miserable the next--that's the reason why we can't possibly marry.[46]

She sees the problem as being peculiar to her generation, although Mrs. Hilberry tells her that it has always been a precarious business, this trusting of another person, and that she felt no more secure in making her commitment than does Katherine. All one can do is make a sort of leap in faith and place one's hopes on one's vision. Hope and faith belong less to Katherine's world of abstract mathematics than they do to her mother's realm of sensitive feeling, but they suggest an approach to life which makes possible the sharing of one's loneliness. For in the same breath that she declares marriage out of the question, Katherine acknowledges that men and women cannot live without each other. The solitude one requires for art and contemplation must needs be complemented by social communion or else it becomes too inner-directed and sterile. Nor, suggests Virginia Woolf, can one find absolute fulfillment with members of one's own sex. The homosexuals in her fiction are portrayed as being miserable, not simply because society rejects them but because

their aberrant behaviour is in itself evidence of a distressed condition which is lopsided and out of proportion. Men and women bring to one another qualities which each lacks and without which neither can be whole. The image of a man and woman approaching each other from opposite directions, meeting and going off together on a different route, symbolises the harmony which can result from such union and occurs both in A Room of One's Own and The Years, giving on both occasions a feeling of a comfortable state of being.

> One has a profound, if irrational, instinct in favour of the theory that the union of man and woman makes for the greatest satisfaction, the most complete happiness.[47]

Every individual must combine in his or her own mind male and female faculties and become androgynous before he or she may function at fullest capacity. When one side predominates to the extinction of the other, a person tends to become dogmatic and sterile. Katherine and Ralph Denham avoid such one-sidedness in their individual lives and approach a more intimate communion in their proposed alternative marriage. The book closes without exploring the development of their relationship and one is left in doubt as to its outcome. Like Rachel and Terence in The Voyage Out, Katherine and Ralph are both creative and sensitive people, but neither can fully grasp the significance of the other's art. Ralph struggles to communicate in broken phrases the richness and mystery which attends communion and justifies relationships, but when he allows Katherine to read his paper, hoping that she will grasp something of the truth he has tried to convey, she focuses instead on a spoked inkblot he has scribbled in the margin. His immediate reaction is one of despair and shame because he is convinced that she finds his words inadequate and that she draws attention to the little dot merely

to avoid condemning his paper outright. In fact Katherine responds intuitively to the flame-encircled drawing with a feeling not so very different from that which Ralph felt as he drew it. Another chance remark--that the world looks something like that to her too--rescues Ralph from his misery and fills him with joy. The balance between the two is so precarious, and the gulf between them in need of so many bridges, that one cannot but feel apprehensive about their future. Woolf herself seems undecided and the quality of their life together is not determined. The last view we have of the pair confirms that night follows day, darkness succeeds illumination, and whether one can survive the intervals supported by some personal vision of faith will depend on the arbitrary flow of confidences, confessions, matches struck in the dark necessary to sustain one.

> From the heart of his darkness he spoke his thanksgiving; from a region as far, as hidden, she answered him.[48]

The Voyage Out is similarly inconclusive since the lovers' plans for a new kind of marriage are destroyed with Rachel's death. Although in her early twenties, Rachel has lived almost exclusively in female company and is consequently all the more susceptible to the impressions different men make upon her during the voyage and subsequent sojourn in South America. Her brush with Richard Dalloway on the 'Euphrosyne' makes clear to her female physical weakness in the face of male aggression. The kiss he forces from her betrays the same kind of masculine urge for dominance as St. John Hirst's deprecation of female intelligence. Rachel has been accustomed to tolerate her father's feeble humour and Mr. Pepper's pedantic lectures: such allowances are not unreasonable when made out of love or civility, but she refuses to submit to male oppression as

she sees it for the first time and decides that the sexes 'should live separate; we cannot understand each other; we only bring out what's worst.'[49]

She later discovers new possibilities of friendship with a young novelist. Terence Hewet has 'something of a woman in him'[50] and is himself indignant at the monotonous lives most women are condemned to endure. He admires Rachel's aunt, Helen Ambrose, who is both better informed than most women and more conversant in male company, but he finds even her culpable of the irrational respect that women have for men. The Ambrose marriage is a compromise because

> She gave way to him; she spoilt him; she arranged things for him; she who was all truth to others was not true with her husband. It was a strange and piteous flaw in her nature.[51]

Terence thinks that perhaps Rachel was right when she said the sexes were better off apart; certainly his most humane friends are single, and all the women he admires most are unmarried. But as soon as he applies this theory to his own particular case it becomes unfeasible and absurd. This is due in part to the extent of his desire for Rachel and also to his conviction that their marriage would be free from the vacuities and insincerities which mar the marriages of the Elliots, Thornburys, Ambroses and indeed most people.

Evelyn Murgatroyd, who finds Terence exceptional in his masculine sensitivity and sympathy, is herself the illegitimate daughter of a handsome soldier whose photo she carries in a double frame with another of her mother. The man's self-assurance contrasts vividly with the woman's expression of timidity and resembles the picture of Mary Seton's mother in A Room of One's Own. Mother of thirteen children, Mrs. Seton is de-

picted 'encouraging a spaniel to look at the camera, with the amused, yet strained expression of one who is sure that the dog will move directly the bulb is pressed.'[52] The women appear insignificant beside their men, and, convinced of the slight importance of their function in life, hold themselves in correspondingly low esteem. Woolf's study of fictional marriage is held between resentment of masculine oppression on the one hand and, on the other, a very positive celebration of marriage as a life-giving union in which the woman's contribution is as important as her husband's although in another sphere. Hewet's contradictory feelings about both the tyranny and bliss which exist in matrimony stem from a similar dual viewpoint.

Rachel and Terence prepare to establish their marriage on a basis precedented by Mary Wollstonecraft and Godwin, with respect for one another and recognition of each other's autonomy. But the importance Rachel gives her music, and Terence's inability to understand or appreciate it, draws a veil between them behind which Rachel retires to a realm of artistic solitude which does not include Terence. It is not unreasonable to suspect her illness of similar implications, for she thereby absents herself from the pressure of having to cope with Terence's demand to share her existence more fully. Invalid and isolated, she can allow her mind to flit around the room or settle in some distant corner of her body, wilfully irresponsible. Terence's visits disturb her loneliness when 'she wished to be alone. She wished for nothing else in the world.'[53] Her day dream of a tunnel under a river recalls the imagery of her nightmare on the ship, but although there is still something sinister about this oozing underworld, it is contrasted by the sense of effortless buoyancy which full immersion supports. Rachel sinks willingly

into this selfless stream which carries her away from the reality of sexual union or emotional involvement. Terence has been aware of her holding back from the beginning and it is ironic that only in death does he feel perfect happiness and peace in her company.

> They had now what they had always wanted to have, the union which had been impossible while they lived.[54]

The fatality Woolf believed lay in sexual onesidedness became the object of a wild fantasy in the mock biography of Orlando. The heroine, who has been in former lives a hero, is particularly well-qualified to speak about the peculiarities of both sexes and to make an unusually sensitive lover as either man or woman. Sexual identity is a matter of riotous confusion throughout the book. When Orlando first sees Sasha he is not sure whether he is looking at a youth or a maid. He himself is pursued by the monstrous Archduchess Harriet Griselda, who later disrobes to reveal the personage of Archduke Harry, a man who has been masquerading as a woman so as to court the boy Orlando, whom he is delighted to find transformed into a woman.

The dedication and certain episodes in the text establish some kind of identity between Vita Sackville West and Woolf's Orlando. Virginia first met Vita in December, 1922, and enjoyed a friendship of increased intimacy with her until about 1929. A few weeks before the publication of Orlando in 1928, both women had gone to France for a holiday together. Vita's lesbian proclivities were well known to Woolf and I believe it is the former's affair with Violet Trefusis that Virginia lists in a series of junketings which included an intrigue in the Low Countries with a certain lady whose husband followed them there. Vita was certainly Virginia's inspiration for Orlando, and her ancestral home

with its magnificent grounds and opulent style of living provided material for Virginia's imagination to work upon. But there is of course more fantasy than fact in her portrayal, and the whole method makes fun not only of sex but of history and the biographer's art. Her prefatory catalogue of acknowledgements includes Lytton Strachey just before she cuts it off as having become too long and unmanageable. Strachey seems to be added almost an an afterthought, but the joke of Orlando is especially designed for him to relish. In his own preface to Eminent Victorians in 1918, Strachey deplored the turgidity of Standard Biographies and recommended instead a style which maintained the author's 'own freedom of spirit.' Rather than attempt a 'direct method of scrupulous narration,' he prefers to light upon unexpected incidents and examine each with 'careful curiosity.' Virginia Woolf takes Strachey's thesis to absurd extremes, ignoring historical facts, or even historical time, in laying bare the life of Orlando as she pretends to understand it. Bizarre and extravagant as it is, the book is nevertheless a fair representation of what Vita meant to Virginia and is spiritually more alive than Nigel Nicholson's traditionally documented account of his mother.

Vita's life was scarcely less strange than Orlando's, and her unusual marital arrangement must have held a special fascination for Virginia Woolf. Already quite aware of her Sapphist inclinations, Vita had married Harold Nicholson and had two sons by him. The apparent conventionality of their marriage deterred neither from engaging in numerous subsequent affairs, Vita with women and Harold with young men. Notwithstanding difficulties which ensued from such complications, the Nicholsons remained devoted to one another. They were remarkably generous and free from jealousy whilst being very fond of each other. In the Rayleys'

marriage,[56] Paul and Minta tolerate each other's infidelity with increased equanimity as their passion for one another cools, but the Nicholsons were exceptional in remaining very much in love. Theirs was an extraordinary variation on matrimony. Their relationship embodied many of the qualities which Woolf's lovers tried to find in marriage and which characterized the richest and most fulfilling of her fictional unions. Vita and Harold wrote to each other almost every day they were apart, and after nearly forty years of marriage, Vita sent him a letter in which the timbre of their feelings for one another is held:

> I was always well trained not to manage you. I scarcely dare to arrange the collar of your great-coat, unless you ask me to. I think that is really the basis of our marriage, apart from our deep love for each other, for we have never interfered with each other, and strangely enough, never been jealous of each other. And now, in our advancing years, we love each other more deeply than ever....[57]

Orlando and her sea sailing husband enjoy a similar independence and companionship at the end of the novel. They have achieved the difficult balance which the lovers in Woolf's early novels had sought with hope but without full confidence. Yet however loving and comfortable was the Nicholsons' arrangement, it can scarcely be seen as a model for marriage. Instead it seems to belong in that heterogenous collection of relationships which fulfill the individuals concerned but fall outside the pale of defined groups. Thus Eleanor recognises Sara's and Nicholas' relationship as one founded on love between a man and woman but unfit for marriage because of Nicholas' homosexuality.[58] Lily's and William's affection for one another not only exists outside marriage but depends on their exemption. Each interests Woolf as further evidence of relations between men and women, and by their odd proportions helped clarify in her mind the more usual conditions on which marriage is based. I do

not wish at this point to comment upon the Woolf's marital relationship, but Virginia Woolf's reflections upon her own marriage are included in an Appendix.

In her 1926 diary, Virginia Woolf entered under the heading "The married relation:

> Arnold Bennett says that the horror of marriage lies in its "dailiness". All acuteness of relationship is rubbed away by this. The truth is more like this: life--say four days out of seven--becomes automatic: but on the fifth a bead of sensation (between husband and wife) forms which is all the fuller and more sensitive because of the automatic customary unconscious days on either side. That is to say the year is marked by moments of great intensity. Hardy's 'moments of vision'. How can a relationship endure for any length of time except under these conditions?[59]

This passage explains something about Mrs. Dalloway's[60] marriage and that of the Ramsays,[61] and in doing so distinguishes them from the brief sketches we find in the pathetic short story of 'Lapin and Lapinova', the Jarvises of Jacob's Room, the Pargiter parents in The Years, and Isa and Giles in Between the Acts.

Clarissa Dalloway's misery at being labelled 'the perfect hostess' by Peter Walsh reflects her impatience with the significance he allows such a role rather than frustration with the role itself. In other instances Woolf had held up woman's life of social engagements as superficial and lamentably shallow beside the world of action and achievement which was open to men. Here the emphasis falls upon a different note, so that not only do the men in the book appear as silly or worse, but Mrs. Dalloway herself finds a kind of transcendence in her own sphere. Richard Dalloway serves on parliamentary committees, Peter Walsh presides over a district in India which is twice the size of Ireland, and Hugh Whitbread has a position at court. But although each man believes

he serves an indispensable function, the real business of his work is revealed to be quite trivial and unimportant. Peter's colonial career is marked by his having ordered wheel-barrows from England which the natives had refused to use when they arrived. Hugh's inordinate pride in his linen cupboards is an inane preoccupation which doesn't seem altogether inappropriate in a fellow who would dress in knee breeches and lace ruffles to do some menial job at court with inexplicable deference for a distant Royalty. Even Richard's perpetual concern with the unfortunate Armenians seems rather remote from reality, and, read in context, scarcely more important that Clarissa's perturbation over an uninvited guest who seems determined to come to her party. Both Clarissa and Richard tend to devaluate each other's problems without being unkind or getting hurt. Their blindness to one another's concerns is both a limitation to their intimacy and a protection of it, so that as her husband leaves for a committee on she is not quite sure what, Clarissa reflects,

> And there is a dignity in people; a solitude; even between husband and wife a gulf; and that one must respect...for one would not part with it oneself, or take it against his will, from one's husband, without losing one's independence, one's self-respect--something, after all, priceless.[62]

The significance with which she endows her parties in private is necessarily lost upon others, but her pique at their obtuseness is less important than her own conviction of worth. She is not arrogant in her self-assertion, however, and wonders if she could have chosen her life what she would have made different--been clever perhaps, interested in politics like a man or even, like Lady Bexborough, maybe less sensitive to other people's needs? But she speculates about things which she can only guess at because she knows nothing about them really. 'Her only gift was knowing people almost by instinct',[63] and she uses her gift to

create the only life available to her. Parties are both her creation in life and her celebration of it. Peter and Richard regard her enthusiasm for such occasions as both snobbish and childish but neither the man she married, nor the man who wanted to marry her, understands her or her parties. What they condemn as shallow betrays their own superficial judgement, although Clarissa realises they can no more understand what she means than she can comprehend Peter's new love, 'the most important thing in the world,' but unknowable to the other. The polished silver, flowers and furniture are for Clarissa merely the instruments with which she performs her offering. There are several allusions to the sanctity of her task and there is something mystical in her sensitivity. Walking through the Park near Piccadilly she is carried away by the intoxication of the moment, 'what she loved was this, here, now, in front of her.' Together with Woolf's other visionaries, Mrs. Ramsay and Lucy Swithin, Clarissa finds consolation in the belief that people survive death by living on in 'each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met.'[64] She loves life in all its manifestations and it is this which she celebrates in her parties and makes into an 'offering for the sake of offering.' There is a wonderful vitality and generosity in her embrace which she feels positive can't be dealt with by 'Acts of Parliament'[65] and which makes her special both as an individual and as a counterbalance to Richard.

Walking home from a rather boring luncheon, Richard braces himself to tell Clarissa that he loves her, something he has never felt free to say, partly out of laziness, partly because he is shy, but like Mrs. Ramsay in To the Lighthouse, he cannot bring himself to utter it outright.

Instead he gives Clarissa a bunch of her favorite flowers, 'She understood; she understood without his speaking' [65a] similarly Mr. Ramsay is convinced of his wife's devotion without her having to frame it in words. These gaps which interrupt the flow of thoughts between two people are minimized when each makes allowances for the other. They are moreover nicks in time which sharpen one's awareness of being no less than do their corresponding moments of harmonious sharing. Richard's flower-borne message, and Clarissa's anticipated party, constitute the beads of sensation which save their marriage from monotony. They share a past which yet leaves room for wonder, so that Clarissa speculates on what life would have been if she had married Peter, and Richard recalls Walsh's passion and wonders if anything remains between them. Neither confides in the other, but half-knowledge and half-guesses establish a tension between them which is vital in the same kind of way that their mutual future concerns their only child. Together they deplore Elizabeth's infatuation with Miss Kilman, but agree it will pass and that their daughter will grow in some way strange to them but accompanied by their interest and love.

It is a short book and one which gives a much fuller picture of Mrs. Dalloway than of her husband, but there emerges a very rounded sense of their lives together. Each allows the other some license of independence so that neither feels dominant or tyrannized. Their love is rather asexual, which is or has been a grievance for them both, but the bonds between them are strong enough to survive the absence of physical passion. All human relations, even the best, have some flaw. What is of interest and worth is how people manage to live together with their imperfections without compromising one another. Mrs. Dalloway is

Virginia Woolf's earliest portrait of a marriage seen through this perspective and establishes the precedent for the Ramsays.

5. Masculine Feminine

Poetry ought to have a mother as well as a father.[66]

Biographers and critics have been ready to identify the existence of two opposed principles in Virginia Woolf which for convenience's sake may be termed masculine and feminine. Quentin Bell explains this dichotomy by referring to her ancestors, who embodied quite distinct modes of apprehension. On the Stephen side the family was remarkable for its high moral tone and intellectual excellence. The Stephen men presented an impressive lineage as lawyers and advocates of human dignity through independence, whether the subject was an unwilling colony or a negro slave. The spirit of religion visited the men more lightly than it did their sisters, for whom enlightenment was of the Quaker variety. But if the men had missed the touch of spiritual bliss, they were no less upright in their morals and aspirations than the worthy Caroline Emelia, Leslie Stephen's pious sister. There was nothing frivolous in the conduct of their lives, and when either found expression through their pen, the same high seriousness characterized Light Arising as The Dictionary of National Biography. Leslie Stephen could no more have written some Thoughts on the Central Radiance than his sister could have grappled with his monumental work of scholarship, but the similarity of their temper becomes more apparent when it is seen against that of the Jacksons and their antecedents who comprise the feminine side of Virginia's heritage. Virginia's mother was herself the daughter of one of the Pattle sisters, famed alike for their Pre-Raphaelite beauty and artistic dispositions. At the same time that Virginia's paternal grandfather was establishing his reputation as 'Mr. Over Secretary Stephen' in the Colonial Office, her great-grandfather Pattle was in the Colonies themselves, where he was earning the

title of 'the biggest liar in India.' It says something about the difference between the two that whilst Stephen was as ascetic in his habits as the chergyman he wished he might have been, Pattle drank himself to death and was embalmed in a barrel of rum to await shipment to England. The Pattles were altogether a more colorful breed and it scarcely seemed out of character that James' casket should explode one sultry night below his widow's window and send her out of her wits. The ladies of that family were endowed by nature with a sensitive temperament which could easily become nervous.

One of Virginia's Pattle great-aunts had a genius for photography and another wrote sentimental poetry. Their influence, however, was anecdotal and less dynamic than the presence of Aunt Anny, who was the sister of Leslie Stephen's first wife. Minny and Anny were Thackeray's daughters, and Anny at least shared her father's literary interests. No Stephen had ever written a novel nor made them a substantial part of his reading, but Anny was not at all Stephenese. She was boisterous and erratic. She allowed herself 'flights of imagination'[67] and 'little schemes and fancies' which were extravagant and sentimental and unfettered by the demands of reason or factual truth. She was vigorous and witty even as an old lady, and Virginia 'admired her sincerely'.[68] The same qualities which endeared her to the Stephen children exasperated their father; he could not tolerate her abandonment and was forever 'checking her exuberant impulses' and drenching her flights of fancy 'with chilling criticism.' To Virginia they presented two quite different versions of life to which she felt drawn and between which she felt divided. In her mind they represented the two sides of her inheritance and epitomized the difference between masculine and feminine,

which she saw as the tension underlying relationships between the sexes and in particular of her parents' marriage.

The extent to which her portrait of the Ramsays' marriage in To the Lighthouse is autobiographical is suggested by entries in her diary. The term 'novel' didn't quite fit her conception of the book and she considered calling it an elegy instead.[69] She proposed to have

> father's character done complete in it; and mothers; and St. Ives; and childhood; and all the usual things I try to put in--life, death, etc. But the centre is father's character, sitting in a boat, reciting We perished, each alone, while he crushes a dying mackerel.[70]

Three years later she observed the date of her father's birthday:

> He would have been 96, 96, yes, today; and could have been 96, like other people one has known: but mercifully was not. His life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books; --inconceivable.[71]

The grim patriarch of exacting standards and exhausting demands was clearly an important part of Virginia's conception of her father. During his lingering fatal illness there were times when she longed for the end which would relieve her of sickbed ministrations and the anguish which attended them. But her letters from this period show the same kind of ambivalence which her early diaries expressed with regard to her stepsister's uncertain convalescence which ended in death. The letters have the advantage of seven years which tells in her increased self-awareness. For if Leslie Stephen was often a tyrant, he was also 'the most delightful of people.'[72] As she became adult and hence of fuller interest to her father, life seemed to hold infinite possibilities of happiness shared between them. When he died, her grief at never having been able to allay his loneliness brought her close to another breakdown. Her sense of bereavement was overcast with guilty misgivings that she had

not done enough for him or convinced him of the depth of her affection. Her sister's unashamed relief and readiness to find something much wider than consolation in the travels and friendships which now opened up before them seemed almost reprehensible to Virginia. And yet Vanessa was only giving life to the desires which Virginia suppressed from guilt. However happy the future with her father had promised to be, it would have been one in which she remained first and foremost a daughter; and whilst it was gratifying to be esteemed a 'good daughter' it wasn't as exciting a life as that of an independent novelist, something she could never have become while her father lived. Her feelings oscillated between strong attraction and resentment: her feelings for her mother were similarly complex, and it is her recognition that 'nothing was simply one thing' that makes the imaginative reincarnation of her parents so much fuller than her previous sketches.

Virginia Woolf's perception of the difference between the masculine and feminine attitudes of mind is dramatized by Mr. and Mrs. Ramsays' first encounter in To the Lighthouse. Always anxious to endow those she loves with happiness, Mrs. Ramsay encourages her youngest son's hopes for a long anticipated voyage to the lighthouse with the assurance that she expects the weather will be fine. Her prediction is rooted in wishfulness rather than circumstantial evidence, a fact which her husband is quick to point out.

> What he said was true. It was always true. He was incapable of untruth; never tampered with a fact; never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being, least of all his own children, who, sprung from his loins, should be aware from childhood that life is difficult.[73]

This strict adherence to truth regardless of people's feelings appears

incomprehensively brutal to Mrs. Ramsay. For her part she would change the facts if she could, and if not, she would pretend life was softer and more delightful than harsh reality exposed. She and James feel comfortable in one another's company partly because they both live so imaginatively and fringe the present moment with the anticipated sensations of the future.[74] Like her predecessor, Clarissa Dalloway, Mrs. Ramsay has an untrained mind and consequently relies on her intuition rather than her knowledge, trusting instincts which come to her naturally as a woman. Neither woman holds much store by books, Clarissa toying with a biography at bedtime, Mrs. Ramsay never finding time to read even those volumes which had been dedicated to her. Only occasionally does she peer in her shortsighted way into a book picked at random.[75] She lets the words of a sonnet wash rhythmically through her mind without understanding what they mean but feeling by conviction rested and satisfied. It's the feeling which matters to her and which carries within it the essence of meaning which needs no analysis or discrimination.

At the same time she lulls herself with poetry, Mr. Ramsay sits nearby re-reading a passage from his favorite novel. He too is moved by what he reads, but his emotion comes as the natural consequence of incident following incident, narrative reaching its inevitable conclusion. Whereas Mrs. Ramsay reads in skips and zig-zags as if 'she was climbing backwards, upwards, shoving her way up under petals that curved over her,'[76] her husband's process is quite straightforward, as 'if thought ran like an alphabet from A to Z.' The books they read and the way they read them are further indices of their respective characters. Mr. Ramsay returns to <u>The Antiquary</u> with anticipated fortification yet with judgement suspended till he is sure of 'the whole shape of the thing.'[77]

He reads with the same steady perseverance that characterizes his own studies, plodding from one letter to the next, hoping to 'repeat the whole alphabet in order.'[78] Scott's story 'of man pitted against Nature, of man in relation to his fate'[79] appeals to Ramsay's sense of melodrama. It is not unfair to see him as representing the prosaic side of life and his wife the poetic. True he recites poetry himself, but it is poetry full of masculine sentiments, Tennyson's 'Charge of the Light Brigade' and Cowper's 'The Castaway', neither of which is related in spirit to the Shakespearean sonnet Mrs. Ramsay settles upon. The casual way in which she picks both book and poem contrasts with Ramsay's deliberation and typify her nature. For if Ramsay belongs to that class of thinkers described as steadfast, she is of the other group, 'the gifted, the inspired who, miraculously, lump all the letters together in one flash--the way of genius.'[80] They cannot meet in books or in the emotions which fill them respectively when they have finished reading. Not being able to share those feelings heightens the tension between them but in a magnetic way which reaches a resolution satisfactory to them both. Mrs. Ramsay silently implores her to speak to him, to tell him that she loves him. She finds it impossible to meet his need directly by saying what she feels, but bridges the gap between them with a smile which gives him what he wants without words. Their differences create a kind of resonance which for both of them is the optimum happiness.

Their ways of seeing are as different as their ways of reading. Mr. Ramsay is longsighted,[81] which means he sees different things from his wife. Her myopic gaze fixes itself on the closeness revealed to her--the view, Prue's beauty, or a bed of dahlias, none of which is visible to her husband. He seems quite oblivious of the ordinary things in life,

although he sometimes pretends to notice in order to please her, praising the flowers whilst considering 'a spot about a foot or so above them.'[82] His obtuseness [illegible] incredible to her for whom such things are so obvious, but it is a point for wonder rather than resentment and not really so surprising when she considers that he is not only a man but a great man and must have a mind different in every way from hers.

Thus his view of life is different from hers both literally and metaphorically. The sight of an evening star fills her with keen pleasure, but is something which experience has taught her she must savour alone. The source of her ecstasy is her husband's cause for melancholy. Things which fill her with a silent rhapsody become material for dismal phrases in his mind. He builds words upon words in a most extravagant way, groaning aloud at his fate, bemoaning the future of his books, reciting fateful poetry but seeming more cheerful than usual directly he has finished. Mrs. Ramsay is annoyed by this practice of his which seems a childish and self-indulgent game and disproportionately sombre. But like many games it is not very important, and for all his gloom and desperation he is actually less pessimistic than she is. He wishes very much that he could distinguish himself in his life's work, but in his systematic classification of thought he has only managed to reach the letter Q; R, the initial of his own name, escapes him. For all his fine sense of tragedy, in his own life Mr. Ramsay lends himself to battle rather than defeat. The prospect of oblivion is excruciating, but he has eight children to pass to posterity, and there is dignity even in a doomed struggle. For him the children are something he has created and can fall back on for succour and self-confirmation: as such they are a welcome adjunct to his work. But for Mrs. Ramsay the family <u>is</u> her life's work and their individual

futures more precarious to her than to her husband. When she anticipates Prue's marriage and the happiness she will find vicariously through it, Mrs. Ramsay nevertheless believes her children will never be as happy as they are now:

> 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.[83]

For Mr. Ramsay children help stem the personal tragedy of life: for Mrs. Ramsay they remind one of the general chaos which can and does engulf and destroy. Pitted against death Ramsay holds up his children and his books in defiance, where Mrs. Ramsay spreads a circle of love in consolation.

She is both a lovable and a loving person, so much so that Lily and others find her irresistible. And yet her solicitations have an edge to them which Lily finds frightening and which one character identifies in such a way as to remain immune to her spell. Mrs. Ramsay makes a profession out of taking care of others and Augustus Carmichael positively refuses to be taken care of. His aloofness peeves her, and although she mentally accuses him of injuring her unfairly with his distrustfulness, she cannot free herself from his ghost. Carmichael is her antagonist not because he refuses her offer of stamps and tobacco but because he escapes the indebtedness acceptance would entail. She interprets his resistance to her benevolence as shrewd suspicion on his part:

> 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?[84]

There is an ulterior motive in her continuous self-sacrifice. Hers is a self-fulfilling generosity because through giving to others she makes of them takers and thereby acquires some kind of ascendancy. At the particular moment when Mr. Carmichael shuffles by and makes her feel so nervous and shabby, she is seated with her son James, to whom she has been reading a Grimm's fairy story. It is the tale of the Fisherman and his Wife in which the woman presses her unwilling husband to demand ever-increasing powers from the magic flounder who is obliged to grant his wishes. The 'story of the Fisherman and his Wife was like the bass gently accompanying a tune, which now and then ran up unexpectedly into the melody.'[85] A parallel is surely intended between the insatiable wife and Mrs. Ramsay. Never concentrated on one thing only, her mind wanders as she reads to consider Minta Doyle and her mother's charge that Mrs. Ramsay wished to dominate and make people do what she wanted, an unfair accusation Mrs. Ramsay thought. It is unjust as a complete picture but a very true part of the whole.

Mrs. Ramsay is not only an incurable matchmaker, she is a misguided one. Her insistence on marriage as an institution blinds her to the peculiarities of individual natures. That William should be a man and Lily a woman is reason enough for them to marry in her wilful simplicity, and she is unfriendly to the resistance of those whom she tries to steer into the lives she has planned for them. The marriage she helps engineer between Minta and Paul Rayley becomes for a moment the focus of the magnificent dinner party she gives with the luscious Boeuf en Daube borne to the candle-lit table like an offering in celebration of their love. But Mrs. Ramsay's pleasure in having brought them together is undercut with malice which predicts their hidden woes:

> these lovers, these people entering into illusion
> glittering eyed, must be danced round with mockery,
> decorated with garlands.[86]

She readily sacrifices Charles Tansley for her husband's comfort, or Lily for Charles'; neither act seems unreasonable given her sense of precedence of men and especially great men. But the sacrificial element of this celebration is directed towards something more diverse and closer to the chaos which is the source of her private pessimism. Mrs. Ramsay is both witch and enchantress. The woman who sits thinking how best to manipulate Minta forms a picture for William Bankes which represents civilization: his rapture fills Lily with gratitude for Mrs. Ramsay that she should inspire such love. Mrs. Ramsay is a woman worthy of the loving legend which memorializes her spirit after death. The self-sacrifice she makes without resentment for all men is seen as a chosen act which, though it may exhaust her, also makes her triumphant. The Ramsays' marriage is at times puerile, at others magnificent, but central to their own lives and to those which they draw about them. It is by far the most interesting of Virginia Woolf's portraits and one in which the qualities she identified as masculine and feminine seem best suited to meet each other's needs and thereby achieve the resonance struck between their different proportions. Much of the interest lies in the subtle twist with which she re-assembles the conventional.

Ostensibly Mrs. Ramsay's life and family duties are not dramatically different from those of other women and wives. Like them she received no education that would fit her for the world of science or thought, and even the sanitation of dairies remains a masculine preserve. Like Mrs. Hilberry and Clarissa Dalloway she is adept at social orchestration and is another perfect hostess. She nets her children

with the warmth of motherly love as naturally as Susan in The Waves. She radiates beauty with a self-consciousness equal to Jinny, and bestows charity upon the anonymous poor as liberally as Eleanor Pargiter. But above all she inspires and sustains her husband and gives unstintingly of the sympathy he demands.

> (She) seemed to raise herself with an effort, and at once to pour erect into the air a rain of energy, a column of spray, looking at the same time animated and alive as if all her energies were being fused into force, burning and illuminating (quietly though she sat, taking up her stocking again), and into this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself, like a beak of brass, barren and base. He wanted sympathy.[87]

Mrs. Ramsay reveres her husband and other men without envy and gives to them all without resentment, for she pitied all men as if they lacked something, women never as if they had something. She feels she has,

> the whole of the other sex under her protection; for reasons she could not explain, for their chivalry and valour, for the fact that they negotiated treaties, ruled India, controlled finance; finally for an attitude toward herself which no woman could fail to feel or to find agreeable, something trustful, childlike, reverential...[88]

Mrs. Ramsay helps [illegible] feel important by pretending she believes in their importance herself. But in fact she not only sees herself as their protector, she pities them for what they miss and all women possess--an intuitive understanding which finds meaning in experience even when it cannot be communicated. Because such a gift, masculine accomplishments are relatively simple and childish. She is not resentful of the fact, because their limitations make them turn to her; and by allowing them to protect and impress her she wins both gratitude and reverance. Helping James cut out pictures from an old catalogue she imagines her little boy,

> all red and ermine on the bench or directing a stern

> and momentous enterprise in some crisis of public affairs.[89]

Almost without exception she makes of men acolytes--even the intractable Tansley falls under her charm. She flatters him with her insinuation that all women revere the masculine intellect and subject themselves to it.

> She made him feel better pleased with himself than he had done yet...He would like her to see him gowned and hooded, walking in a procession.[90]

In her mind she makes of her son a man and of Tansley a child. The moment after she has won the tribute she pities him with something close to contempt which she cannot, however, allow herself to breach, because, if the worshipper is despicable, of what value is his worship? The question is much more crucial with regard to her husband. She gives to him freely the reassurance he would never ask of his own free will. Her triumph in giving is discomposed by the fear that others will say he depends on her, 'when they must know that of the two he was infinitely the more important, and what she gave the world in comparison with what he gave, negligible.'[91] So she reasons with herself as Carmichael shuffles by and reminds her of the inadequacy of human relationships and how even the most perfect cannot bear the scrutiny of truth.[92] Carmichael makes her feel uncomfortable because he suspects her desire to give as being vanity, and her uneasiness in his presence suggests the accuracy of his implied accusation. Mrs. Ramsay finds her true vocation in responding to the needs of others, and thereby operates with her own force and finds her own identity as an individual. Her self-effacement is part of the scheme but in no way impairs her transcendence. In the first section her children and Lily resent the fact that Mrs. Ramsay should be forever giving to men who are forever taking. But when Lily recalls her ten years later, her anger at

Mrs. Ramsay's self-surrender is mixed with recollections of the woman's glowing splendour, when she blazed up 'into a rapture of sympathy, of delight in the reward,' which conferred 'the most supreme bliss of which human nature was capable.'[93] Lily was impatient with Mrs. Ramsay for the self-indulgence she allowed all men, but if she gave of herself with such enthusiasm, can one blame the men for taking?

Her love for Mrs. Ramsay moves Lily to offer what sympathy she can to Mr. Ramsay, which she does by praising his boots. Mr. Ramsay happens to be very proud of his boots, and her spontaneous appraisal fills him with what he needs. Lily herself feels a kind of ecstasy and, understanding for the first time Mrs. Ramsay's delight on such occasions, realizes she will never feel sorry for her again, or hate Mr. Ramsay. She turns to finish the picture she had tried to paint before, and this time completes it on the wave of her vision. Mrs. Ramsay was no more culpable as giver than was her husband as taker; together they formed a natural harmony.

Similarly James' hostility toward his father is annulled by the trip to the lighthouse. As he sat with his mother the lighthouse had been 'a silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye that opened suddenly and softly in the evening.' Now--

> James looked at the lighthouse. He could see the white washed rocks; the tower, stark and straight; he could see that it was barred with black and white; he could see windows in it; he could even see washing spread on the rocks to dry. So that was the Lighthouse, was it? No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing. The other was the Lighthouse too.[94]

The lighthouse which from a distance seemed soft, full of light and identified with Mrs. Ramsay, is starkly black and white seen close. In James' mind the image of the lighthouse associated with his mother be-

comes united with the phallic tower and symbolizes the feminine and masculine contribution of his parents' marriage. As his hatred slips away James feels closely identified with his father. Like Lily he has to realize that Mrs. Ramsay was neither persecuted, nor an unwilling victim, before he can appreciate the truth of things in the mutual fulfillment of his parents' marriage.

CHAPTER II

Solitude and Sharing

> I am talking of the common life which is the real life and not of the little separate lives which we live as individuals.[1]

In the final pages of A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf again stressed the need for privacy and solitude if any individual is to learn to write. And yet solitude unrelieved may profit only those minds which are lyrical, scholarly or fastidious. For someone who loves the vigour of life, such seclusion has a most unfortunate effect on his or her writing, as is evident in Aurora Leigh. Having escaped from her sofa in Wimpole Street, Elizabeth Barrett threw herself into the life of cafés and arguments, drawing rooms and gossip. The change overwhelmed her and although 'She waited, wisely, until her escape had given her some measure of knowledge and proportion,'[2] the imbalance of her earlier sheltered life distorted her verse so that it moves uneasily from the exquisite to the monstrous. Solitude undiluted is good neither for writers who would write of life or those who would live it. The need for privacy is paralleled by the desire to share; and the difficulty of finding some way to accommodate both is a major theme in Virginia Woolf's novels.

Mrs. Ramsay is the most conspicuous 'sharer' of Woolf's characters and cannot be in the comapny of another person without directing all her energy toward making of the moment something which belongs to them together rather than separately. But such efforts are very wearing and it is a relief when people leave her alone and she need not consider what she should say or do:

> For now she need not think about anybody. She could be herself, by herself. And that was what now she often felt the need of—to think; well not even to think. To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others.[3]

The sense of self uninterrupted which Mrs. Ramsay occasionally enjoys in private is also a factor in her social relationships. Lily Briscoe longs to feel intimate with Mrs. Ramsay but cannot find the means to unite their inner selves. She sits [redacted] she can get to the older woman but is miserably aware of the [redacted] between them:

> What art was there, known to [redacted] 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 adored? ...Nothing happened...How then, she had asked herself, did one know one thing or another thing about people, sealed as they were?[4]

Similarly, Sally Seton despairs of human relationships and the difficulty of knowing other people, 'for what can one know even of the people one lives with every day?'[5]

The refuge of selfhood is time-bound and holds possibilities of loneliness as well as individual affirmation. Separation dissolves in the world without self, the world of unity wrought by shared experience which Virginia Woolf's characters alternately yearn for and shun.

The difficult balance between solitude and sharing is the main theme in Virginia Woolf's The Waves. This is a brilliant and yet elusive book: it plumbs that part of living which exists with least awareness and of which we are reminded by chance, often with shock, as when awaking abruptly from a dream, or dredging one's mind for one memory and finding another. It is not an easy book, but critics who dismiss it as difficult often do so on false grounds; for to assert that the book is a muddle, and

the six voices indistinguishable, is to betray a lack of sensitivity to image and sound, since each is sharply individualized in the opening staggered chorus. What makes the book both difficult and intriguing is the extent to which each person borrows from others to compose his or her identity. A longing for community together with a desire to preserve one's integrity and be known and loved as Bernard, Louis, Neville, Jinny, Susan, Rhoda, is the agonizing balance between kinship and isolation which The Waves explores.

There is no story in the conventional sense: all that happens is that six childhood friends arrange two formal reunions in the years following their school days. Life makes them older rather than different, for thirty years later the character set when very young has fulfilled its own prophecy and become more accentuated, more deeply engraved by time.[6] All reveal their private selves, but it is Bernard who is most verbal and who has a vision of the group within a pattern, something which in part he sees and in part creates, since Bernard is a coiner of words and a player with phrases for whom patterns and stories are essential. They are both the trade by which he is known and loved and the source of his personal failure. He loves tremendous and sonorous words and with them he makes linked phrases which 'run together whatever happens, so that instead of incoherence there is perceived a wandering thread, lightly joining one thing to another.'[7] For Bernard everyone is material for his stories, his friends, horsebreeders and plumbers whose habits and gestures he notes for further reference in a notebook of many pages methodically lettered from A to Z. His magic is to make of the ordinary and mundane something fantastic and sparkling so that his audience is transported on his bubble of creation. There is a certain fool-

ishness in his extravagance but people do not come to him for serious stories; it is the very lightness of his fabrication which releases them from their own existence so they too can float away on an image of themselves recreated. Bernard's stories are brilliant distractions but he leaves out what people feel most deeply, and the consequent airy quality is too insubstantial to withstand the scrutiny of a harsher reality. Bernard poses as Byron, melancholy, passionate and sardonic, aware that he is posturising, anticipating his literary biographer: but his enthusiasms are too diverse to make a convincing copy of any one thing, and whilst he captures the rhythm of Byron's verse and the gesture of discarding a cloak, he spoils the act by spilling his tea and staining Gray's 'Elegy' with his buttery fingers. Bernard's curiosity leads him to distribute himself too generously to find real concentration in any one person. In the same way his stories can become so finely spun out that they are trifling, phrases for phrasing's sake. Their lightness then becomes a fatal flaw brutally exposed by a simpleton--a cricket-playing destined civil servant, Percival. Percival 'sees nothing: he hears nothing,' but his 'pagan indifference' is a peculiar force which sweeps before it all trifling and insincerity and thereby conquers. Bernard's audience is infected with Percival's boredom, and their loyalty to this heavy hero robs Bernard of his inspiration so that the words choke in his throat. Neville, who relies on Bernard to interpret him to himself, to answer the question 'Who am I?'[8] painfully realises his friend's limitations: 'Among the tortures and devastations of life is this then--our friends are not able to finish their stories.'[9] The loop of light which Bernard has wound about his listeners is thus broken and each reminded of his own solitude. Bernard's is a great gift but it is not salvation.

Bernard does not believe in separation. To every figure he lends a character, he borrows from in part exchange. He cannot fabricate without an audience, 'To be myself (I note) I need the illumination of other people's eyes, and therefore cannot be entirely sure what is myself.'[10] Of all their meetings he is the most active engineer. As a child he had followed Susan in her misery to comfort her and share with her the imaginary world of Elvedon, a mystery which he fictionalized for their mutual memory. It is Bernard who arranges to meet Neville, to eat crumpets and discuss poetry, and he who goes to visit Jinny after learning of Percival's death. The other five are more passive in their relationships, even if it is a passivity which invites seduction, such as Jinny's, or demands donations, such as Susan's. Neville wishes he were loved, Louis yearns for respect and Rhoda for obscurity, but none of them acts upon his desires with energy comparable to Bernard's: theirs is the yearning of waiting, his of gnat-like agitation. But each is conscious of the other and how at times they form a group. For all of them meeting involves the pain of self-doubt which is only precariously balanced by the solace of kinship.

Neville's preference for the measured exactitude of the classics is indicative of his precise temperament, a character kept strictly under control, his passions repressed because unsanctioned. Weak himself, he is entranced by the bodily strength of other men, captured by their flick of a hand, the wrinkled nose of some lovely youth. To the men with whom he falls hopelessly in love he offers the pleasures of bus rides, a web of private conversation, comfortable silences in tidy firelit rooms. The attraction he feels for half-naked cabin boys, for horsemen and cricket players, is that of a voyeur only, constitutionally exempt from par-

ticipation. Although he gives his loves the names of classic heroes, the books of which he speaks are unknown to them. Mixed with his awe of their physique is contempt for their pagan sensibilities. There is thus a limit to their sharing, and his inability to communicate intellectually with his lovers reduces them in his esteem as he himself is reduced by his own susceptibility. He offers tenderness tentatively with the wry expectation of betrayal enforced by the belief that such as he deserve no better. Each affair is a moment stolen out of time, a denial of individual solitude. It is painful to become part of another, but the desire for consolation overcomes the fear of adulteration; so that one repeats old patterns with assured expectations and disappointments:

> ...if one day you do not come after breakfast, if one day I see you in some looking-glass perhaps looking after another, if the telephone buzzes and buzzes in your empty room, I shall then, after unspeakable anguish, I shall then--for there is no end to the folly of the human heart--seek another, find another, you. Meanwhile, let us abolish the ticking of time's clock with one blow. Come closer.[11]

For Rhoda and Louis the business of sharing is less equivocal. For both the experience is treacherous, but whilst Rhoda hugs corners and shadows to escape, Louis tries to belong by winning approval with carefully copied mannerisms and expertise. Lacking self-confidence rather than skill, he waits for others to do first what he must do also. As precise as Neville, he is yet more of a perfectionist because his endeavours are concentrated by being single-minded. Louis' refrain of a stamping beast chained on the sand is an image of frustration rather than of latent power. His greatest wish is 'to be taken to the arms with love,'[12] but his Australian accent renders him forever alien and external; or rather, not the accent itself, but the significance he believes it holds

for others, a self-consciousness which projects a sense of inferiority and leads others to behave as his superiors. A foreigner by birth and heritage, Louis is the most sensitive to history and the lives which passed before his. In his mind's eye he sees women passing with red pitchers to the Nile, camels swaying and men in turbans; all the 'tramplings, treadings, stirrings' of earlier civilizations weave within him as if the substance from which he drew his life had its roots in former centuries. To Louis, 'rooted to the middle of the earth,' Bernard, Neville, Jinny and Susan merely brush the surface of the world, but by their very mediocrity it is they who belong, whereas he is never included.[13] He is conscious instead of flux, of disorder; of annihilation and despair, and the reassurance of the rhythm of the average man, a harmony 'like a waltz tune, eddying in and out, round and round,' gives him no escape from his solitude. Louis is the exception doomed forever to see the whole from a point outside, to translate the poet's perfect statement and expose the rhythm's aimlessness. Like Neville he mocks that which he longs to be a part of: like Rhoda he feels outcast and vulnerable, the victim of those he would have as equals.

Both Louis and Rhoda claim to be the youngest, the most naked of their friends,[14] and in their recognition of each other's isolation they become lovers, not to find shelter but rather confirmation of their individual dislocation. But whilst life for Louis has been a burden, it is a labour he has accepted and struggled with, facing the ridicule of clerks and charwomen with outer equanimity, ever striving to win their acceptance. For Rhoda life is infinitely more terrifying, 'alone in a hostile world,'[15] afraid of being blown forever outside the loop of time, she sees death in the shadow of a tree,[16] destruction in a puddle,[17]

Disgusted with a world sordid and deformed, suspicious of hatred in every face, Rhoda is alone and lonely. Her grief for Percival is tainted by the shortcomings she suspects in the lamentations of his other friends so that her tribute of violets seems withered and black, spoilt by the world's corruption. Percival's death forces her to look at the world anew as a place without him and she goes to an afternoon recital to clarify her thoughts as she listens to chamber music(fn)--music that sounds of laughter and sun-baked hills, a ripple and the sea:

> 'Like' and 'like' and 'like'--but what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing? Now that lightning has gashed the tree and the flowering branch has fallen, and Percival, by his death, has made me this gift, let me see the thing. There is a square; there in an oblong. The players take the square and place it on the oblong. They place it very accurately; they make a perfect dwelling place. Very little is left outside. The structure is now visible; what is inchoate is here stated; we are not so various or so mean; we have made oblongs and stood them upon squares. This is our triumph; this is our consolation.[18]

Rhoda lives in an underworld of dreams and nightmares which is more sinister than Louis' tunnel of time where Kings and Queens keep company with Indian mystics and dead boys and girls. Life for him is stretched out thin, but full of people distinct and real; Louis' world is clothed in

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'I do a little work on it (The Waves) in the evening when the gramophone is playing late Beethoven sonatas.' AWD p. 108.

'In 1972 three boxes containing several hundreds of index cards were discovered in Sussex ranging from Palestina to Schoenberg--a catalogue of Leonard's collection of recorded music. He always marked when he and Virginia or some other friend listened to a particular work. In 'The String Quartet', included in the collection Monday and Tuesday, she wrote, 'That's an early Mozart, of course--But the tune, like all tunes, makes one despair--I mean hope. What do I mean?'' p. 30.
'The Stuff of which legends are made,' Miron Grindea. Adam, 1972.

flesh; Rhoda's is a vast emptiness interspersed with occasional marble columns. Believing she has no face herself, the phenomenal part of life escapes her so that she leaves Louis and the threat of embraces for her watery world of imagination. Rocking white petals in a basin of water, hers, a ship, sails on as others flounder: but there is no safety in solitude even, for unspoken terrors bringing violent death crouch behind doors and smiling faces, the tiger ready to pounce.

Rhoda lives in the shade of reality and feels rather than thinks. Her moment of abstraction at the concert is a rare distillation of random fears into a vision of perfection and peace. This is her moment in the same way that Lily Briscoe's life reaches a peak as she completes her picture of Mrs. Ramsay. For both life is suddenly illuminated and the understanding which has always eluded them seems almost clear. Rhoda sees behind the likeness to the thing itself, a square upon an oblong which leaves very little outside. The moment is a triumph, but as a moment in time it cannot endure: that which was left out of the shape reasserts itself so that the triumph passes and its memory can at best be consolation against the reaffirmed meanness and disunity. Rhoda's poignancy here is emblematic of what each character feels in The Waves. Susan's satisfaction in netted fruits and children in cots is also the source of her sickness--the fecundity she longed for became oppressive, almost obscene, so that love is closely followed by hate. Jinny's rouge and pocket handkerchief cannot hold back the ravages of time, and even Bernard's stories fail him, and his phrases no longer fit as he gets older. Maturity makes of things something different so that what was beautiful becomes grotesque, things that were exciting, stale, and people that were hopeful, resigned. But beyond the individual calamity is

sometimes glimpsed a mystic completeness in which the pain of one's personal transience is subsumed.

> We have proved sitting eating, sitting talking, that we can add to the treasury of moments. We are not slaves bound to suffer incessantly unrecorded petty blows on our bent backs. We are not sheep either, following a master. We are creators. We too as we put on our hats and push open the door, stride not into chaos, but into a world that our own force can subjugate and make part of the illuminated and everlasting road.[19]

The real triumph lies in the occasional conjugation of I, you and he into 'we' which makes of the single red carnation 'a six-sided flower, made of six lives.'[20] Proportions are changed to render the one-dimensional into something domed.

The relationship between personality and participation is further explored in Virginia Woolf's last novel, Between the Acts. The action spans twenty-four hours in an English village, where local inhabitants have gathered at Points Hall for the annual pageant held to raise funds for the crumbling church spire. The program on this occasion is an ambitious survey of the history of England. Under the direction of Miss La Trobe, the publican, policeman, Mrs. Clark of the village shop, daughters and sons, act their parts as pilgrim or Queen with quick changes behind the bushes, shedding Chaucerian sackcloth to don an Elisabethan cape of silver cleverly contrived from wire scouring wool. For Miss La Trobe, the magic of a cotton dishcloth lies in the imagination which can make of it an exotic turban, but with a small budget and an obdurate audience, the gap between the illusion she had sought to convey and what the others catch is painfully wide.

The business of [illegible] sandwiches is managed by elderly Lucy Swithin, nicknamed Batty. Conscious of her duties as hostess--to make

people comfortable and cut the bread in perfect triangles--her real enthusiasm is saved for a whimsical probing of the world armed with her favorite reading, an Outline of History. She reads creatively rather than scientifically so that the thick-necked monsters of forests and swamps leave the pages and travel many eons to stalk the Strand and Piccadilly. In her mind the divisions between centuries are misty, so that primeval savages are confused with the Egyptians under Pharaohs who performed extraordinarily skilful operations on the brain and invented false teeth. She appears to have no difficulty reconciling her belief in human evolution from mastodons with the gold cross she fingers on her breast. There is something so generous about her vagueness that it is quite disarming. When she confides in Isa that she doesn't believe there were such people as the Victorians, only 'you and me'[21] dressed differently, Isa does not contradict her because there is something charming and innocent about the old lady which invites protection. Thus, when Lucy caresses her cross and smiles benignly at the view, making, as Isa imagines, some gigantic harmony out of every individual agony, she wins from Isa an indulgent smile, which if a little patronizing is all the same loving.

To old Bartholomew, however, his sister's range of sympathy is exasperating. Her religion he condemns as superstition, her free association of thoughts as undisciplined rambling. Her weakness is for him inherent in her being female--sexual attraction which redeems other women in his eyes is out of the question with Lucy, and it is significant that he marvels at her ever having borne children and thinks of her less as a woman than as his younger sister, Cindy, who used to trail him on childhood fishing trips and whom he can still silence with a growl. She

stops him with questions about the weather or the classical origin of some myth--questions which tickle his mind and send him searching for the authoritative statement of a newspaper forecast, or through the pages of an encyclopaedia. She could, he admits, have been a clever woman if she had managed to fix her gaze, but Lucy's grasp of knowledge is like Rachel Vinrace's in The Voyage Out:

> Her mind was in the state of an intelligent man's at the beginning of the reign of Queen Elizabeth; she would believe practically anything she was told, invent reasons for anything she said. The shape of the earth, the history of the world, how trains worked, or money was invested, what laws were in force, which people wanted what, and why they wanted it, the most elementary idea of a system in modern life--none of this had been imparted to her...[22]

Like so many women in Virginia Woolf's novels, Lucy is essentially uneducated, college and disinterested thought belonging to her brother and other men--men who encouraged her to cultivate sensibility instead of sense and who, finding the mature creature ill-informed and fanciful, are both reinforced in their sense of superior strength and alternately charmed and irritated by her unintellectual character.

Living in the same world, men and women perceive it differently. The Times for Bart holds a report on M. Daladier pegging down the franc; for Isa a story which begins with a green tailed horse and ends with a young woman screaming on a barrack room bed. The savages which delight Lucy with their naked beauty are for Bart subject bodies in the shadow of a rock, inferiors over whom he governs clad in a helmet and armed with a rifle. India and Imperialism belong to men and are emblematic of what binds Giles to his father with respect and muffled affection--a masculine fierceness and manipulation of politics and money which makes them both ridiculous and glorious in the eyes of women. Lucy finds Giles' business in stocks and shares not only amazing but amusing; yet

the same qualities seen smartly buttoned in a blue blazer are for Mrs. Manresa adorable. The different perspectives from which characters are viewed confounds the search for an objective reality because the shifting impressions make a simple definition impossible. People mean different things to different people and the problem of really knowing one another is therefore so complicated as to be impossible. People do not understand each other: Giles' private revelations contradict the person others think they know him as. Aunt Lucy making light of his profession as a stockbroker does not know that he would rather have been a farmer but felt trapped into playing the part expected of him and forced into keeping his own secrets. Giles, whose firm chin and fierce blue eyes betoken strength and confidence in the eyes of those who admire him, is in fact filled with a child's inner turmoil of confusion and fear. He is impatient with the village festivities, which he considers unjustifiably frivolous on a day when men are being shot just across the Channel: he is disgusted by William Dodge because homosexuality is loathsome to him. He despises William for not being a plain man who could feel straightforward love for a woman, and he resents William's abdication from manliness, suspecting him of a weak and pliant character. Giles' outrage on both accounts fits within the conventional expectations of him as a masculine man, but behind it lies self-doubt and shortcomings which, if admitted, would subject him to the same disqualification he now wreaks upon Dodge. Giles is scared by war and by lust, and the anger he directs at William is to shield him from his own cowardice. During one of the dramatic interludes, Giles comes across a snake in the grass with a toad stuck in its mouth. The composition is singularly grotesque--the toad unable to escape and the snake unable to swallow--and Giles stamps them both to death.

When Mrs. Manresa sees his blood-stained shoes she feels instinctively that he has performed some gallantry on her behalf and gathers herself up to play the part of Queen to match his as hero. Isa, however, is not impressed by Giles' attempt at valour. He wants to make her feel that he bears the burden of making money for her to spend, but she deflates him with one eloquent look, which says, 'I don't admire you ... silly little boy, with blood on his boots.'[23] The man who caught a leaping salmon and captured her love has long since ceased to be for Isa either hero or lover. But she too is a prisoner of the half-truth of clichés: she looks at Giles and thinks, 'He is my husband...The father of my children.'[24] She does not know who he really is and she has stopped feeling curious. She knows even less about the gentleman farmer, Rupert Haines, but in his case the unknown is an attractive mystery. She does not speak with him but with William instead. With him she can speak as freely as if they had known each other all their lives, and much more freely than with any other man in all her life because William's homosexuality disqualifies him from the usual flirtation and fighting between the sexes. She does not despise him as Giles does, nor feel sorry for him like Lucy, but he does not count as a full human being either. They repeat to each other lines from the play and from poems or speak from inside their minds as if they were reading other lines. To both it is clear that play acting is a daily convention that keeps people from ever really knowing one another or saying what they mean. It is also apparent to both of them that behind the performance is the anguish of loneliness with the imminent doom of sudden death.[25]

William's relationship with Mrs. Manresa is bizarre but not incongruous with her reputation. Mrs. Manresa is an actress of the music hall

variety; ostentatiously vulgar, she flaunts her jewels and charms with equal abandonment and confidence of making an impression. She plays at once the part of a wild child of nature and that of a captivating courtesan, carrying through from one to another with an exuberant energy which somehow works. She makes Bart feel young and reckless and charms Giles into an insubstantial conspiracy which leads him to exempt her from his general stricture. In the final act of the play when the actors flash mirrors at the audience to reflect them as the present day, Mrs. Manresa alone is unabashed. For the others recognition is painful, and revelation before others undesirable, but the looking-glass holds nothing for Mrs. Manresa which she has not seen before and made free with in public. Far from shying away from her image, as do the others, she checks her makeup and reapplies her face with professional equanimity. She is a natural actress and Bartholomew applauds her magnificient performance.

The invitation to identify Miss La Trobe's drama with the lives of the spectators is implicit from the beginning, when it is specified that they shall play the part of the audience, a part which becomes the finale of the pageant as the present day. Mr. Streatfield's interpretation of the pageant's message is not inaccurate but becomes banal in his words. What Miss La Trobe had conceived on a massive scale becomes petty as he explains it. He suggests that the play showed how we act different parts and yet remain the same, how each person thinks of himself as being separate but that each is member one of another and part of a yet greater whole in which nature also participates. This is surely not far from what Miss La Trobe sought to convey with her procession through the ages set against a backcloth of music designed to integrate the pieces.

And yet triumph escapes her; something which she intended to move people to feel for themselves eluded them and is reduced by the clergyman to words empty of colour and drama. It is with an ironic pathos that she who celebrated unity should be left alone at the end to walk home to her solitary cottage. Like William she does not really belong to her sex; her gait is masculine, she smokes cigarettes, swears and drinks with none of the softening features of a 'lady'. Her life is neither excited nor distressed by feelings for men, although it is not free from allurement and rejection. Having quarrelled with the actress who shared her bed, Miss La Trobe is alone again, finding consolation in a brandy and soda. It is not only relations between men and women which are unsatisfactory, nor merely sexual affairs--all contacts are incomplete and uncertain. Bartholomew's brotherly affection for Lucy will repeatedly be spoilt by the torch of reason he brandishes at the expense of her vision; and Isa's conception of Giles has weathered with time so as to allow room for contempt which had no place earlier. But although Isa may feign indifference, her feelings for Giles remain strong, love and hate closely following one another. It is a pattern to which she pretends she has resigned herself, 'This year, last year, next year, never,'[26] but from her passivity emerges another desire, a wandering speculation about the gentleman farmer; and from her attitude of detachment grows another struggle with Giles, a fight which changes into an embrace.

Alone in the bushes, Miss La Trobe's despair is confirmed by the gramophone muttering 'Dispersed are we'; but her hope is encouraged when it adds, 'let us retain what made that harmony.'[27] She is surprised by a flock of starlings that attack the tree under which she has sheltered and make it buzz with life. Already her acute depression has passed

and become a half-forgotten memory as she begins to visualize a new archetypal drama:

> 'I should group them,' she murmured, 'here. It would be midnight; there would be two figures, half concealed by a rock. The curtain would rise. What would the first words be?'[28]

The words escape her, but the scene is set in the dark after dinner at Points Hall; Isa and Giles, actors larger than life, become enormous against a colourless sky. 'The house had lost its shelter. It was night before the roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high places among rocks. Then the curtain rose. They spoke.'[29]

Thus the book ends with another beginning of epic-like pretensions which as we read we mock ever so slightly because we know what went before and have reason to expect that what may come after will not be greatly different. Virginia Woolf does in her novel with creative subtlety what Streatfield and others blunder in direct assault. Incidental details, deliberately casual, imprint themselves upon the reader's mind. No clear system emerges; at no one point can one say, 'Ah, yes! that's the centre; now I understand,' but neither does one feel that the book is devoid of meaning. The birds which raise a cacophonous rhapsody above Miss La Trobe have made other appearances less distant than may seem. Interrupting a gramophone intermittently humming,

> The King is in his counting house,
> Counting out his money,
> The Queen is in her parlour,
> Eating ...[30]

burst the real birds of the nursery rhyme jingle, swallows, or were they martins?, skimming through the trees, retreating and advancing. These are the same birds, believes Lucy, that have come to Points Hall every

year:

> Year after year they came. Before there was a channel, when the earth, upon which the Windsor chair was planted, was a riot of rhododendrons, and humming birds quivered at the mouths of scarlet trumpets, as she had read that morning in her Outline of History, they had come...[31]

--the same swallows, or were they martins? It really didn't matter. Everything seems to matter a lot less than people make believe. The birds dance as easily to a waltz as they do to a nursery rhyme, perch in the latter's simple strung out lines as comfortably as they wreathe in and out of Bartholomew's reflective verses:

> O sister swallow, O sister swallow,
> How can thy heart be full of the spring?[32]

--swallows and Lucy are confused in his mind which worries over his son's unhappiness. Why was Lucy always up in the clouds like some bird? What was upsetting Giles? Sitting in his library amonst books, 'The treasured life blood of immortal spirits,'[33] it is the mortal lives of his sister and son that preoccupy him: distracted now by a simple tune of arbitrary violence,

> Hark hark, the dogs do bark
> The beggars are coming to town...[34]

now by a languishing love song,

> Leave your casement and come, lady, I love till I die...

but thinking all the while of Giles.

Jays and magpies mean the same thing to Giles and farmer Pinsent; also a fish on the line. 'Fish?' murmurs Lucy, 'Ourselves.'[35] Looking at their speckled shadows in the lily pond 'hopefully, without much help from reason,'[36] she finds faith in fish and sees in their blotched beauty an image of power and glory in ourselves. It is a comforting vision which must be kept private and safe from the spectre of Bartholomew, who also

rises from the depths of the lily pond to threaten her faith. It had been the same when they were children; following her brother to fish from the meadow she had made posies from long stemmed flowers, shaping the ordinary and everyday into something beautiful and transcendent; but Bart had made her take the fish off the hook herself and the blood had shocked her. Isa had first met Giles fishing, but he had all the sportsman's luck. Now she orders filleted soles for their lunch and worries whether it will be fresh.' Off rambles Lucy on another tangent, remembering fish brought to their door in a pail when they were children; but there was a time before then when there was no sea at all between England and the Continent and mammoths walked in Piccadilly...

The unravelling of histories private and impersonal is one of the ways in which Virginia Woolf explores the relationship between the two. Each individual's memory is a repository of happenings within his or her lifetime, but the sequence of events is full of peaks and valleys which fold back upon one another as incidents are recalled and lived through again out of context. Woolf proposes that the experience of reality is something quite different from a series of 'and thens' strung like beads upon a single thread. Even a shy and retiring person does not live untouched by the presence of others; friends, houses, scenes add depth to the perception of the individual psyche. Consciousness is more like a dragonfly than a train; sometimes suspended but never quite at rest, it flits from one thing to another. Thinking of fish and looking at lilies, Lucy by the pond hovers between two fluidities: 'Above, the air rushed; beneath was water.'[37] She floats in them both, making analogies and finding significance, buoyed up by optimism in the mystery unravelled. Swallowing sugared raspberries at the end of the day, she

returns to the play and asks no one in particular, 'What did it mean?' Explanation escapes her and instead of understanding she feels grateful that it didn't rain this year, blesses the sleeping children and fingers the pages of her Outline of History to find her place: 'On top of the matted branches the birds sang...'[38]

In an early diary, dated 1899, Virginia wrote:

> Actors may change their parts, may be different, but the sameness of the scene gives a certain continuity to the whole and does in fact influence our lives to no little extent.[39]

It was an idea that she clung to in her subsequent writing and is in keeping with the concept of a larger whole in which individuals find relief from the burden of selfhood. Lucy Swithin's optimism rests on such a belief, so that history and nature can be embraced as part of one's own identity with other things: '...we have other lives, I think, I hope, she murmured. We live in others.'[40] Such faith opens a door upon immediate solitude and offers a comforting rejoinder to the physical annihilation of death. Clarissa Dalloway finds a similar transcendence in her party, and Mrs. Ramsay after her magnificent dinner:

> 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.[41]

As compensation for the uncertainties of life, those who seek find the intimacy of friendship, a sense of kinship with others, and a belief in life after death through other people, things and places. 'So afraid one is of loneliness; of seeing to the bottom of the vessel,'[42] Virginia wrote in 1928:

> That is one of the experiences I have had here some August[illegible] got then to a consciousness of what I call "reality": a thing I see before me: something abstract; but residing in the downs and sky; beside which nothing matters; in which I shall rest and continue to exist. Reality I call it. And I fancy sometimes this is the most necessary thing to me; that which I seek. ...I would like to express it too.[43]

Sometimes the sense of loneliness proved too strong and Virginia Woolf lost a sense of proportion and slipped from the world of relationships into a solitary pool of insanity.

CHAPTER III

Sanity and Suicide

> This world of human beings grows too complicated, my only wonder is that we don't fill more madhouses: the insane view of life has much to be said for it--perhaps it's the sane one after all.[1]

The close relationship between Virginia Woolf's inner emotional life and her writing is well documented. A Writer's Diary records the intense self-doubt and depression which followed the completion of every book, the fear of adverse reviews and the tremendous relief [illegible] was released instead. Although she anticipated the ultimate release of her diary under the careful editorship of her husband, it was written with quite a different mental set than those pieces which were intended for immediate publication.

> This diary writing does not count as writing since I have just re-read my year's diary and am much struck by the rapid and haphazard gallop at which it surges along, sometimes indeed jerking almost whole-heartedly over the cobbles, still if it were not written rather faster than the fastest typewriting it would never be written at all and the advantage of the method is that (it) scrapes up accidentally several stray matters that I should exclude if I first thought and it is the accidents that are the diamonds in the rubbish heap.[2]

The volume her husband compiled from the twenty-eight notebooks she had written over the years 1918 to 1941 conscientiously picked out many of the diamonds, choosing, however, only those which he felt were of interest with regard to his wife's writing and threw light on her life as a writer. The mass of unpublished material seemed to hold a tantalising promise of secrets withheld for motives of discretion, but although there are some stinging comments directed against various acquaintances and

sometimes their work, the diaries spring fewer surprises than one perhaps hoped for. They are full of hurried recollections, impressions and the records of feelings, intimate but not unexpected. In her essay on Evelyn, Virginia Woolf reflects that,

> the good diarist writes either for himself alone or a posterity so distant that it can safely hear every secret and justly weigh every motive.[3]

It is inconceivable that the diaries should have been made public during her lifetime because they bear too close upon the strain she suffered both from writing and from the reception of her works. Such insight is useful to the student who looks for further illumination of her books, but whilst the diary has been rescued by posterity, one nevertheless feels it is primarily a private composition. One reads the diary because of the novels, not vice-versâ. A second comment by the author herself seems to hold the key to posterity's continued interest in this private volume: One would wish that the psychoanalysts would go into the question of diary-keeping,[4] for it is the parallels one inevitably draws between Virginia Woolf's psychic history and the progress of the novels which exert a strong fascination.

In their memories of her, many people recall Virginia's extraordinary flights of imagination when she would transform some quite ordinary incident and make of it something unbelievably wonderful and extravagant. On such occasions she seemed to leave the ground and the excitement with which she glowed and radiated amongst her audience won her the reputation of a conversational genius. The outcome of such brilliant performances was uncertain, however, and it was clear to Leonard from the beginning of their [illegible] that all aspects of Virginia's life must be carefully scrutinized, since [illegible] could easily be followed by

severe depression as by elation. She enjoyed the society of their friends and depended on her writing as her life, but the physical and mental stress which both entailed brought her dangerously near the limit of her endurance. Only too often a headache signalled the first stage of another breakdown and she had to submit to a kind of comatose half-life in order to survive the ordeal. Leonard became her anxious and devoted guardian, watching for tell-tale symptoms and rationing all her activities. He observed,

> two markedly differ[illegible]--indeed almost antithetical--phases in Virginia's creative process. The swing of the pendulum in the mind between conscious, rational, analytic, controlled thought and an undirected, intuitive or emotional process almost always take place when the mind produces something original or creative.[5]

Virginia Woolf was right in fancying all people have these spiritual tides in them,[6] but in [illegible] the pendulum swung a little higher toward each extreme and thereby established a kind of tension which persistently threatened her mental stability. It seems to have been the unavoidable price she paid for writing and something which makes her books different from anything else one reads.

Bloomsbury was already interested in Freud by the first decade of the twentieth century. Virginia's brother, Adrian, and his wife became psychoanalysts, and the Hogarth Press published James Strachey's translation of Freud's entire works. Virginia herself reflected she would give a great deal to understand the ramifications of her own psychology,[8] yet she was never analyzed and the only treatment she was given for her recurrent lapses was a kind of rest cure, either at home or in a [illegible] sanitorium. Subsequent opinion has tended to confirm that this was the best course of action, considering Virginia's [illegible], which

seemed to be manic depressive. If she was air borne when manic, it was a subterranean watery realm she inhabited when depressed. A diary entry for August 8th, 1921, notes:

> The dark underworld has its fascinations as well as its terrors...[9]

Although she was tormented by delusions and sometimes lost her grip on surface reality, her periods of illness were nevertheless intriguing to her and often fruitful.[10] The most striking images of those times are connected with water, and the ominous fin which raised itself at Rodmell[11] became a symbol of enlightenment as well as death.

Her early diaries make several references to deaths by drowning which made her wonder, 'Does water prompt suicide.'[12] The maids at Point Hall believe a lady drowned herself in the lilypond, and selfless Rhoda, who rocks her petals in a basin of water and throws her tributary wreath of violets woven with Death into the Thames, commits suicide. There is something very tempting about this watery world which is dreamy and free from strife. It offers a retreat from action and passion which the narrator in 'A Mark on the Wall' finds very attractive:

> Yes, one could imagine a very pleasant world. A quiet, spacious world, with the flowers so red and blue in the open fields. A world without professors or specialists or housekeepers with the profiles of policemen, a world which one could slice with one's thought as a fish slices water with his fin, grasing the stems of water lilies, hanging suspended over the nests of white sea eggs...How peaceful it is down here, rooted in the centre of the world and gazing up through the grey water...[13]

Such an existence offered delightful reflections, drowsy dreams and comfortable vagueness which were nevertheless very real to Virginia[14] and to those characters in her books who are visionary and introspective. Circumstances [illegible] Mrs. Ramsay flying on the surface of life, but left for a moment alone she sinks into the unfathomable deep where one loses

personality and shrinks to a core of limitless darkness.[15] Her daughter, Nancy, examines the sea life in a rock pool and sees in its tininess a microcosm of the outer vastness.[16] Similarly, Lucy Swithin peers into the depths of the fish pond,[17] and Jacob Flanders dives to touch the sea bed.[18] The trance which overcomes Rachel in The Voyage Out seems to separate her from the rest of the world by a translucent wave, a river, or a pool of water.[19] She believes that this watery world holds some message of immense importance, although the precise meaning eludes her. The solicitations of her sickbed attendants are worrying because they interrupt her concentration in the underworld. In common with Mrs. Ramsay, Rachel longs to be released from the burden of selfhood. Mrs. Ramsay's desire for anonymity and extinction is balanced by her urge for recognition [illegible]ity, but Rachel comes to wish for nothing else in the world t[illegible] alone.[20] One feels that the fever which marked the beginning of her descent is only in part the cause of her death, because her will offers no resistance.

Rachel chooses a realm of darkness in preference to the everyday world in which living is more complicated and even joy is overcast by irritants. She surrenders her personal will to escape participation. In Mrs. Dalloway Septimus Smith makes a comparably deliberate choice, although his vision is more highly charged than Rachel's. The deformed creature who inhabits her nightmare on board ship does not haunt her waking hours. The dream changes the outline of her world in a way which renders it more circumscribed and less attractive, but it does not fill her with terror. In this respect Septimus is closer to Rhoda, who suspects the torturer's grimace in every overt smile. Both Rhoda and Septimus are afraid of human nature and feel themselves to be the vulnerable

victim upon whom the beast will pounce at any moment. Rhoda's persecutors are as insubstantial as the rest of her world but Septimus' are given acute presence. Septimus is suffering from shell shock and the emotional ravages of war. During combat he had felt proud of his self-control when his best friend had been killed before his eyes: but what he then applauded as self-command became a source of panic later when he found he could not feel at all. He had married a young Italian hatmaker to find refuge from his private hell, but cannot justify his own salvation through sacrificing her. His marriage makes him feel guilty because he cannot respond to his wife's love. His incapacity for feeling disqualifies him from the human race, so that he becomes both a deserter who must be crushed and an outsider who views the world from a distant vantage point. From his detached viewpoint the world seems full of meaning which only he can see. Free from the feeling of human relationships, he has become supersensitive to the environment so that sound tingles through his body, flowers grow through his flesh.[21] The sensation is queer but not malevolent to begin with. Birdsong and the noise of traffic seem to achieve an odd harmony; trailing clouds promise never-ending beauty. At such a moment the fear of emotional numbness is submerged and he feels very much drawn to life. And yet the human beauty which Rezia responds to so vividly is inaccessible to Septimus as if it were behind a pane of glass.[22] The beauty he recognises is only visible to those who have gone under the sea and having been brought back from the dead perceive the old forms differently.[23] It is this difference in perception which makes Septimus different and therefore alarms other people. His own sense of inadequacy is magnified by society's criticism, so that his panic turns to fear and identifies the source of his anguish as his

oppressor. Septimus denounces human nature but particularises its representatives with a shrewdness which is not altogether irrational. His wife is a reminder of his own emotional crime, but he does not include her in his condemnation and is distressed to think they may be parted. The brutes are those who want to take her away from him and subject him to their own kind of cure. Dr. Holmes is large and fleshy with little spiritual sensitivity, but the real aggressor is William Bradshaw. Dr. Bradshaw proposes to cure Septimus by his personal system of proportion, but the Goddess by that name which Bradshaw worships is a sinister parody of that word. She is but a thin veneer over the real passion which fills Bradshaw's heart. A bloodless creature himself, Bradshaw feasts on the human will of others, winning his precedence through their submission. A Conversion 'tempts men to fall from the true belief' of Proportion and instead of bringing about a state of balanced harmony establishes the rule of the ruthless over the vulnerable.

> Naked, defenceless, the exhausted, the friendless received the impress of Sir William's will. He swooped; he devoured. He shut people up.[24]

Clarissa senses something 'obscurely evil'[25] about Bradshaw and avoids all but the most minimal contact with him at her party. Clarissa is Septimus' partner in a complementary way; she skimming the surface, he the depths of a vision shared by both of them. Clarissa's antagonist is the self-righteous woman who comes to teach Elisabeth history. Miss Kilman has subsumed her personal grievances in a religious fervour which remains more personal than sublime. Like Bradshaw she has an ungovernable urge to dominate others. Her conspicuous self-denial aims at reminding others of their laxity and selfishness but is itself a manifestation of her own self-absorption. There is neither love nor

charity in Miss Kilman's Christianity. Lady Bruton's fervour for Canadian immigration [illegible] similar urge for power and makes her ruthless and lop-sided in character. Clarissa resents and fears both women, but attempts conciliation rather than confrontation. To Miss Kilman she presents flowers from her country house, and to Lady Bruton an invitation to her party. Clarissa has never faced a crisis since she refused to marry Peter Walsh thirty years ago, and when she hears that Septimus has thrown himself out of a window she reflects that all she ever threw away was a shilling tossed into the Serpentine.[26] Clarissa has merely toyed with passions in her life, but she understands the significance of Septimus' gesture and exults in the triumph he thereby won over Bradshaw.

> 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 [illegible] embrace in death.[27]

Septimus' suicide *is* an act of will. Balanced on [illegible] window sill he does not want to die but nevertheless chooses death as the only escape from Bradshaw and Holmes. As such it *is* an act of defiance which both Rezia and Clarissa understand and feel glad that Septimus made.

> Septimus had felt like a drowned sailor who had seen the bottom of the sea, after which nothing above looked the same. Clarissa is in her element at her party, where, dressed like a mermaid, she seemed to lollop on the waves,[28] floating in beauty with perfect ease. Again the watery metaphors suggest the amphibious lives of both and the degree to which each was committed to his exploration. Clarissa feels 'somehow very like him',[29] a relationship which lies in their shared vision of reality. Both of them are horrified by death and yet find with it a kind of reconciliation. Beholding an apparition of the dead Evans, Septimus is extra-

ordinarily relieved to find her unchanged, and holds for a moment the joyful revelation that [illegible] interrupts him and the reader must fill the gap. Is it the revelation that there is no death, just as there is no crime but love? Perhaps, but one never quite sees the whole or feels sure that one has grasped the meaning or even that there is any meaning at all.

Clarissa can accept a mystery but not nothingness:

> 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.

Neither Septimus nor Clarissa can be sure, but it is their degree of feeling which gives them human worth. It is these oscillations from melancholy to enthusiasm, from self-confidence to mistrust which mark a sense of proportion, not the rigid science which Bradshaw takes as authority.

CHAPTER IV

Conclusion

In the 'Time Passes' section of To the Lighthouse, two characters pierce the present in search of the past which lies furled within the immediate scene and within their personal memories. The half-witted charwoman, Mrs. McNab, glances sideways into a dusty looking-glass and leers at her own reflection; 'as if, after all, she had her consolations, as if indeed there twined about her dirge some incorrigible hope.'[1] On the beach, the mystic , the visionary, 'stirred a puddle ... and asked themselves, 'What am I?' 'What is this?' and suddenly an answer was vouchsafed them'.[2] Both peer into imperfect mirrors and apparently see something beyond reflected likeness. It would seem that crippled with age and conscious of her mental infirmity, Mrs. McNab has little to rejoice in, but she glimpses something which makes her grin and sets her humming an old-fashioned, gay tune. Similarly the mystic on the shore finds something which helps keep him warm in the frost and gives him comfort in the desert. As always, Virginia Woolf is vague about the specific identity of such sources of consolation, '(what it was they could not say)'.[3] With this vagueness comes an uncertainty as to whether such comfort has any objective justification. Mrs. McNab's visions of joy are rendered nebulous by the 'as if' qualification; and in the subsequent paragraph, the pool which had vouchsafed reassurance becomes disturbed with strange imaginations of 'flesh turned to atoms which drove beyond the wind.'[4] In this section we learn that Mrs. Ramsay has died, her son, Andrew, has been shattered by an exploding shell, and her

daughter, Prue, has died in childbirth. Despite these facts of death and destruction, people continued to dream 'that good triumphs, happiness prevails, order rules;'[5]--a search for consolation that was impossible to resist.

This section, together with the relationship established between Septimus Smith and Clarissa in Mrs. Dalloway, prepares us for Virginia Woolf's statement in her 1930 diary when, after another period of near insanity, she reflects: 'I believe these illnesses are in my case--how shall I express it?--partly mystical.'[6] The suggestion that seer and madman are closely related, and even sometimes combined within one person, is less surprising than the implication that each shapes his vision out of a shared need. For both the evidence of death and rejection is diminished so that a hopeful ideal of love and unity may predominate. Mrs. McNab has been deserted by her children and their father, but nevertheless picks out a streak of light from 'the depths of obscurity';[7] and the mystic denies the clouds and shadows by hiding them behind intimations of 'some absolute good'.[8] Seen in this context, both [illegible] affirmation suggest a fear of loneliness and a longing for comm[illegible]ip have already recognized as a recurrent theme in Virginia [illegible]tion. The melancholy which often accompanies solitude can be alleviated by thought, both cathartic and positive. Thus Mr. Ramsay feels better as soon as he has finished some lugubrious lamentation, and having recognized her sadness, Virginia Woolf feels it lessen:

> Why is life so tragic; so like a little strip of pavement over an abyss. I look down. I feel giddy; I wonder how I am ever to walk to the end. But why do I feel this; Now that I say it I don't feel it.[9]

The incessant fluctuation between hope and despair has already

been noted as one of the polarities which characterize Virginia Woolf's work. This sense is reinforced in her last novel which conveys a sense of uncertainty through its fragmented form. Written just before her final breakdown, Between the Acts reflects a sense of dislocation which is more troubling than in any other of Virginia Woolf's books. In his autobiography, Leonard Woolf records how at that time, with Europe on the verge of the worst holocaust in history, it seemed that they were living without a tomorrow.[10] He and Virginia had already discussed suicide and made preparations to avoid being captured if the Germans invaded England. The gramophone in Between the Acts is only vaguely affirmative when it invites everyone to unite: the sense of one's 'nose pressed to a closed door'[11] is more insistent than before, and the sense of proportion between ruptures and flow more heavily weighted on the side of breakages. The 'orts and fragments' hold moments of joy and laughter but the spaces between them are increasingly alarming: they are the abyss over which Virginia Woolf balanced on a strip of pavement, and they form the well of loneliness which one tries to abate by sharing. I think her fear of separateness may explain her criticism of T. S. Eliot's poetry:

> As I sun myself upon the intense and ravishing beauty of one of his lines, and reflect that I must make a dizzy and dangerous leap to the next, and so on from line to line ... I cry out, I confess, for the old decorums.[12]

The 'dizzy and dangerous' leaps she dreads having to make correspond to the spaces between the acts in her last novel.

The desolate bombed ruins of London must have contributed to her depression, but worse was the knowledge that she was going mad again. She had made four earlier attempts at suicide and had made both flippant

and serious remarks about taking her own life.[13] On the morning of Friday 28 March 1941, she left the following note for Leonard and slipped out of the house alone.

> Dearest,
>
> I feel certain I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. And I shan't recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can't concentrate. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do. You have given me the greatest possible happiness. You have been in every way all that anyone could be. I don't think two people could have been happier till this terrible disease came. I can't fight any longer. I know that I am spoiling your life, that without me you could work. And you will I know. You see I can't even write this properly. I can't read. What I want to say is I owe all of the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that--everybody knows it. If anybody could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness. I can't go on spoiling your life any longer.
>
> I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been.[14]

V

She drowned herself in the River Ouse, with what feelings we can only imagine: as she had told Vita Sackville-West, her own death would be the one experience she would never describe. Death by drowning may have suggested to her the same kind of release from her burden as she imagined a young woman had found in 1903, when, 'slipping off the weight which had been too much for her, she sank in the water.'[15] But as for Septimus Smith, Virginia Woolf's suicide was an escape which was also an act of courage. In her last diary entry, she wrote, 'I will go down with my colours flying.'[16] It is clear from her last letter to Leonard, and from her diary, that life had been very rich and precious, and that it was not life but a living death which terrified her. For Virginia Woolf, as for Bernard in The Waves, death was the enemy and I think her suicide can be seen as showing a comparable spirit to that of

Bernard's final statement: 'Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!'[17]

In her review of Harold Nicholson's Some People, Virginia Woolf observed an analogy between the granitelike solidity of biographical fact and the rainbow-like truth of human personality:

> If we think of truth as something of granite like solidity and of personality as something of rainbow like intangibility and reflect that the aim of biography is to weld the two into one seamless whole, we shall admit that the problem is a stiff one and that we need not wonder if biographers have for the most part failed to solve it.

The problem is rendered a little less stiff in Virginia Woolf's case by the volume of material to support investigation in both realms, and it is such a sense of proportion between the writer and her work, and between recurring themes in her books, that I have attempted to illustrate.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I

1. Biographical Introduction

[1]Letter to Violet Dickinson FTM p. 217

[2]Letter to Emma Vaughan, 8th August, 1901 FTM p. 43

[3]Letter to Violet Dickinson, 27? December, 1902 FTM p. 63

[4]See 'Bloomsbury, the Legend and the Myth' in Lytton Strachey and the Bloomsbury Group by Michael Holroyd, pp. 36-54.

[5]See Bloomsbury by Quentin Bell.

[6]J.K. Johnstone, The Bloomsbury Group.

[7]Letter to Thoby Stephen, May, 1903 FTM p. 77

[8]Quentin Bell, Virginia Woolf: A Biography. Appendix C, p. 205. Also, Letter to Violet Dickinson, 1st October, 1905, where she describes the contributors as 'these inanimate creatures.' AFM p. 208

[9]Appendix C, p. 205.

2. A Room of One's Own

[10]AROO p. 5

[11]AROO p. 13

[12]AROO p. 19

[13]AROO p. 35

[14]JR pp. 31-2 Mrs. Plumer is caught within this system, and helps perpetrate it with a single-mindedness which is all her trapped vision allows.

'It was none of her fault--since how could she control her father begetting her forty years ago in the suburbs of Manchester? and once begotten, how could she do other than grow up cheese-paring, ambitious, with an instinctively accurate notion of the rungs of the ladder and of an art-like assiduity in pushing George Plumer ahead of her to the top of the ladder? What was at the top of the ladder? A sense that all the rungs were beneath one apparently; since by the time that George Plumer became Professor of Physics, or whatever it might be, Mrs. Plumer could

only be in a condition to cling tight to her eminence, peer down at the ground, and goad her two plain daughters to climb the rungs of the ladder.

[15] AROO p. 37

[16] AROO p. 60

[17] AROO p. 62

[18] AROO p. 60

[18a] 'That she disliked feminists and was suspicious of organised political activity for women is felt in the caricatures of Evelyn Murgatroyd in The Voyage Out, Julia Hedge in Jacob's Room, Mr. Clacton and Mrs. Seal in Night and Day, and in the decidedly grudging approval allowed to ...Mary Datchet (Virginia Woolf's one feminist in the literal sense) in Night and Day.' 'Feminism in Virginia Woolf' by J.B. Batchelor. English, XVII (Spring 1968), 1-7.

3. Women as Artists

[19] AROO p. 50

[20] AROO p. 67

[21] ND p. 26

[22] ND p. 308

[23] ND p. 308

[24] ND p. 219

[25] ND p. 224

[26] AROO p. 60

[27] TVO p. 34

[28] TVO p. 51

[29] TVO p. 77

[30] ND

[31] TVO p. 82

[32] TTL

[33] AROO p. 32

[34] TTL

[35] TVO p. 292

[36] TTL p. 51

[36a] TTL p. 60

[37] TTL p. 57

[38] TTL p. 62

[39] TTL p. 237

[40] TTL p. 183

[41] TTL p. 146

[42] TW p. 139

[43] TTL p. 183

[44] TTL p. 223

4. Marriage

[45] AROO p. 103

[46] ND p. 450

[47] AROO p. 96

[48] ND p. 471

[49] TVO p. 156

[50] TVO p. 247

[51] TVO p. 242

[52] AROO p. 23

[53] TVO p. 347.

[54] TVO p. 353

[55] Nigel Nicholson, Portrait of a Marriage.

[56] TTL

[57] Portrait of a Marriage, p. 250

[58] TY

[59] AWD pp. 96-7

60 MD

61 TTL

62 MD p. 133

63 MD p. 11

64 MD pp. 11-12

65 MD p. 6

65a MD p. 131

4. Masculine Feminine

66 AROO p. 101

67 Leslie Stephen, Mausoleum Book p. 17

68 AWD p. 8

69 AWD p. 78

70 AWD p. 75

71 AWD p. 135

72 Letter to Violet Dickinson FTM p. 123

73 TTL p. 6

74 TTL p. 65

75 TTL p. 36

76 TTL p. 137

77 TTL p. 138

78 TTL p. 41

79 CH v. 1 'Sir Walter Scott, The Antiquary' p. 143.

80 TTL p. 71

81 TTL p. 235

82 TTL p. 77

83 TTL p. 74

[84]TTL p. 49

[85]TTL p. 66

[86]TTL p. 116

[87]TTL p. 44

[88]TTL p. 8

[89]TTL p. 8

[90]TTL p. 14

[91]TTL p. 46

[92]TTL p. 47

[93]TTL p. 171

[94]TTL p. 211

CHAPTER II

[1]AROO p. 111

[2]CE v.1 'Aurora Leigh' p. 214

[3]TTL p. 72

[4]TTL p. 65

[5]MD p. 213

[6]It struck me that age consists not in having a different point of view, but in having the same point of view faded. Diary v.3. Berg

[7]TW p. 41

[8]TW p. 71

[9]TW p. 32

[10]TW p. 99

Also, 'What I call 'my life' is not one life that I look back upon; I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am--Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda or Louis; or how to distinguish my life from theirs,' p. 237. And, 'Who am I? ...Am I all of them? Am I one and distinct? I do not know.' p. 248.

[11]TW p. 155

[12]TW p. 80

[13]TW p. 80

[14]TW pp. 91, 188

[15]TW p. 136

[16]TW p. 91

[17]TW p. 135

[18]TW p. 139

[19]TW p. 125

[20]TW p. 196, also p. 101

[21]BTA p. 122

[22]TVO p. 34

[23]BTA p. 81

[24]BTA p. 38

[25]BTA p. 82

[26]BTA p. 151

[27]BTA p. 137

[28]BTA p. 146

[29]BTA p. 152

[30]BTA p. 83

[31]BTA p. 79

[32]BTA p. 83

[33]BTA p. 83

[34]BTA p. 84

[35]BTA p. 142

[36]BTA p. 142

[37]BTA p. 142

[38]BTA p. 151

[39] [Diary] v. 1 [Berg]

[40] BTA p. 53

[41] TTL p. 131

[42] AWD p. 129

[43] AWD pp. 129-30

CHAPTER III

[1] Letter to Emma Vaughan, 23 April, 1901. FTM p. 42

[2] [Diary] v. 5 [Berg]

[3] CE v. III, p. 44

[4] CE v. III, p. 163

[5] Leonard Woolf. Downhill all the Way, p. 54.

[6] [Diary] v. 5 [Berg]

[7] Freud set for the the objects of psychoanalysis and sketched the development of his doctrine in the American Journal of Psychology in 1910: the English translation of The Interpretation of Dreams appeared in 1913, and Wit and the Unconscious in 1918 ... In an article in the TLS of March 25, 1920, p. 199, entitled 'Freudian Fiction', (Review of An Imperfect Moth by J.D. Beresford) Virginia Woolf asserts that it is not only legitimate but desirable for a novelist to turn to Freudian theories to explain the behaviour of his characters, but at the same time she points out the danger inherent in too slavish or too exclusive an application of these theories--an attitude characteristic of hers toward doctrines and systems.'
Jean Guiguet. Virginia Woolf and her Works, p. 35

[8] At one of the early meetings of the 17 Club, Lytton Strachey gave an account of the British Sex Society meeting in Hampstead, focused on incest and Freud: Virginia Woolf wrote, 'I think of becoming a member.' [Diary] v.3 [Berg]

'The more I think of it the stranger my own organism appears.' [Diary] v.5 [Berg]

'Began reading Freud last night; to enlarge the circumference: to give my brain a wider scope: to make it objective; to get outside.' AWD p. 309

'Now I'm going to read Freud.' AWD p. 314

[9] [AWD] [Berg]

[10] 'To lie on the sofa for a week. I am sitting up today in the usual state of unequal animation. Below normal, with spasmodic desire to write, then to doze. ...A cloud swims in my head. ...Once or twice I have felt that odd whirr of wings in my head, which comes when I'm ill so often ...If I could stay in bed another fortnight, I believe I should see the whole of The Waves.' AWD p. 150

[11] AWD p. 100

[12] Diary v.1 Berg

[13] 'A Mark on the Wall' from A Haunted House, pp. 49-50.

[14] '...my present feeling is that this vague and dream-like world, without love, or heart, or passion, or sex, is the world I really care about and find interesting. For though they are dreams to you, and I can't express them at all adequately, these things are perfectly real to me.'
Letter to Madge Vaughan, June? 1906. FTM pp. 226-27.

[15] TTL p. 72

[16] TTL p. 87

[17] BTA p. 142

[18] JR p. 45

[19] TVO pp. 329, 331, 341

[20] TVO p. 347

[21] '...as if the flesh were dissolved and through it the flowers burst red and white.' AWD p. 37

[22] MD p. 97

[23] MD p. 77

[24] MD p. 113

[25] MD p. 204

[26] MD p. 203

[27] MD p. 204

[28] MD p. 192

[29] MD p. 206

[30] MD p. 169

CHAPTER IV

[1] TTL p. 149

[2] TTL p. 150

[3] TTL p. 150

[4] TTL p. 150

[5] TTL p. 151

[6] AWD p. 150

[7] TTL p. 149

[8] TTL p. 151

[9] AWD p. 27

[10] Leonard Woolf. The Journey not the Arrival Matters: An Autobiography of the Years 1939-1969.

[11] AWD p. 350

[12] Virginia Woolf quoted by T. Holliday in the introduction to the Modern Library edition of To the Lighthouse. New York; 1937, p. ix

[13] 'Nessa and I have been arguing the ethics of suicide all morning.' Letter to Violet Dickinson. 30th Oct. 1904. TFM p. 147.

'Then I shall take a dive into the Serpentine, which, I see, is six feet deep in malodorous mud.' Letter to Violet Dickinson. May, 1912. TFM p. 499.

'...remarks of mine about sixty as an age limit.' [AWD] v.4 [Berg].

[14] Quentin Bell. Virginia Woolf: A Biography. p. 226.

[15] [Diary] v.2 [Berg]

[16] AWD p. 351

[17] TW p. 256

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To simplify subsequent references to the texts, I have used abbreviations as indicated within brackets above.

II. ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS

The unpublished material to which reference is made is from The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations; the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature. In 1957 Leonard Woolf made an arrangement whereby the 28 manuscript volumes of Virginia Woolf's diaries (1915-1941) would become the property of the Berg Collection after his death. In 1953 Leonard Woolf published a selection from them as A Writer's Diary. Among the collection are eight early notebook diaries which are referred to in the footnotes as [Diary v. Berg].

[Diary] Holograph notebook, unsigned, dated Jan.4, 1897 - Jan. 1, 1898. (bound 13 cm.)

[Diary] 7 Holograph notebooks, unsigned, each dated. 7v.
Dates in no. 1: Warboys, Aug.4 - Sept.23, 1899;
no. 2: Hyde Park Gate, June 30 - Oct.1, 1903?;
no. 3: New Forest, Christmas, 1904 - [London] May 27, 1905;
no. 4: Carter's Bay, Cornwall, Aug.11, 1905 - Sept. 14, [1905];
no. 5: Giggleswick, April, 1906 - Wells, Aug.1-14, 1908;
no. 6: Asheham, Aug.3, 1917 - Oct.6, 1918;
no. 7: Monks House, Rodmell, Sept.2 - Oct.1, 1919.
No. 3 contains reading notes and notes for a Spanish trip.

[A Writer's Diary] Holograph, unsigned, dated Jan.1, 1915 - March 24, 1941. 28 v. 1918 - 1919 in 4 volumes; some entries duplicate. List laid into v.1

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APPENDIX

In the following selection of quotations, one can trace the development from Virginia Woolf's early misgivings about marriage to the unquestionable happiness she found with Leonard.

> I suppose though there is a kind of unity in marriage (barring children) which one doesn't get from liaisons. I'm thinking a good deal, at intervals, about marriage. My quarrel with it is that the pace is so slow, when you are two people.
> Letter to Vanessa Bell, Virginia Woolf's sister, Aug. 1911 TFM p. 475.

> ...I began life with a tremendous, absurd, ideal of marriage, then my bird's eye view of many marriages disgusted me, and I thought I must be asking what was not to be had, but that passed too. Now I only ask for someone to make me vehement and I'll marry him.
> Letter to Molly McCarthy, March, 1912. TFM p. 492.

> I sometimes feel that no one ever has or ever can share something--It's the thing that makes you call me like a hill, or a rock.
> Letter to Leonard Woolf, May 1912. TFM p. 496.

> Aug. 10, 1912, Virginia married Leonard Woolf at a civil ceremony.

> ...but I daresay we're the happiest couple in England.

> This comment follows the record of another serious twenty-two day illness. [AWL] v.6 [Berg]

> What I want to say is I owe all of the happiness of my life to you.
> Letter to Leonard Woolf, 28 March 1941. Quoted by Quentin Bell in Virginia Woolf: A Biography. p. 226.