

VIRGINIA WOOLF: "RE-FORMING" THE
NOVEL THROUGH IMAGERY

by

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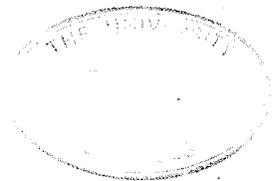
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ABSTRACT

This study examines fiction from Virginia Woolf's middle period in order to show what role imagery played in her program to "re-form" the novel.

The traditional novel tended to portray a character completing a series of actions in chronological time. These actions were so related to each other as to form a coherent plot which became the main device for giving shape and unity. Virginia Woolf forged other methods, based on the use of images for creating structure and character. She saw character as a complex and ever-shifting mode of existence rather than as a fixed state existing in a moment of time. As a result, she employed her images to get at the mysterious reality of personality in flux, to set down an accurate record of consciousness as it is really experienced.

Chapter One discusses Virginia Woolf's vision of both life and art and the manner in which this vision leads her to rely upon images. Chapter Two discusses as experiments toward the new novel three short stories and *Jacob's Room*. The latter is analyzed as an attempt to create significant form; attention is also given to how Virginia Woolf's philosophical skepticism affects the method of characterization. Chapters Three through Five discuss in turn *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Years*, concentrating on the ways the images are employed in relation to structure and characterization. Chapter Three examines

how in *Mrs. Dalloway* the imagery is used to create a moral dimension. Chapter Four argues for a further expansion in *To the Lighthouse* of the use of imagery in portraying character and human relationships, and Chapter Five illustrates how, at its most fecund, Virginia Woolf's image-making faculty creates structure and character in *The Waves*. The Conclusion draws attention to some recurring themes and assesses Virginia Woolf's development over the period under consideration.

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INTRODUCTION

Virginia Woolf arrests her reader's attention with a single, intense image. But how and why is this done, what steps are taken to prepare the reader, and what vision of reality is conveyed? Such an interest in epiphany -- what she herself called the "moment of being" -- leads to an awareness of the centrality of the image in her work. It becomes clear that in order to analyze the methods she develops to "re-form" the novel and so make it take the shape of the modern mind,¹ one must study the imagery. The approach taken to these questions here is first to examine Virginia Woolf's aesthetic and philosophical relationships to her predecessors and contemporaries in order to explain why the image is so important to her, and then go on to analyze the novels themselves in detail.

To focus on Virginia Woolf's fiction after *Night and Day* and before *The Years* is to examine the middle and most successful period of her work. It is difficult to argue with Quentin Bell's assessment that *Jacob's Room* marks the beginning of both her maturity and her fame.² On the other hand, *The Years*, it is generally agreed, marks a noticeable falling off.

¹Virginia Woolf, "The Narrow Bridge of Art" in *Granite and Rainbow* (New York, 1958), pp. 18-20.

²Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, (London, 1972), ii, 88.

Any new study must, of course, take into account the work of predecessors. J.K. Johnstone's study of Bloomsbury has been of great help in understanding Virginia Woolf's position within the British tradition, as has to a lesser extent Irma Rantavaara's *Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury*. The work of James Hafley and John Graham are most important to anyone interested in Virginia Woolf's handling of time. Josephine O'Brien Schaefer and Winifred Holtby provide basic insights to Virginia Woolf's search for reality, while Jean Guiget's exhaustive *Virginia Woolf and Her Works* reveals in a most scholarly way the workings of the artist's mind. I also found of particular interest Ralph Freedman's *The Lyrical Novel*, in which he analyzes the same four novels I shall be discussing.

It is difficult to keep ahead of one's contemporaries. Two cases in point are the chapters on *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Waves*. In November, 1972 Marilyn Samuels published an article in *Modern Fiction Studies* in which she analyzes as I do the use of the sun image as a moral touchstone in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Her study does not, however, go on to point out that other important images are used in the same way. Also, since I first drafted the chapter on *The Waves*, Harvena Richter has schematized the characters of that novel in a way that is similar to but not identical with what I have done. However, the reader will still find many new things in this study to interest him. I would hope, also, that beyond new ways of looking at these novels, two things will emerge: first, how absolutely central the image is to Virginia Woolf; and second, that she was an experimenter who was never interested in returning to once-conquered territory. The decade under consideration was one of steady advance.

There remains the question of why I have omitted any detailed discussion of *Orlando*, despite the fact that it was published between *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*. As Jean Guiget has carefully demonstrated, the author herself did not regard it as a novel. From the time of *Jacob's Room* on, she worked simultaneously on novels and less intensive books which relieved the pressure generated by the more intense composition. Guiget shows that *Orlando* fits into the second category, along with such books as *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*. It is true that S.P. Rosenbaum suggests a contrary view when he says *A Room of One's Own* was written right after *Orlando* and provides a kind of commentary on it in the way that *Three Guineas* comments on *The Years*³, and that John Graham also sees *Orlando* as one of the intensive works, arguing that as it progressed, talent yielded to genius.⁴ However, I find myself more persuaded by Quentin Bell who points out that although for a while *Orlando* shoved everything else aside, and although it went through "the usual vicissitudes of her novels,"⁵ though in a shorter space of time than most, Virginia Woolf saw well enough that it was not important, and was surprised when Leonard Woolf took it more seriously than she had intended. *Orlando* simply does not have the intensity of the major novels, and Guiget's original analysis remains correct.

³S.P. Rosenbaum, "The Philosophical Realism of Virginia Woolf," *English Literature and British Philosophy*, ed. S.P. Rosenbaum (Chicago, 1971), p. 346.

⁴John Graham, "The Caricature Value of Parody and Fantasy in *Orlando*," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 30 (July 1961), pp. 346-48.

⁵Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, ii, 136.

The basis for the subsequent detailed analyses will be given in Chapter One under the three headings of (a) Re-forming the Novel, (b) Image and Form, and (c) Image and Character. Under the first heading I shall begin by discussing what Virginia Woolf meant by "re-forming" the novel. The discussion will then go on to comment upon the personal vision which provides the foundation for Virginia Woolf's image-based method by drawing attention to the similarity of her position to that of Walter Pater. The discussion will next turn to her use of leitmotifs, her handling of time and the "moment of being" through imagery, and finally to the particular nature of her imagery. Under the second heading I shall discuss the relevance of Roger Fry's aesthetic theories to her novels, using *Jacob's Room* as an example. Under the third heading I shall discuss her skepticism about one's knowledge of what is really going on in another person's mind, again referring particularly to *Jacob's Room*.

CHAPTER ONE

THE VISION: RE-FORMING THE NOVEL

As early as 1908 Virginia Woolf formulated her desire to "re-form" the novel. In a letter to Clive Bell she wrote:

I think a great deal of my future, and settle what books I am to write -- how I shall re-form the novel and capture multitudes of things at present fugitive, enclose the whole, and shape infinite strange shapes . . . but tomorrow, I know, I shall be sitting down to the inanimate old phrases.¹

Her dual concern for the capabilities of the novel and the deadness of the old phrases made Virginia Woolf a tireless experimenter. Thus we see her in the period from *Jacob's Room* to *The Waves* reaching new conclusions about the nature of language and its inadequacies, as Bernard finally not only longs for a simple language such as children and lovers use, but even goes beyond this position into the silence that follows his final cry against death.

Her revolt against the established British novel of the early twentieth century was based on her belief that the Edwardian materialists both include too much and leave out what is essential. Bennett, Galsworthy, and Wells do not, she argues in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1924), give us Mrs. Brown herself but rather the social details that

¹Virginia Woolf, "A Letter to Clive Bell," quoted by Quentin Bell in *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, i, 137.

miss the central mystery of the personality of the character. Life escapes from the houses they build because they follow conventions which are no longer relevant. Describing the novels of her predecessors she says:

The writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole so impeccably that if all his figures were to come to life they would find themselves dressed down to the last button of their coats in the fashion of the hour. 2

The word "embalming" is the key to Virginia Woolf's attitude to such a novel. These tools of the older generation are no longer adequate because they do not portray human experience as it is:

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad of impressions -- trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms. 3

Since these atoms are the contents of consciousness at any one moment, to record them will be to record accurately the true nature of consciousness:

Let us record these atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness. 4

²Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction" in *The Common Reader: First Series* (New York, 1925), pp. 153-54.

³*Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁴*Ibid*, p. 155.

As William Davenport comments, this idea led Virginia Woolf to the so-called "stream of consciousness" technique. Her method, showing the quick transitions in the characters' minds, reveals character through uncovering consciousness rather than through a plot and scenes "which might bring out their character in a less intimate way."⁵

We should also note that the atoms that fall upon the mind come not only from without but from within too. Harvena Richter develops this point when she points out that Virginia Woolf sees the body, the memory, and the outer world as together forming one gestalt that impinges upon consciousness.⁶ Thus in *The Waves* Bernard speaks of the arrows of sensation striking *from* the spine.

A.P. Mendilow attributes the modern concentration upon the depiction of developing consciousness to the influence of Bergson's theories of *durée*. He distinguishes between the older presentation of "character" and the twentieth century presentation of "personality". His point is that the creation of a "character" is based upon the idea that the history of the consciousness is composed of a series of states, and that the consciousness is at any one point in time set; to describe it at the present moment is to describe the last of its series of states, in the same way one would describe an oak without mentioning the acorn. The creation of fictional "personality", on the other hand, is based upon the idea that there are no discrete states of consciousness

⁵William Davenport, *To the Lighthouse* (Oxford, 1969), p. 10.

⁶Harvena Richter, *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage* (Princeton, 1970), p. xi.

but instead a flux containing simultaneously past, present, and future. At the same time, modern writing tends to investigate all the levels of consciousness, including subconsciousness, unconsciousness. Tracing this personality view of character back far beyond Bergson to the beginnings of English Romanticism, Mendilow quotes Coleridge's description of Charles Lloyd: "Every hour new-creates him; he is his own posterity in a perpetually flowing series, . . . his body unfortunately retaining an external identity. . . ." ⁷ Virginia Woolf expresses a similar sense of the impermanency of character when she says in *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway* that it is no use trying to sum people up.

Concentration upon consciousness, particularly when it is seen as a flux, removes plot from its central historical position by focusing not upon the event but upon the character's reaction to the event, just as in a similar way it is not the object but the consciousness created by the impression of the object which becomes important. As long as our novelists believed in the validity of identifying character with publicly observable actions, the novel retained its plot. But once the gulf between outer appearance and inner reality dominated their thinking, the public world gave way to the private and action became discontinuous. As Mendilow says,

⁷A.P. Mendilow, *Time and the Novel* (London, 1953), p. 150.

For the modern novelist, therefore, the event loses interest as an event in itself; it serves rather as a *point de repère* for the portrayal of the character as he is in the present of the novel. 8

Character is at this point presented through the manifold techniques usually lumped under the term "stream of consciousness."⁹ In the stream of consciousness novel we are, of course, dealing with the inner world rather than the outer. This shift of emphasis lessens our sense of causality of action, and in this way lessens the importance of plot. The idea of cause more easily develops when action is viewed from the outside, because while we attribute causes to the actions of others, we are often too caught up in the performance of our own acts to be aware of causes. What appears from the outside to be determined feels from the inside to be free. It is not a question of which is the correct view, whether we are free or determined, but which is a more accurate reflection of consciousness as it is experienced.

We have discussed so far Virginia Woolf's intention to "reform" the novel, but not why she relies so heavily on imagery to accomplish that task.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁹Robert Humphrey provides an analysis of the various modes of stream of consciousness in *Stream of Consciousness in the Novel* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1954). The best detailed analysis of Virginia Woolf's method is provided by Eric Auerbach in "The Brown Stocking" in his book *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality* (New York, 1957).

Virginia Woolf is a descendant of Pater. Whether she was consciously influenced by him is not so important as the fact that the two are in some respects so similar that an examination of Pater's theories as expressed in *The Renaissance* helps explain Virginia Woolf's extensive use of imagery.

The "Preface" to *The Renaissance* argues as follows: As aesthetic philosophers we should be concerned with defining beauty not in abstract terms but in the most concrete ones. Therefore, the first step is to know our own impression as it really is. We must look at it so intensely that we seem to participate in the object it represents for us, at the same time not falling into any habits of perception. Whoever experiences impressions strongly and analyses them directly need not question what beauty is in itself, or its exact relation to truth. These are metaphysical questions and are as unprofitable as metaphysical questions elsewhere. What is important is that the critic should possess the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects. If he is, he will be able to trace the active principle or virtue in the work of art and mark the degree to which it penetrates the object considered.

In his "Conclusion" Pater expands upon his ideas, making them relevant not just to the critic but to all men. As an atomist, he sees the world as a flux and believes that even our physical existence is a perpetual motion of phosphorous and lime. The clear, supposedly perpetual outline of a face is but an image of ours under which we group many perceptual elements. That face is really a design in a web, the actual threads of which pass out beyond it: "This at least of flamelike our

life has, that it is but the concurrence, renewed from moment to moment, of forces parting sooner or later on their ways."¹⁰ When we turn to the inward world of thought the whirlpool is still more rapid. The objects in the world seem to call us to action but as reflection plays upon these objects they are dissipated under its influence and we see them as a group of impressions. The world is smaller than we knew:

And if we continue to dwell in thought on this world, not on objects in the solidity with which language invests them, but of impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them, it contracts still further: the whole scope of observation is dwarfed to the narrow chamber of the individual mind. Experience already reduced to a swarm of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. (p. 157)

To Pater, we are all prisoners of ourselves. An experience is composed of nothing more solid than momentary impressions until, in the end, life fines itself down to impressions. If this is so, then it must be experience itself and not the fruit of experience that is our end. The end of life is to pass swiftly from point to point so as to "be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy." (p. 197) We are, in the famous phrase, "to burn always with this hard, gemlike flame." (p. 197) We fail when we form habits of perception. Only roughness of eye, inaccurate sight, tells

¹⁰Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (New York, n.d.), pp. 195-96. Further reference to this book will be included in the text.

us that two persons or two things are alike. As the world dissolves around us we must grasp at any exquisite passion, contribution to knowledge, stirring of the senses through art:

Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the very brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their way is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening. (p. 197)

If we live thus conscious of brevity and mutability we will not have time to make up theories to explain the things we see and touch: "What we have to do is to be forever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions, never acquiescing in a facile orthodoxy of Comte, or of Hegel, or of our own." (p. 197) We are all condemned to death and therefore the only salvation is in expanding the interval. The surest way to do this is through the love of art, not for extended reasons but for art's sake.

The most salient feature of all this in relation to Virginia Woolf's novels is the concentration upon the impression. The impression is as close as we can get to the object in life, while the image is the closest thing to the object in art. Since the image is the artistic equivalent of the basic element of consciousness, the impression, it is with the image that Virginia Woolf begins, and it is through imagery that her novels are best approached. Through imagery she constantly holds the object before us, thus embodying the idea rather than spinning theories. The idea which she embodies is the rather platonic one that beyond the flux there is an ultimate reality. She sees that this reality can be reached only through an intense

relationship with some object or objects of this world. Thus, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, when Septimus Warren Smith sits in Regent's Park in a state of euphoria we read: "A child cried. Rightly far away a horn sounded. All taken together meant the birth of a new religion."¹¹

To see how Virginia Woolf handles the Paterian flux, let us look at one passage, typical of many in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Elizabeth is on her excursion along the Strand:

A puff of wind (in spite of the heat, there was quite a wind) blew a thin black veil over the sun and over the Strand. The faces faded; the omnibuses suddenly lost their glow. For although the clouds were of mountainous white so that one could fancy hacking hard chips off with a hatchet, with broad golden slopes, lawns of celestial pleasure gardens, on their flanks, and had all the appearance of settled habitations assembled for the conference of gods above the world, there was a perpetual movement among them. Signs were interchanged, when, as if to fulfil some scheme arranged already, now a summit dwindled, now a whole block of pyramidal size which had kept its station inalterably advanced into the midst or gravely led the procession to fresh anchorage. Fixed though they seemed at their posts, at rest in perfect unanimity, nothing could be fresher, freer, more sensitive superficially than the snow-white or gold-kindled surface; to change, to go, to dismantle the solemn assemblage was immediately possible; and in spite of the grave fixity, the accumulated robustness and solidity, now they struck light to the earth, now darkness. (pp. 153-154)

Here is the Paterian flux in a world of apparent fixity, and also the "moment of being" through which, for an instant, the perceiver holds time frozen and touches the eternal. Expressing the paradox of the still moment within the flux, we have the clouds which seem fixed at

¹¹Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Harmondsworth, 1964), p. 26. All further reference to this book will be included in the text.

their posts, yet are totally free. In a moment everything can be changed. Everything will be changed, moment to moment, but the distinct moment still exists, and for Virginia Woolf, through it one can touch all parts of time and be in touch with all reality.

There are other affinities between Virginia Woolf and Walter Pater. For instance, when Septimus is so overcome by beauty in Regent's Park that tears run down his cheeks, beauty is not defined but presented through images, and what is stressed is Septimus's ability *to see*. In Chapter Three of this study we shall note that this quality is extremely important and that one of the ways we can judge the various characters is by whether, to recall Pater's words, they really see the object. Holmes, for instance, does not, whereas others such as Clarissa, Elizabeth, or Peter do, at least some of the time, and it seems not to matter whether the object is a street, a natural object, or a person. The characters that Virginia Woolf approves of have that Paterian quality of seeing clearly enough to mark the particular "virtue" or "active principle" in whatever they encounter, be it from man's world or from nature's. Peter Walsh, for instance, displays it when at the end of the novel he is struck forcibly simply by Clarissa's being.

A further affinity between Virginia Woolf and Walter Pater is revealed in her essay "Modern Fiction" referred to earlier, where she states that the writer's job is to record the atoms as they fall upon the mind. Like Pater, she clearly feels the artist's job is to render the moment whole rather than to engage in metaphysical speculation. Clarissa's rejection of Doris Kilman's religion reflects

Virginia Woolf's own impatience with such an abstract approach to existence. The danger of any metaphysical system is its tendency to exclude those perceptions which do not support it. It appears therefore, that what to Pater is necessary for the critic, that he have the faculty of being deeply moved by beautiful objects, seems to be for Virginia Woolf necessary for any person who is fully alive. People like Septimus perceive the "active principle" in many parts of the world around them. It is the god of his new religion.

Before leaving this discussion of Virginia Woolf's affinities with the nineteenth century Romanticism of Pater, we should note that Pater's term "virtue" seems to stand for much the same thing as Ruskin's "moral force". I think, too, that when Clarissa Dalloway speaks of "divine vitality", she is speaking of the same principle of reality. Ruskin explains that a small flower growing in the snow and a spindly tree growing above the tree line on a mountainside exhibit this force, not because they are in some way morally praiseworthy for overcoming obstacles -- to hold such a view would be to be guilty of the pathetic fallacy -- but because they illustrate so clearly the vitality of the universe. In short, as Ruskin uses the term, the word moral refers to vitality, not ethics.

As further proof of Virginia Woolf's relationship to the Ruskinian tradition we note Clarissa's ability to slice "like a knife through everything." (pp. 10-11) This intuitive power, most noticeable in Mrs. Ramsay, but shared by a number of Virginia Woolf's characters, usually women, is akin to Ruskin's "penetrative imagination" which plunges past the phenomena of our world into the reality at the centre of existence. Ruskin comments:

Such always is the mode in which the highest imaginative faculty seizes its materials. It never stops at crusts or ashes, or outward images of any kind; it ploughs them all aside, and plunges into the very fiery heart 12

It is this imaginative power which one needs in order to see the flame burning in the heart of the crocus.

We have seen that in a world of flux, the object, represented in art by the image, is the momentarily fixed point upon which all knowledge, however inadequate, must be built. From the object the mind moves two ways, into the one reality beyond the object, by use of the penetrative imagination, and back into the self, through the movement of consciousness through all time. The images thus create, on the one hand, the unity of reality, and on the other, the unity of consciousness. Thus, while many of the images such as the sun or waves become cosmic symbols, they are also springboards for the movement of consciousness. In both cases unity is achieved through the patterning of images into leitmotifs. However, before going further into this subject, I should like to expand on the nature of the individual image.

Harvena Richter comments that our "common sense" view of the object is rather different from the way Virginia Woolf thinks of it because her view stresses subjectivity. The object is shaped by the individual's thoughts, memories, and sensations: "In other words, *it is the emotional experience of the object, rather than the object itself, which is known.*"¹³ Since the object becomes a mirror image of the mind, it will be very difficult to break out of the bonds of

¹²John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, ij (London, 1903), p. 250.

¹³Harvena Richter, *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage* (Princeton, 1970), p. 69.

personality into the one reality beyond. Nevertheless, Virginia Woolf believes it is possible to do so in moments of illumination. As we shall see later in this chapter, in the discussion on image and character, here again her position is similar to Pater's.

Richter concludes her discussion of Virginia Woolf's attitude towards the object by noting that it is an ordering device. She uses as an example Jinny in *The Waves*:

She seems to center everything; round her tables,
lines of doors, windows, ceilings, ray themselves, like rays
round the star in the middle of a smashed window pane.
She brings things to a point, to order. 14

This passage explains how Jacob, sitting in the corner, can become for a moment the most real thing in the world, what Peter Walsh feels at the end of *Mrs. Dalloway* when he looks at Clarissa, what Lily Briscoe experiences when the Ramsays for a moment symbolize marriage for her, or what the attraction of Percival is for the six speaking characters in *The Waves*. In each case one person, or in the case of the Ramsays, a couple, becomes the momentary centre of all reality. Richter's concluding remark on this topic is that "Much of what we loosely term imagination is this mysterious ability of the object (as percept) to become the focus of a pattern and meaning."¹⁵

Ralph Freedman in his book *The Lyric Novel* arrives by a different route at much the same conclusion as Richter. The lyric, he suggests, differs from the epic and drama in being seen as an instantaneous expression of feeling or as a spatial form:

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 74.

The reader approaches the lyric the way an onlooker regards a picture: He sees complex details in juxtaposition and experiences them as a whole. In Pound's famous phrase, the very notion of the image is defined as the rendering of an emotional and intellectual complex in an instant of time.¹⁶

The reader must experience the same kind of emotional and intellectual complex in an instant of time if he is to be able to identify with the experience of the character. This effect in the reader is achieved through patterning the images into leitmotifs so that a single moment in the reader's experience is linked with a large number of other moments. Since I shall be using the word leitmotif in the looser of the two ways it can be employed let me explain what I mean by it.

In *Aspects of the Novel* E.M. Forster distinguishes between Wagnerian leitmotif and the rhythm of a novel by pointing out that rhythm is not there all the time and that it is not used in a formal way to announce characters. An example of Wagnerian leitmotif in Virginia Woolf's work would be Louis's association with the stamping beast in *The Waves*. Rhythm, says Forster, is used in a freer way and does not harden into symbol. I shall use the term leitmotif to include this kind of handling of imagery. (This is common enough in other instances, as witnessed, for example, by the considerable amount of material written on the use of bird, water, rose, light, and girl imagery in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.) Thomas Mann's

¹⁶Ralph Freedman, *The Lyrical Novel: Studies in Herman Hesse, Andre Gidé and Virginia Woolf* (Princeton, 1963), p. 6.

comments about the leitmotif explain the function of this freer use of the method. He says there is a kind of writer who

strives to overcome the laws of time and continuity. He tries to produce himself completely in each thing he writes, but only actually does so in the way *The Magic Mountain* does it; I mean by use of the *leitmotif*, the magic formula that works both ways, and links the past with the future, the future with the past. The *leitmotif* is the technique employed to preserve the inward unity and presentness of the whole at each moment. 17

Any discussion of a writer's use of leitmotif therefore obviously involves us in a discussion of his attitude toward time.

There has been considerable discussion of Virginia Woolf's handling of time¹⁸ and particularly of whether or not she was directly influenced by Bergson's concept of *durée* because of her handling of consciousness as a process rather than as a fixed state. According to James Hafley (*The Glass Roof*), Virginia Woolf did not read Bergson and according to Jean Guiget (*Virginia Woolf and Her Works*) it is doubtful that she even read Karin Stephen's translation of Bergson's *Misuse of the Mind*. Harvena Richter argues that one could with equal validity establish a case for the influence of Edmund Husserl as for Bergson, since there was then a widespread re-examination of the nature of time. Virginia Woolf concentrates on the experience of time rather than on its

¹⁷Thomas Mann, "The Making of *The Magic Mountain*," in *The Magic Mountain*, trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter (New York, 1969), pp. 717-718.

¹⁸One of the most interesting studies is John Graham's examination of Virginia Woolf's changing methods of relating outer and inner time in his article "Time in the Novels of Virginia Woolf," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 17 (January, 1949), pp. 186-201. Other studies such as James Hafley's *The Glass Roof* (New York, 1963), tend to concentrate on the "Bergson question".

measurement. Time is not experienced as a succession of past, present and future, but as "an all inclusive now."¹⁹ Therefore, although Virginia Woolf did not consciously follow Bergson, her handling of time recalls his concept of *durée* which sees the experience of time as a quality of consciousness, what Richter calls the "*rate of experience* or the rate of being."²⁰ Duration, Bergson explains, is the physical state of becoming; time is experienced as change.²¹ Such an experience of time is achieved in literature through the leitmotif, which unites past, present, and future in the moment of being.

Having examined the reasons why Virginia Woolf relied heavily upon imagery, and the nature of the imagery employed, I wish now to say something in a general way about the two topics which will be the subjects of the main body of of this study: the subjects of imagery and form, and imagery and character.

Image and Form

William Davenport, in commenting upon Virginia Woolf's use of stream of consciousness, says:

¹⁹Richter, p. 38.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 39.

²¹See Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York and London, 1911), pp. 177-178. See also Richter pp. 38-39 for a discussion of the Bergsonian elements in Virginia Woolf's handling of time.

Only through an exploration of the inner reactions of her characters could she hope to represent what life was to her, a mixture of opposites, an evanescent fusion of trivial and important, random and meaningful, transitory and enduring. 22

He points out that to do this she had to invent a freer form of the novel than that used by most of her contemporaries. Having abandoned the usual chronology of happenings, she had to find a new shaping spirit. As Virginia Woolf herself wrote in *Phases of Fiction* (1929):

The novel it is agreed, can follow life: it can amass details. But can it also select? Can it symbolize? Can it give us an epitome as well as an inventory? 23

She has an organic conception of form, thinking of it as a way of proceeding for the artist and as an experience for the reader rather than as a visual structure. Her ideas are therefore related to those of Coleridge, Roger Fry, and Clive Bell, and antagonistic to those of Percy Lubbock. Thus she records in her diary for 26 January, 1920 the following idea for "a new form for a new novel":

Suppose one thing should open out of another -- as in an unwritten novel -- only not for 10 pages but 200 or so -- doesn't that give the looseness and lightness I want; doesn't that get closer and yet keep form and speed, and enclose everything, everything? My doubt is how far it will enclose the human heart -- Am I sufficiently mistress of my dialogue to net it there? For I figure that the approach will be entirely different this time: no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen; all crepuscular, but the heart, the passion, humour, everything as bright as fire in the mist. Then I'll find room for so much -- a gaiety -- an inconsequence --

²²William Davenport, p. 10.

²³Virginia Woolf, "Phases of Fiction" in *Granite and Rainbow* (New York, 1958), p. 145.

a light spirited stepping at my sweet will. Whether I'm sufficiently mistress of things -- that's the doubt; but conceive *Mark on the Wall*, K.G. and *Unwritten Novel* taking hands and dancing in unity. What the unity shall be I have yet to discover; the theme is a blank to me 24

The stress here is upon freedom of movement. Her intention to escape the restrictions of the well-made plot shows up, for instance, in her desire to include even the inconsequential. She stresses not a theme or a structure but a way of proceeding. As Quentin Bell notes, this entry in the diary states the program for a whole decade. A few months later, in the spring of 1920, *Jacob's Room* began to take shape.²⁵

Virginia Woolf thought of the form of the novel as being "not form which you see, but emotion which you feel."²⁶ As far as the reader is concerned, form is the result of his emotional engagement with the book. For this reason she took exception to the idea of form put forward by Percy Lubbock in *The Craft of Fiction*, because he considers form to be something interposed between the reader and the real book:

There is vision and expression. The two blend so perfectly that when Mr. Lubbock asks us to test the form with our eyes we see nothing at all. But we feel with singular satisfaction, and since our feelings are in keeping, they form a whole which remains in our minds as the book itself.²⁷

Mark Goldman is no doubt right in saying that this conception of form can be traced back through Fry and Bell to Coleridge's famous organic

²⁴Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary* (London, 1953), p. 23.

²⁵Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, ii, 73.

²⁶"On Re-Reading Novels," *The Moment and Other Essays* (London, 1947), p. 130.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 130.

theory "with its subjective appeal to the powers of the imagination and its objective reference to the organic relation between the parts and the whole."²⁸ Although it was Clive Bell who coined the term "significant form", it was Roger Fry who wrote most cogently on the subject, and who, as J. K. Johnstone has demonstrated, influenced Virginia Woolf.

Central to Fry's thinking is the autonomous nature of art. Like the other members of Bloomsbury, he accepted that in *Principia Ethica* G. E. Moore had provided the intellectual basis for this position which demands that art be judged on aesthetic grounds only, and never in terms of some exterior consideration such as a particular ethical system.²⁹ Art, says Fry should be not only self-consistent but self-contained.

²⁸Mark Goldman, "Virginia Woolf and the Critic as Reader," *PMLA* (June 1965), p. 280.

²⁹Moore begins by pointing out that people commonly confuse two questions: a) what things are good in themselves, and b) what actions ought one to perform. Questions of aesthetics are related to the first and not to the second. He then criticizes theories which try to define beauty by its universally accompanying characteristics. Most of these theories suffer from the "naturalistic fallacy", that is, they treat goodness as if it were a "natural object" such as "red" or "pleasure", whereas in truth it is a single, unanalysable quality that can be predicated only to certain states of consciousness. There are only two such states of consciousness: a) the contemplation of beautiful objects, and b) the pleasures of human intercourse. These are the only two things which are good in themselves. Moore then argues that "...to prove that a whole, to which it bears a particular relation as a part, is truly good." (G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge, 1903), p. 201.) Having established this connection between beauty and goodness, he says that art is both moral (because it is necessarily related to goodness) and free from moral considerations, that is, free from ethical judgments. (A work of art could be socially evil but still aesthetically successful.) Clearly the word "moral" is used in two senses here, the first related to discussions of what things are good in themselves, and the second having meaning only when applied to questions of what actions ought one to perform.

He argues that all art depends upon cutting off the practical responses to sensations of ordinary life. This sets the spirit free. In actual life a person usually only reads the labels, as it were, on the objects around him, and troubles himself no further. Thus, things usually wear a cap of invisibility. "It is only when an object exists in our lives for no other purpose than to be seen that we really look at it..."³⁰

But if the artist relies on the associated ideas of the objects which he represents, he then implies imagined practical activity at the least, and instead of freeing our spirits, binds us to the necessities of our actual existence. The disadvantage of such an art of associated ideas is that its effect really depends on what we bring with us; it adds no entirely new factor to our experience. Consequently, when the first shock of wonder or delight is exhausted, the work produces an ever lessening reaction. True art, on the other hand, by freeing the spirit, allows for true aesthetic appreciation and thus becomes for the time the spirit's universe. Such art communicates a new and otherwise unattainable experience, and its effect, therefore, is likely to increase, not lessen, with familiarity.

This differentiation between art and life leads very naturally for Roger Fry into the importance of form. Morality appreciates emotion only if it leads to appropriate action, but art appreciates emotion for itself. The emotion art creates is not about sensation, objects, persons, or events in themselves, but about the relations that are seen

³⁰Roger Fry, *Vision and Design*, (New York), p. 16.

to exist between these things in a work of art. To describe the structure that creates the aesthetic emotion, Roger Fry adopts Clive Bell's term "significant form". But Fry points out that it is the significance that gives birth to the form. He says we all agree that we mean by significant form something other than merely the agreeable arrangement of form, harmonious patterns, and the like. We feel that a work which possesses it is the outcome of an endeavour to express an idea rather than to create a pleasing object.³¹ It is the idea, the state of mind behind a work that gives it significance and causes us to feel, if the idea is well expressed, that everything is in its appointed place, and that not a colour could be changed or an object disturbed.³² This is what Fry means when he speaks of emotional harmonies in art or of the emotional unity of a work of art. Form is the completion of the vision. We should feel at every point the impregnation of matter with idea. Good art is aesthetic, significant in form, and based on vision. Bad art is unaesthetic (kinetic), deficient in form, and not founded upon vision. These are the essential

³¹Fry's idea has been stated in the nineteenth century by Ruskin who in *Queen of the Air* says:

This force, now properly called life, or breathing, or spirit, is continually creating its own shells of definite shape out of the wreck around it: and this is what I mean in "Ethics of Dust":-- "you may always stand by form against force." For the mere force of junction is not spirit; but the power that catches out of chaos charcoal, water, lime, or what not, and fastens them down in a given form, is properly called "spirit"; and we shall not diminish, but strengthen our conception of this creative energy by recognizing its presence in lower states of matter than our own. . . . (John Ruskin, *Queen of the Air* (London, 1905), p. 49).

³²Again Fry is working within the Ruskinian tradition. "Theoria, Ruskin's term for the faculty that apprehends beauty, not only delights in the sensuousness of forms but perceives "'the immediate operation of the Intelligence,' which created them." (John D. Rosenberg, *The Darkening Glass* (London, 1961), p. 20).

points of Bloomsbury aesthetics.

I hope to illustrate in Chapter Two that in *Jacob's Room* Virginia Woolf attempted to create aesthetic (static) art with significant form based on vision. To do this, I shall analyze in detail some of the images showing how they are used in a way that reminds one of the form of the novel itself. This method of approach will, I hope, illustrate clearly and specifically that, for Virginia Woolf, form was a way of proceeding and not a structure to be filled out. Significant form will then be seen as the signature we are to read.

Image and Character

The main point in Virginia Woolf's attack upon the way the Georgian novelists handled imagery is that they miss the central mystery of personality. Mr. Bennett tells us what Mrs. Brown's rent is, Wells what it ought to be, and Galsworthy that she cannot possibly pay it, but none give us Mrs. Brown herself. Virginia Woolf tries to get at this central mystery -- the essential and multiple consciousness that cannot be reduced to sociological or political components -- by exploiting the images of consciousness.

Her method depends, as Philip Rahv has pointed out, upon disengaging the ego "from concrete situations in life and converting it into a vehicle of poetic memory."³³ She retains, he adds, only enough of the traditional fictional material that fixes time, character, and place as is necessary to identify the scene and its inhabitants, and all the rest is sensation and reverie -- the habitual forms of

³³ Philip Rahv, *Image and Idea*, (Norfolk, Conn.), 1949, p. 169.

lyricism. Overstated and simplistic in that it does little to account for what Virginia Woolf was trying to do by writing "from the outside" in *The Waves*, for instance, Rahv's position does draw attention to obvious qualities of Virginia Woolf's writing developed during the period of her career being considered in this study. Virginia Woolf sees consciousness as something which radiates out from the sense impression. Thus the fictive mind is seen creating a halo of associations around the image. Consciousness is seen as both a mirror and a lamp, "both as Plato's passive reflector and as Plotinus' active projector".³⁴ Writing which tries to trace these operations of the mind is, of course, "stream of consciousness", although the word "stream" is too restrictive, misleadingly implying both a singleness of direction and a necessary purpose or intention which might, in fact, be totally absent. But since William James coined the term, it has been widely accepted. James also talks about the "halo, or fringe" of consciousness, which Virginia Woolf calls the "luminous halo". These haloes are, according to Shiv Kumar, "nothing else than those transitional phases of our mental process which mark the merging of the past into the present, and the fading of the present into the future, thus making experience a continuum".³⁵ But in Virginia Woolf's work the halo joins not only past and present, but mind and body. Ralph Freedman notes that by emphasizing "the difficulty of distilling a clear image of the mental act from its involvement

³⁴Rantavaara, *Virginia Woolf's "The Waves"* (Helsingfors, 1964), p. 24.

³⁵Shiv K. Kumar, *Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel* (New York, 1963), p. 15.

with the body, Virginia Woolf focused sharply on the implications of the 'semi-transparent envelope.'³⁶ In "On Being Ill" she complained that literature had always treated the body as a sheet of glass through which the soul looks through clear.³⁷ But the body has a memory of its own. Our history is that of our sensibilities, which involve both the mind and the body.

If, on the one hand, the "luminous halo" is Virginia Woolf's image of the continuity of our being, it is, on the other, her representation of our isolation within the matrix of our own minds, feelings, and bodies. The term "luminous halo" thus also becomes an indication of her Paterian-like solipsism; it is Pater's "wall of personality". When the novelist comes up against this wall she faces the problem of how to portray character when, in fact, it is always hidden. It is this problem which particularly concerned her in *Jacob's Room*.

³⁶Freedman, p. 198.

³⁷"On Being Ill," *The Moment and Other Essays* (New York, 1948), p. 9.

CHAPTER TWO

EXPERIMENTS TOWARDS THE NEW NOVEL

When Virginia Woolf conceived of "The Mark on the Wall," "Kew Gardens," and "An Unwritten Novel," "taking hands and dancing in unity,"¹ she was thinking of a novel quite different from what she had been writing. Although, as she acknowledges in her diary, she cannot yet see the form of this new novel, the three experimental short stories she mentions exemplify the philosophical position and the image-based method of *Jacob's Room* as well as introduce other ideas to be taken up and developed in subsequent novels.

The theme of "An Unwritten Novel" is that we do not really know other people.² We build a life and a character up for them from the outward signs available to us, but what we construct is likely to be a measure of ourselves, not them. Similarly, in *Jacob's Room* the main character is seen mostly from the outside, and the search for Jacob ends with a pair of empty shoes, the real person having escaped us.

In both "An Unwritten Novel" and *Jacob's Room*, Virginia Woolf is questioning the conventions of characterization in the novel. If in life it is impossible to know another person then why do readers

¹*A Writer's Diary*, p. 22.

²S.P. Rosenbaum describes both "An Unwritten Novel" and "The Mark on the Wall" as epistemological tales. (See Rosenbaum, pp. 324-325.)

accept the novelist's view of the reality of his characters? In "An Unwritten Novel", the narrator sits opposite a middle-aged woman in a train compartment and constructs a life and character for this person she calls Minnie Marsh. At the end of the story Minnie is met by her son, an event that destroys the life and character the narrator has invented. In an altered form this story is incorporated into *Jacob's Room* where Mrs. Norman, who like Minnie Marsh is met at the end of her journey by her son, shares a compartment with Jacob. Jacob enters her life like a moth, attracts her attention, then vanishes forever. Thus the incident in *Jacob's Room* is a rewriting of "An Unwritten Novel" from Minnie Marsh's point of view.

The implication of "An Unwritten Novel" and the scene from *Jacob's Room* is not simply that we don't know chance acquaintances very well, but that all our encounters are of this sort. No matter how long the acquaintanceship, some incident can always arise to show that the life and character we have constructed from the signs is inaccurate or too narrow. Thus in *The Waves* Bernard speaks of "'these minute objects which we call optimistically, 'characters of our friends.'"³

In "Kew Gardens", the action is reduced to a flow of images. The light strikes through the red, yellow, and blue petals of the flowers, staining for a moment the grey rocks, the brown earth and the snail, and the clear water drop. Meanwhile, couples -- a married

³Virginia Woolf, *The Waves in Jacob's Room: The Waves* (New York, 1964), p. 345. All further reference to this book will be included in the text.

couple with children, an old and a young man, two elderly women, and two lovers -- pass the flower bed with "irregular and aimless movement" before being "enveloped in layer after layer of green-blue vapour. . . ." ⁴

The story sets up a polarity between the ephemeral beauty of life as it is known to the human consciousness and the purposeful underlying reality of the universe. This reality is bound to absolute time. Images of flowers, colours, (particularly red, yellow, and blue, the colours which predominate again in *Jacob's Room*), a dragonfly, a green insect, and the people who pass by "like the white and blue butterflies who [cross] the turf in zig-zag flights from flowerbed to flowerbed" (p. 35) -- all these represent the world of flux. The brown earth, the brown snail, and the grey rock represent the world of absolute time into which all beauty crumbles. While everything else -- insects and people alike -- move through the garden erratically, the snail moves onward like absolute time. Meanwhile, the people, who are the momentary moths of the snail's world, move like the old man, with gestures "isolate and pointless". The snail functions as a symbol of reality in much the way Big Ben functions in *Mrs. Dalloway* or the lighthouse in *To the Lighthouse*.

In both "Kew Gardens" and *To the Lighthouse* light colours are used to signify the creation of beauty. The brown and grey reality of the floor of the garden is transformed into a beautiful place by the addition of the colours from the flowers. In *To the Lighthouse*,

⁴Virginia Woolf, "Kew Gardens" in *A Haunted House* (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 41.

Lily Briscoe begins her painting with a series of brown strokes and then adds the colours of the imagination, her artist's vision transforming the world as she adds the blues and greens.

Colour is also used in "Kew Gardens" to give a sense of reality to the ephemeral. The people, who pass by like bright butterflies, are enveloped in the mists so that they lose colour and the sense of reality, ephemeral as that reality might be. Colour is used in this way in *The Waves* where the interchapters show the world being created as the grey of chaos takes on colour, weight, and substance. At the end of the book the cycle is complete and the world returns to greyness.

Like *The Waves*, "Kew Gardens" moves toward abstraction. Shortly before writing *The Waves*, Virginia Woolf recorded in her diary an idea for a new play-poem and set down a paradigm which consists of phrases such as "he said", "she said", and "they missed". The conversation between the two elderly women in "Kew Gardens" approaches this:

'Nell, Bert, Lot, Cris, Phil, he says, I says, she says, 'I says, I says -- '

'My Bert, Sis, Bill, Grandad, the old man, sugar
Sugar, flour, kippers, greens,
Sugar, sugar, sugar.' (p. 38)

This movement towards abstraction is an attempt to find the universal behind the particular and is consistent with the desire Bernard expresses in *The Waves* to view life from "the third story window". In a scene which I shall discuss in detail in Chapter Five, Bernard sees two semi-abstract figures standing before a window. These doomed yet eternal figures without features are "robed in beauty". The same kind of featureless figures pass by the flowerbed in Kew Gardens. As we shall

see, the doomed figures Bernard sees silhouetted in *The Waves* are associated with death. Similarly, the figures without features who pass by the flowerbed are soon enveloped in the green and blue mists where they lie in the shadows, speaking to us as if from the underworld, with wordless, disembodied voices. This world of semi-ghosts, touched by both beauty (colour) and death (the mist) entices Virginia Woolf, her writing always maintaining a tension between the two.

While "An Unwritten Novel" deals with the theme of our knowledge of others and "Kew Gardens" shows us Virginia Woolf relying heavily upon images to juxtapose flux and permanence, "The Mark on the Wall" introduces another theme found throughout her works: the relation between outer reality and our experience of it. This is really a variation of the theme of "An Unwritten Novel." Here she records the turns of consciousness, concentrating not on outer reality but the reaction to it.

The narrator sees a small mark on the wall and begins to speculate on what it is. Her thoughts eddy from this point of departure until the fact that began the mental process is wholly forgotten. Then the mark calls the narrator back to the factual world and the process begins again. Eventually someone comes along and comments on the snail on the wall.

Although a closer look reveals the mark to be a snail, just as a new fact destroyed the narrator's life of Minnie Marsh in "An Unwritten Novel", the important point is not that "reality" has been established but that our mental processes have little to do with the world of hard fact, in this case represented by the snail. Both stories function as parables of the nature of human knowledge. To-

gether, "An Unwritten Novel" and "The Mark on the Wall" tell us that our contact with everything beyond the wall of our own personality is tenuous, and that life, far from being ordered like "Whitaker's Table of Precedency", is not at all symmetrical but gratuitous. We never know what will come through the door next.

These three short stories, because of their questioning of the nature of human understanding and the reliance upon imagery in "Kew Gardens", provide an excellent introduction to *Jacob's Room*. In the analysis of the novel which follows, I hope to show how Virginia Woolf tried to provide the structure that she could not yet visualize in January, 1920 when she recorded her idea of having "An Unwritten Novel", "Kew Gardens" and "A Mark on the Wall" take hands and dance in unity. This structure will be seen to be largely the result of the way she handles imagery in the novel.

The Search for Jacob

Jacob's Room marks a major step forward in Virginia Woolf's development as a novelist. The break it makes with *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* is seen immediately in the greater subtlety and flexibility in the use of imagery. Consider for instance, the following passage which begins with the second paragraph of the novel:

Slowly welling from the point of her gold nib, pale blue ink dissolved the full stop; for there her pen stuck; her eyes fixed, and tears slowly filled them. The entire bay quivered; the lighthouse wobbled; and she had the illusion that the mast of Mr. Connor's little yacht was bending like a wax candle in the sun. She winked quickly. Accidents were awful things. She winked again. The mast was straight; the waves were regular; the lighthouse was upright; but the blot had spread.

" . . . nothing for it but to leave," she read.
 "Well if Jacob doesn't want to play" (the shadow of Archer, her eldest son, fell across the notepaper and looked blue on the sand, and she felt chilly -- it was the third of September already), "if Jacob doesn't want to play" -- what a horrid blot! It must be getting late. 5

The welling from the point of the nib suggestively leads into the tears that appear in Betty Flanders' eyes. Those tears, apparently caused by the memory of her dead husband Seabrook, ("Accidents are awful things" refers to his premature death which is mentioned a little farther on), as well as her sense of isolation and helplessness ("there was nothing for it but to leave,") create the illusion that Mr. Connor's yacht is bending like a wax candle in the sun. The wax candle looks forward to the lighthouse, whose form and symbolic function it shares. The lighthouse, in various permutations, is used in Virginia Woolf's work as a symbol of civilization, order, and meaning. Just as the blot on the page threatens the meaning of the words, the meaning of the world is threatened by Betty Flanders' grief and sense of isolation, and, as a result, the wax candle bends as order threatens to disintegrate. Thus S.P. Rosenbaum calls Betty's tear "an epistemological thing".⁶ Death and meaninglessness surround Betty Flanders for a moment, but she winks away the tears; the mast straightens up and the lighthouse comes back into focus. But the blot has spread.

The blot represents that part of the reality which she cannot control and which perception cannot alter, something which is non-

⁵Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room* in *Jacob's Room* and *The Waves* (New York, 1964), p. 7. All further references to this book will be included in the text.

⁶Rosenbaum, p. 331.

personal. The lighthouse and mast are affected by perception but the blot, unperceived while the tears come to Betty's eyes, has continued to grow, having, as it were, a life of its own. This blot was first associated with the tears and Seabrook's death. Its spreading suggests the omnipotence of death, an idea reinforced by the appearance of Archer who casts a blue (ink-coloured) shadow on the sand in which his mother's heels are symbolically rooted; she too, under the shadow of death, will return to dust. Archer casts a shadow of death and Betty Flanders -- even the name Flanders is foreboding⁷ -- feels the chill as she senses her own mortality. But Virginia Woolf gives a natural explanation for this psychological or even spiritual activity that takes place within Betty. Since it is the third of September, the declining autumn sun is responsible for the cold. It is this aspect of the experience that Betty consciously fastens upon. The other level of meaning of the experience is presented only indirectly through the imagery. The symbolic power of the blot gives a deeper meaning than is at first apparent to Betty's cry, "'-- what a horrid blot! It must be getting late.'" In particular, it is getting late for Jacob who, although still a child, is death-bound from the beginning. Archer, unable to get much co-operation from his preoccupied mother, goes off to look for Jacob by himself. He calls "'Ja--cob! Ja--cob!'" his cry hanging disembodied in the air. The voice has an "extraordinary sadness," and when it goes out into the world "pure from all body,

⁷A number of critics have drawn attention to the obvious association of Jacob's last name to the Belgium cemetery. See, for instance, Richter, p. 19.

body, pure from all passion ... solitary and unanswered, breaking against rocks," (pp. 8-9) the search for Jacob has begun.

Some Images

The narrative line of *Jacob's Room* moves from childhood and joy to adulthood and death. The events of the novel do not, however, "open out of one another" so as to form a plot. We merely pick up the action at various points of Jacob's life and what he *does* in any one scene is not necessitated by what preceded this action, nor does it determine what follows. The various scenes of Jacob's life are, however, held together by the repetition of images.

There is a lot of colour imagery in *Jacob's Room*, particularly in the first five chapters and the penultimate Chapter Thirteen. Purple, green, and white are mentioned frequently, and brown and black occasionally. But of particular interest is the repeated use of the primary colours; red, yellow, and blue, which are used in such a way as to juxtapose the two ends of the narrative line -- Jacob's youth and Jacob's death. These images are often used so that a single vehicle has a dual tenor, in this case the two tenors being diametrically opposed. Each of these colour images contains, therefore, because of its ambivalence, a paradigm of Jacob's existence. Thus there is a unity of image and narrative line. That this is so will become evident in the detailed examination of some of these images to follow.

Such a unity of part and whole (image and narrative line) suggests Virginia Woolf here aims at what Roger Fry would say has

significant form, which, the reader will recall, is achieved when at every point matter has been permeated by idea, the idea here being that all beauty and joy is fleeting, and that death and disintegration always lie close to life and meaning. I shall also discuss why, despite this attempt to create significant form, *Jacob's Room* is not a wholly satisfactory novel, after I have examined the treatment of character.

I have already commented on how, in one passage, the colour blue is used to prepare the reader for Jacob's death. Red and yellow, the other primary colours, are also used to construct leitmotif patterns that prophesy death. When Jacob is about to jump from the large rock where he has just caught a crab, he sees a couple lying on the beach just in front of him. They are enormous, frightening, and their faces are red:

The large red faces lying on the bandanna handkerchiefs stared up at Jacob. Jacob stared down at them. Holding his bucket very carefully, Jacob then jumped deliberately and trotted away very nonchalantly at first, but faster and faster as the waves came creaming up to him and he had to swerve to avoid them, and the gulls rose in front of him and floated out and settled again a little further on. (pp. 9-10)

In his fright he runs crying "'Nanny! Nanny!'" But he is lost. What he took for a person is only another rock. The waves swirl round it and we are reminded of Archer's cry which was described as breaking upon rocks. But, being young, Jacob is immediately distracted by a sheep's skull which protrudes from the black sticks and straw under the cliff. The obvious symbol of death is the skull, yet, through association, both the red faces of the couple and the waves become linked with death also. Red is associated with Jacob's fright, and as he runs his cry comes on the *crest* of each breath.

Let us look at another scene, this time centring our attention on the use of the colour yellow. There is an aquarium in Scarborough, but no one has ever been cheered by it. Men wheel triangular hordings of red, blue, and yellow through the streets advertising this place where a monster shark is to be seen. The combination of colours recalls Jacob's fright on the beach in Cornwall, Archer's chilling shadow, and the sheep's jaw with the yellow teeth Jacob found sticking out of the rubble at the base of the cliff. Virginia Woolf's description of the lugubrious aquarium is rather interesting:

So that was a reason for going down into the Aquarium, where the sallow blinds, the stale smell of spirits of salt, the bamboo chairs, the tables with ash-trays, the revolving fish, the attendant knitting behind six or seven chocolate boxes (often she was quite alone with the fish for hours at a time) remained in the mind as a part of the monster shark, he himself being only a flabby yellow receptacle, like an empty Gladstone bag in a tank. (p. 18)

The experience has a dream-like quality which is expressed in the shift of attributes from the objects in the room to the shark. There is a slight sense of horror centred in the fish, and yet, when the eye turns upon it, this evil turns out to be emptiness.

There are other places in the opening chapters where primary colours are obviously associated with the as yet submerged sense of horror that is woven into the texture of the book. For instance, Jacob takes to collecting butterflies when he grows older:

The fritillaries flaunted along the hedgerows. The blues settled on little bones lying on the turf with the sun beating on them, and the painted ladies and the peacocks feasted upon bloody entrails dropped by a hawk. (p. 24)

To yellow teeth and bones, Virginia Woolf now adds red entrails. What could seem more gay and innocent than a day full of bright butterflies and Jacob, who collects them, watching? But death has intruded upon this idyll.

We might note how well the primary colours are related to the subject matter of childhood. Richter had pointed out that the child's life seems to be dominated by the appearance of things and that Virginia Woolf has made excellent use of this fact:

Through young Jacob in *Jacob's Room*, Cam, Nancy, and James in *To the Lighthouse*, the children in *The Waves*, and Isa's son in *Between the Acts*, the reader's vision is accommodated to the vivid clarity of childhood, its ability to infuse the perceived object with emotion, its delight with the isolated object which is experienced wholly and separately. ⁸

Thus we can see that in terms of both the subject of childhood and the theme of juxtaposing life and death, the choice of the primary colours as central leitmotifs is a particularly happy one.

We must not, however, push these associations so hard that we betray ourselves into saying that each time Virginia Woolf uses one of these colours it is associated only with death. The primary colours recur often, particularly in the early chapters where they give the novel an undeniable freshness. It would be difficult for Virginia Woolf to create the sense of youth and vitality of the early part of the book if each time red were always blood, yellow teeth in

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 79.

a skull, and blue coldness. One tends to associate life and liveliness with the primary colours simply because they are so strong. For instance, there is a purely joyful celebration of colour in the yellow flower nodding outside the kitchen window. It seems to be saying that Betty and her children are free while poor Mr. Floyd is becoming the principal of Maresfield House. But for the most part, Virginia Woolf simply assumes the reader will make the naturally joyful associations without prompting and goes out of her way, as it were, to provide the darker associations. Thus when Jacob is catching butterflies, a whiff of rotten eggs vanishes the yellows that come pelting across the orchard. Captain Barefoot attends Mrs. Flanders in his blue serge. He is lame and lacks two fingers on his left hand -- defects that draw attention to his mortality. Also, the fact that his physical deformities are the result of serving his country presages what will happen to Jacob. The sense of horror that is introduced by these colour images is reinforced by certain ominous signs. Examples of these are the aster beaten to the ground by the rain, the crab futilely trying to climb out of the bucket throughout the night, and the sound of carpets being beaten, which turns into the sound of the war cannons.

These colour images are also used to give the novel a sense of roundedness. Images of red, yellow, and blue are used often and with considerable force in the early parts of the novel when Jacob is young, but when he grows up they tend to disappear. However, they make a reappearance near the end of the novel, particularly in Chapter Thirteen which is set just before Jacob's death. Along with such images as the recurring sound of nocturnal women beating carpets,

these colour images cast the reader's mind back to the beginning of the novel. We will see Virginia Woolf repeating this method in *The Waves*. Although there are approximately ten images of red, yellow, or blue in the last half dozen pages of Chapter Thirteen, their associations tend to be with the adult world, whereas at the beginning of the novel they were associated with childhood. Thus in Chapter Thirteen there is a red light on the Parthenon, Fanny looks at a large yellow globe marked with steamship lines, elderly people in Whitehall follow the "gold lettering of their creed" (p. 171) and a gilt clock strikes five. Time passing is always a part of the adult consciousness and so the hour is also recorded by Big Ben.

The very mention of Big Ben brings to mind *Mrs. Dalloway*. In Chapter Thirteen images are used as they are in that novel to facilitate the movement from one consciousness to another, as when, for instance, Peter Walsh, Septimus Smith, Rezia, and other bystanders are all linked by the airplane. In Chapter Thirteen of *Jacob's Room* a runaway horse moves us from Clara Durrant to Julia Eliot. Julia Eliot is expected at Lady Congreve's at five and then Florinda stares at the clock at Verrey's while it strikes five.

Despite the extensive use of imagery in the early chapters to create a sense of foreboding, and the return to some of the novel's early images in Chapter Thirteen, *Jacob's Room* remains an unsatisfactory book. The problem lies in Chapters Six through Twelve where Virginia Woolf's imagination seems to have flagged with the result that the images are relatively scarce. Thus, although the early chapters in particular make a good stab at significant form, the imagery, and

therefore the design, is weak in the middle, and the novel, while an interesting experiment, is only a partial success.

Characterization

Imagery is not used in *Jacob's Room* in the extensive way that it is in the other three novels I will be analyzing to tell us much about what kind of a person Jacob is. The imagery is associated with what he does and with the world, natural or social, that surrounds him, rather than with how he reacts. As a result, we are left to guess at his interior existence. However, before venturing into the area of guessing at Jacob's interior life I shall discuss the point of view from which his story is told in an attempt to explain why the imagery is not used to reveal character directly. I shall first discuss Virginia Woolf's attitude to the creation of character in this novel and illustrate the resulting point of view that emerges and shall then show how the ambiguity we have already noted in the colour images turns up in one of the characters. We shall see once again that life is not symmetrical and rational, but discontinuous and impossible to sum up. At the end of the chapter I shall speculate upon Jacob's interior life.

Basic to the method of *Jacob's Room* is this question: can we know another human being, his mind, his emotions? In this novel Virginia Woolf presents her main character so that, with few exceptions, we see him from the outside only, just as in life we see others from

the outside only. Consider, for instance, the episode in the third chapter of *Jacob's Room* where Mrs. Norman shares her railway compartment with Jacob. As he bursts through the door she says, "This is not a smoking carriage." (p. 30) but he doesn't hear and she suddenly finds herself shut up alone with a powerfully built young man with his back to her putting his bag in the rack. She fears he might attack her. She will throw her scent bottle out of the window with her right hand and pull the cord with her left. But Jacob only sits down. Later, Mrs. Norman notices that his socks are loose, his tie shabby, and that his eyes are fixed on the landscape. He now reminds her of her own son so she feels more friendly towards him. When the train arrives at Cambridge her son meets her and Jacob is lost to her mind, "as the crooked pin dropped by a child into the wishing-well twirls in the water and disappears forever." (p. 31)

This scene captures our own response to *Jacob's Room*. In this novel we see Jacob the way Mrs. Norman does, as a fleeting impression. Virginia Wolf makes the point explicit:

Nobody sees any one as he is, let alone an elderly lady sitting opposite a strange young man in a railway carriage. They see a whole -- they see all sorts of things -- they see themselves. . . . It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done. . . .

(pp. 30-31)

A passage in the fourth chapter returns again to this idea. Jacob and Timmy Durrant, who are sailing near the Scilly Isles off the coast of Cornwall at the time, have been discussing Timmy's scientific findings:

"It follows . . ." said Jacob. Only half a sentence followed; but these half-sentences are like flags on top of buildings to the observer of external events down below. (p. 50)

Therefore, Virginia Woolf has placed herself in an artistically difficult relationship with her main character because she can never really show us Jacob directly, and because she can show him to us from the outside only, he remains something of a "crooked pin dropped . . . into the wishing well. . . ."

As one would expect, the relation between narrator and character shows up in the point of view from which the story is told. Consider, for example, the passage at the beginning of the fifth chapter, which again discusses the idea of our tenuous knowledge of others. The proximity of the omnibuses at Mudie's corner in Oxford Street gives the outside passengers a chance to stare into each other's faces, but, because they have their own business to think of, few take advantage of the opportunity:

Each had his past shut in him like the leaves of a book known to him by heart; and his friends could only read the title, James Spalding, or Charles Budgeon, and the passengers going the opposite way could read nothing at all -- save "man with a red moustache", "a young man in grey smoking a pipe". (pp. 64-65)

The paragraph continues with an incident similar to Mrs. Norman's experience of Jacob:

. . . and little Johnnie Sturgeon took the chance to swing down the staircase, carrying his large mysterious parcel, and so dodging a zig-zag course between the wheels he reached the pavement, started to whistle a tune and was soon out of sight -- forever. (p. 65)

We are not told Jacob saw the Sturgeon boy, or if he did see him that his experience of the boy with the mysterious parcel was the same as that described by the narrating voice. But Jacob *could* have seen the boy and *could* have felt a tinge of regret as the boy disappeared in the traffic. The point of view in this passage is one used frequently in the novel. It involves a centre of consciousness that moves close to Jacob's but is not identical with it. It therefore approximates the angle of vision of the character. The centre of consciousness tends to move between the omniscient narrator and the character without taking up a fixed position in either. What emerges is a tentative point of view. However, because the point of view of the narrator is only tentatively the point of view of the character, we must make reservations about identifying the two as one. This situation parallels our own angle of vision upon others in the sense that we do our best to approximate their experience through imagination; but while our assumptions and methods are reasonable, our knowledge is never certain.

In the passage quoted above, where we read that each person had his past shut in his heart, the centre of consciousness is certainly with the narrator. But near the end of the same paragraph it has apparently moved close to Jacob: "Oh yes, human life is very tolerable on the top of an omnibus in Holborn, when the policeman holds up his arm and the sun beats on your back. . . ." (p. 65) But "your back" generalizes the comment and so the point of view is not identical with Jacob's. The comments that follow -- that if there is any place where

man has secreted a shell that fits him, it is on the banks of the Thames where the great streets join and St. Paul's Cathedral "like a volute on the top of the snail shell, finishes it off," (p. 65) and that changes of mood wear us out -- are clearly editorial and belong to the narrator.

The general effect of the handling of the point of view is to lessen the dramatic force of Jacob's condition by generalizing reactions rather than centring them in his consciousness. This movement away from Jacob into the impersonal "one" reinforces the tendency to abstraction in Virginia Woolf's writing which I mentioned in the discussion of the short stories at the beginning of this chapter, but it is not a method she continued to use in later novels.

If we follow carefully the handling of point of view of *Jacob's Room* we notice that there are times when it shifts so far into the impersonal "one" that Jacob seems to be completely left behind. We can see this process in the following passages:

Then two thousand hearts in semi-darkness remembered, anticipated, travelled dark labyrinths; and Clara Durrant said farewell to Jacob Flanders, and tasted the sweetness of death in effigy; and Mrs. Durrant, sitting behind her in the dark of the box, sighed a sharp sigh; and Mr. Wortley, shifting his position behind the Italian Ambassador's wife, thought that Brangaena was a trifle hoarse; and suspended in the gallery many feet above their heads Edward Whittaker surreptitiously held a torch to his miniature score (p. 68)

Here the point of view is clearly omniscient. Jacob sees Clara but he knows nothing of her enjoyment of death in effigy. Mrs. Durrant's sigh may or may not reach his ears; Mr. Wortley's movement probably

escapes his eye. Certainly he knows nothing of Edward Whitaker's surreptitious pleasure. The next paragraph moves the centre of consciousness even further away from Jacob:

In short, the observer is choked with observations. Only to prevent us from being submerged by chaos, nature and society between them have arranged a system of classification which is simplicity itself; stalls, boxes, amphitheatre, gallery. (pp. 68-69)

Here the narrator is not just a detached observer but an interpreter, and one senses the direct intrusion of the author herself. This movement away from a fictive voice culminates towards the end of the paragraph: "But no -- we must choose. Never was there a harsher necessity! or one which entails greater pain, more certain disaster; for wherever I seat myself, I die in exile." (p. 69) The "I" of the author has now replaced the "one" of the narrator.

At the other extreme, the point of view can move so far into Jacob's consciousness that one must forget for the while that one can never know what is really going on in a person's mind. Such a passage as the following presents Jacob's mind directly:

But when she looked at him, dumbly, half-guessing, half-understanding, apologizing perhaps, anyhow saying as he had said, "It's none of my fault," straight and beautiful in body, her face like a shell within its cap, then he knew that cloisters and classics are no use whatever. The problem is insoluble. (p. 82)

Substitution of "he must have known" for "he knew" would have preserved the tentative point of view. On the other hand, the use of the present tense instead of the past in "cloisters and classics are no use" turns the statement into a general truth rather than leaving it as something Jacob felt to be true at that moment.

These shifts in point of view suggest Virginia Woolf is struggling to find a suitable artistic form which will allow her to create character while at the same time impressing us with how little we know of other people. Her preoccupation with the skepticism which is responsible for so much of the method of *Jacob's Room* is most eloquently expressed in the well-known passage near the end of Chapter Five where we see that the reason it is so difficult to create a detached point of view within which to place the narrative is that no such thing actually exists. There is no ideal observer:

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

Such is the manner of our seeing. Such the conditions of our love. (pp. 71-72)

Virginia Woolf expresses here a Paterian-like solipsism. Like Pater, she is sure only of impressions, and they are shadowy and unsubstantial. A face, as Pater said, is but the pattern we impose upon the active forces in the universe.

We can return now to the question of why *Jacob's Room* is not a wholly satisfactory novel. Although part of the failure can be attributed to the lack of imagery in the middle sections, equally important is the refusal to centre the narrative in the central character.

A novel which almost does away with plot must provide other entertainments, for instance, letting the reader empathize with what the character experiences. Yet this is just what the displacement of the point of view from Jacob does not allow. Because we do not get sufficiently involved with Jacob from the outside (what he does) or from the inside (what he experiences), he remains shadowy. Too seldom does the young man sitting in the corner become the most real thing in the world.

There is one more point that should be raised before speculating upon Jacob's inner life. We have seen above how the imagery touches on both beauty and death. Individuals too are composed of ambiguities and contraries. Virginia Woolf uses Florinda to make the point. While Jacob is talking to Richard Bonamy, he sees Florinda for a moment in the light cast by his idea of the civilization of Greece:

. . . as he tramped into London it seemed to him that they were making the flagstones ring on the road to the Acropolis, and that if Socrates saw them coming he would bestir himself and say 'my fine fellows,' for the whole sentiment of Athens was entirely after his heart; free, venturesome, high-spirited She [Florinda] had called him Jacob without asking his leave. She had sat upon his knee. Thus did all good women in the days of the Greeks. (p. 76)

But Jacob can't really force his Greek ideal onto Florinda because although she is pretty, she is, alas, stupid. He puzzles himself about the mind-body problem, not in the abstract, but in terms of Florinda whom he has brought back to his rooms. He questions too why beauty should go hand in hand with stupidity. Rational speculation seems to him to break down when confronted with life, and, compared to the inexplicable conjunction of beauty and stupidity, his idea of Greek

rationalism seems foolish. Jacob feels a revulsion from the classics, from the life of Cambridge, from the cloistered rooms which protect one from the disturbing knowledge of the lack of order and symmetry in life. He feels an anger growing towards whoever created this anomalous universe. There is the dream of Greece, but there is also Florinda, pretty, sentimental, a bit sordid, with her hand upon his knee. Jacob reflects it is not her fault that such contraries are met in her, or that she is so depressing. But there she is, and the thought saddens him: "It's not catastrophies, murders, deaths, diseases, that age and kill us; it's the way people look and laugh, and run up the steps of omnibuses." (p. 82) When she stands before him, half guessing what he is thinking, saying, as he has said himself, "It's none of my fault," then he knows that cloisters and classics with their protection from incongruity are no use. In the last analysis, at least so it seems to him at this moment, rationalism and Greece are routed and, faced by the reality of Florinda, he realizes that the problem of understanding the confused and apparently unpatterned nature of existence is insoluble. He can find no valid reading of the meaning of existence.

At other times Virginia Woolf presents a brighter picture. There is at least art to give life meaning. The narrator considers the changing colours of the buildings on the Acropolis:

. . . this durability exists quite independently of our admiration. Although the beauty is sufficiently human to weaken us, to stir the deep deposit of mud -- memories, abandonments, regrets, sentimental devotions -- the Parthenon is separate from all that; and if you consider how it has stood out all night, for centuries, you begin to connect the blaze (at midday the glare is dazzling and the frieze almost invisible) with the idea that perhaps it is beauty alone that is immortal. (p. 148)

But the sum total of statements about beauty, ugliness, and the incongruity of the universe leave us with nothing certain, and it seems there should be more.

Keeping this in mind, perhaps we can speculate on why Jacob collects butterflies. It is not just that they are the traditional symbol of the romantic pursuit, as in, for instance, *Lord Jim*.⁹ While they are, on the one hand, suggestive of beauty, and, on the other, associated with death, they are, beyond these polarities, simply themselves. At this level they perhaps operate as a symbol of Jacob's quest for the one reality that lies beyond good and evil. Perhaps he is concerned with what Clive Bell says philosophers used to call "the thing in itself."¹⁰ While the author, with the reader in tow, is off in pursuit of Jacob himself, the symbol of reality for author and reader, Jacob is off in pursuit of the butterflies, his symbol of reality. Here we arrive at the centre of Virginia Woolf's vision. Her quest is always

⁹Virginia Woolf is herself a latter-day English Romantic. Consider, for example, the following quotation:

. . . a concreteness of description in which all the senses -- tactile, gustatory, kinetic, organic, as well as visual and auditory -- combine to give the total apprehension of an experience; an intense delight at the sheer existence of things outside the self . . . seeming to lose identity in the fullness of identification with the object. . . . And under the rich sensuous surface we find the characteristic presentation of all irreconcilable opposites.

All of this applies to Virginia Woolf although it was written of Keats. (See Abrams *et al.*, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, rev. ed., (New York, 1968), ii, 503).

¹⁰Clive Bell, *Art* (London, 1949), p. 53.

for the thing in itself, and *Jacob's Room*, which is built out of skepticism and ambivalent feelings, is one manifestation of her vision.

Virginia Woolf would like to be able to give us Jacob whole, just as Clarissa Dalloway wishes to present her life to her parents like a bouquet of flowers, or as Bernard wants to give the reader his life whole like a globe in the last chapter of *The Waves*. But this is just what she cannot do. The craft of fiction seems inadequate:

. . . there remains something which can never be conveyed to a second person save by Jacob himself. Moreover, part of this is not Jacob but Richard Bonamy -- the room; the market carts; the hour; the very moment of history. (pp. 72-73)

In this novel she stresses the short-comings of her art, as if providing a lesson in accordance with the thesis of "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" where she chastizes readers for allowing writers to palm off on them "an image of Mrs. Brown which has no likeness to that surprising apparition whatsoever."¹¹ As S.P. Rosenbaum points out, in *Mrs. Dalloway* Virginia Woolf does supply the surprising apparition. The novel ends with the words "For there she was."¹² But *Jacob's Room* ends with a pair of empty shoes, as if Virginia Woolf were saying "For there he wasn't." Thus the novel is called *Jacob's Room* and not *Jacob*. Jacob always slips out, and all we have is the empty room. Although, for a moment, the young man in the corner is the most real thing in the world,

¹¹Virginia Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," in *The Captain's Death Bed* (London, 1950), p. 118.

¹²Rosenbaum, p. 334.

he gets up and goes about his business, leaving us, like Archer, Clara, and Bonamy, calling his name. And, as Bonamy's disembodied, elegiac voice goes out into the world we are left, like Betty Flanders, holding emptiness.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SOLDIER AND THE HOSTESS

The double plot in *Mrs. Dalloway*, one strand centred around a middle-aged Westminster hostess and the other around a shell-shocked young man, could easily split the novel down the middle. However, unity has been achieved through devices such as constructing the plots so they comment upon each other, as when a series of actions in one plot is repeated in the other; creating main characters who directly and indirectly comment on each other; and linking up themes and characters in the two plots through imagery. I shall discuss each of these techniques at various points in this chapter.

Josephine O'Brien Schaefer provides an outline of how imagery acts to link the various parts of *Mrs. Dalloway*.¹ A car links Clarissa to Septimus and Rezia. The transition back to Clarissa is made through the skywriting. Peter is linked with Septimus and Rezia through a running child. They in turn are linked to Richard Dalloway through a clock. Next, Clarissa is linked to Elizabeth and Miss Kilman through a clock. Then a shadow links them with Septimus and Rezia. The transition to Peter is made by way of an ambulance.

¹Josephine O'Brien Schaefer, *The Three-Fold Nature of Reality in the Novels of Virginia Woolf* (London, The Hague, Paris, 1965), p. 86.

Another way in which imagery contributes to the structure of the novel is through the leitmotifs it creates. An examination of leitmotifs used to present themes and create characters reveals that to a greater extent than was the case in *Jacob's Room*, idea has permeated form.

Image and Theme

One of the themes of *Mrs. Dalloway* is the search for reality. When this reality is found, the self and the non-self are joined and a "new religion" is born. Of particular interest to this topic are the image patterns based on voices, fountains, waves, fibers, and nets.

Richter points out that according to comments to be found in an unpublished notebook, Virginia Woolf intended to use a "Greek chorus" in *Mrs. Dalloway*. In the first part of the novel there was to be "'an observer in the street at each critical point who acts the part of chorus -- some nameless person.'"² In the Regent's Park scene "while Peter Walsh sleeps, she planned to have 'a chorus, half of calm and security . . . half fear and apprehension' consisting of the nursemaid, sleeping baby and a little girl."³ In the final version of the novel only the elderly grey nurse and sleeping child remain. However, along with this remnant, and of more importance, we find a second chorus,

²Richter, p. 139.

³Ibid.

the woman Peter Walsh sees opposite Regent's Park Tube Station. She is "a rusty pump" whose ageless, androgynous voice "springs spouting from the earth." With an absence of all human meaning she sings:

"ee am fah um so
foo swee too eem oo --"
(p. 90)

This timeless, sexless voice spouting from the earth comes out of an age before human thought. It has known "the age of tusk and mammoth", the "silent sunrise" of the world, as well as "the last rays of the sun when the universe will be over." This voice symbolizes that which endures, the permanent and unchanging reality of the non-self with which the self seeks unity. We will see later how characters such as Elizabeth Dalloway and Clarissa hear this voice and what it means to them.

The song might well be, as J. Hillis Miller argues, really an inarticulate version of Richard Strauss's "Aller Seelen" with words by Hermann von Gilm. Miller finds lines of the song incorporated at various points in the dialogue. Also, the theme of the song, that one day of the year is given to the dead, is reflected in the action of the novel where Sally Seton and Peter Walsh "rise from the dead" and come to Clarissa's party. The characters in the novel are obsessed, says Miller, with the time Clarissa chose Richard Dalloway and rejected Peter Walsh.⁴

Miller's interpretation of this one aspect of the symbolic and thematic importance of the song might well be correct without diminishing

⁴J. Hillis Miller, "The Omniscient Narrator in *Mrs. Dalloway*," in *The Shaken Realist: Essays in Modern Literature in Honor of Frederick J. Hoffman*, eds. Melvin J. Friedman and John B. Vickery (Baton Rouge, 1970), pp. 114-15.

its particular importance to Peter Walsh. The old woman is, as Richter calls her, an early Anna Livia Plurabelle, the woman indistinguishable from the spring, her song identical to the water.⁵ This old woman will reappear in the next two novels, as the character Mrs. McNab in *To the Lighthouse* and as another street-dweller in *The Waves*. The comment that they make on the world by providing a standard of permanence in the flux of reality is best understood if one sees them as a contrast to the young men who die in the various novels -- Jacob, Septimus, Andrew Ramsay, and Percival. Unintelligible but undeniable, these women stand for the sheer vitality of what lies beyond what Walter Pater calls the "wall of personality". They symbolize the world of objective reality which, to judge from her diary and her novels, Virginia Woolf herself longed to touch.

In Elizabeth Dalloway's case, the meaning of this voice of reality is made explicit. During her excursion into the Strand, Elizabeth feels the "geniality, sisterhood, motherhood" of the area. Suddenly, there is the sound of military brass. It seems that had some woman just died, the person watching at the end would have been consoled by the music upon opening the window:

It was not conscious. There was no recognition in it of one's fortune, or fate, and for that very reason even to those taxed with watching for the last shivers of consciousness on the faces of the dying, consoling. Forgetfulness in people might wound, their ingratitude corrode, but this voice, pouring endlessly, year in, year out, would take whatever it might be; this bowl; this van; this life; this procession; would wrap them all about and carry them on, as in the rough stream of a glacier the ice holds a splinter of bone, a blue petal, some oak leaves, and rolls them on. (p. 153)

⁵Richter, p. 142. Richter speculates that the fountain imagery came out of Virginia Woolf's reading of Henry James's *The Sacred Fount*, a review of which is drafted in the earliest *Mrs. Dalloway* notebook. (See Richter, p. 223).

When Clarissa stands at the window and watches the old woman across the street getting ready for bed, she too hears this eternal voice in the hum of her party going on behind her. She then turns away from death and goes back to life.

The particular choice of the word "pouring" to describe this voice is indicative of the way the voice and various fountain, spring, and water images are intermingled in *Mrs. Dalloway*. We have already noted that the old derelict's voice "spouts" from the earth. Its "burbling song, soaking through the knotted roots of infinite ages, and skeletons and treasure, streamed away in rivulets over the pavement, . . . fertilizing, leaving a damp stain." (p. 91) Looking back upon the June day on which the novel is set, Peter Walsh thinks of the "drip, drip of one impression after another." (p. 169) Similarly, Septimus hears Rezia's sentence bubbling away, "drip, drip, drip, like a contented tap left running." (p. 159)

The water naturally associated with the fountain imagery inevitably leads one to consider the way wave imagery is used to indicate the reality that various characters in the novel are searching for. For instance, Clarissa, feeling herself united with the city around her, sees the air lifting the leaves "on waves of that divine vitality" which she loves. Consider also the following passage which describes Clarissa's state of consciousness as she gathers the folds of her green dress in her fingers like waves while mending it for the party that evening:

So on a summer's day waves collect, overbalance, and fall; collect and fall; and the world seems to be saying 'that is all' more and more ponderously, until even the heart in the body which lies in the sun on the beach says too, that is all. Fear no more, says the heart. Fear no more says the heart, committing its burden to some sea, which sighs collectively for all sorrows, and renews, begins, collects, lets fall. And the body above listens to the passing bee; the wave breaking; the dog barking, far away barking and barking. (p. 45)

In this passage both the body and the mind achieve a deep sense of peace as they give themselves up to the waves. The body, described as "above" the heart which has sunk into a peaceful trance, listens to the breaking wave of the actual ocean, while the heart commits its burden to "some" sea, a mystical sea which heals and renews. The similarity to Septimus's mystical experience when he is sitting on the bench at Regent's Park is suggested by the recurring image of the barking dog.

When Septimus sits in ecstasy in Regent's Park, the colour of the leaves thins and thickens "from blue to the green of a hollow wave," and in harmony with the wave motion of the leaves, the birds rise and fall in "jagged fountains". While in another trance-like state in his own living room, Septimus is described as if he were under water. The trees trail their leaves "through the depths of the air," and the sound of water is in the room. He lies lapped in impressions and thinks of his hand lying on the water when he was bathing. The way it floats suggests that he is relaxed and at peace. When he jumps from the window, it is as if he were seeking a final reconciliation in water, for he dives into the depths of the air through which the trees trail their leaves. The imagery suggests that he drowns himself by plunging into depths from which he can never again be awakened

by the voices of bullying "human nature".

The way the world undergoes a sea change at the moment Septimus achieves mystic enlightenment is paralleled by a later scene in the novel where Peter Walsh is on his way to Clarissa's party. His senses are particularly alive and he feels so expansive that it seems his body must contract when he enters Clarissa's house: ". . . and out the leaves in the square shoved lurid, livid -- they looked as if dipped in silver water -- the foliage of a submerged city." (p. 179) Therefore, Peter himself must be "submerged", a fact which symbolizes his ability to penetrate the outer husk of reality.

Another group of images frequently associated with the achievement of a sense of unity are those of strings, nets, and webs. In the afternoon, just at the time she sees her old neighbour across the street, Clarissa hears the all-encompassing wave of sound from Big Ben and thinks that she is "attached to that sound, that string."⁶ During his ecstasy in Regent's Park, Septimus feels that the leaves undulating like waves are "connected by millions of fibres with his own body." (p. 26) The white and blue sky is barred by the pattern of black branches. This image of a net is repeated where he becomes pure sensibility and the immediacy of his relationship with the world is described in one of the most striking images in the novel: "His body was macerated until only the nerve fibres were left. It was spread like a veil upon a rock." (p. 76) Here the inner world, the

⁶There is an obvious similarity here to Mrs. Ramsay's feeling that the third stroke of light from the lighthouse is her stroke. A Freudian critic might say that the fact both the sound of Big Ben and the light from the lighthouse come from towers is psychologically important to Virginia Woolf, but of greater importance is the fact that Big Ben and the lighthouse are symbolic standards in the world of flux.

veil, which represents the sensibility raised to its highest pitch, and the outer world, the rock, are fused in a single image.

The string image is used in a related but different way where Doris Kilman feels her entrails stretching across the room as Elizabeth escapes from her in the tea room. For Miss Kilman, nothing, including love, brings a sense of unity. Her love is degrading because it is jealous, and for her, strings don't relate, they merely bind.

The pattern of imagery based on waves and related water images also develops the time theme in the novel. In *Mrs. Dalloway* considerable attention is paid to the idea of stopping the flow of time through the creation of spots of time. Since in these moments the ravages of time are overcome, the handling of time can be seen as a variation of the unity theme we have been discussing. For instance, time is marked by the waves of sound spreading from Big Ben. The importance of this sea image to express time lies in the fact that as the wave is the surface of the sea, so the moment is the surface of eternity. In Clarissa's moments of intense enjoyment, a number of which occur while she is out buying flowers, time slows, and Clarissa exclaims that no one will ever know how much she loves life. Such "moments of being" occur throughout Virginia Woolf's writing and their presence suggests a mystical belief that one can get beyond the moment into a realm where time is overcome. Through the moment, one touches eternity.

When we survey the characters of the novel we notice that they are often distinguished according to their relationship to time. Clarissa, for instance, loves the moment and constantly builds life

up. She plunges into the moment upon which presses the pressure "of all other mornings". Time is seen as a continuum rather than a series of discrete events. The idea that life is a plunge into the time stream is of particular interest in that Septimus's suicide is also a plunge. Septimus was trying to find an absolute unity of self and non-self, just as Clarissa is likewise trying to overcome division.

The trouble with plunging in is, of course, that one can drown. There is always the danger that because the perfect moment is so fleeting one may seek the unchanging embrace of death. From the "sane" point of view, this is what happens to Septimus, although we are led to believe that under the circumstances, the integrity of death is preferable to the corruption of existence created by Holmes and Bradshaw. Even for Clarissa, the plunge has its dangers. Although at present in love with life, she fears what will happen in the future. Thus she notices that when she is on the edge of an experience she feels afraid. A new experience is like being a diver before the plunge, "while the sea darkens and brightens beneath him, and the waves which threaten to break but only gently split their surface, roll and conceal and encrust as they turn over the weeds with pearl." (p. 35) But despite her fear, Clarissa plunges. On the first page of the novel we read that her first love of life was stirred by "the kiss of a wave."

Her relationship to time contrasts strongly with Doris Kilman's. The solemn stroke of Big Ben, which lies "flat like a bar of gold on the sea," (p. 141) entrances Clarissa; the world apparently drops away and she escapes from time. The last stroke of Big Ben seems to be her stroke, just as the third stroke of golden light from

the lighthouse is Mrs. Ramsay's. And then another city clock which strikes a few minutes after Big Ben brings her a lap full of trifles to which she must attend, and she goes on with her ordinary life. But Doris Kilman, being herself out of time with time, is associated only with the late clock, no mention being made of her even hearing Big Ben, which is used in the novel as a symbol of the absolute standard of the non-self. Having never escaped the chopped up time of her daily life to submerge beneath the surface of time to identify with the golden stroke of Big Ben, she is paradoxically drowned in a sea of anger and tedium:

Beaten up, broken up by the assault of carriages, the brutality of vans, the eager advance of myriads of angular men, flaunting women, the domes and spires of offices and hospitals, the last relics of this lap full of odds and ends seems to break, like the spray of an exhausted wave, upon the body of Miss Kilman standing in the street a moment to utter, 'It is the flesh.' (p. 142)

As is the case with Sir William Bradshaw, who lives in Harley Street where the clocks "chip away" at time, life for Miss Kilman does not flow.

The sun image is also important to the development of the time theme in the novel. While on her way to buy the flowers, Clarissa stops in front of Hatchard's Book Store and looks in the window. Just at the moment she is wondering "What image of white dawn in the country . . ." (p. 12) she is trying to recover, her eye alights on these lines from the dirge in *Cymbeline*:

Fear no more the heat of the sun
Nor the furious winter's rages. (p. 12)

The first line, both as it is and in a changed form, becomes a leitmotif for Clarissa and Septimus. The way in which the sun image is used in relation to time can be demonstrated if we follow Clarissa from this point in the novel.

Throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, the reader is kept very aware of the progress of the sun. Light seems to be the dominant feature of scenes involving Clarissa in the London streets in the morning, Septimus in Regent's Park and in his living room, Elizabeth in the Strand, and Peter Walsh on his way from his hotel to Clarissa's party. The cycle of these scenes is concluded by one that takes place at night when Clarissa looks out across the street to see her old neighbour. Here the sun image returns through the device of having Clarissa recall the first line of the *Cymbeline* dirge. This progress of the sun from the white dawn of Clarissa's youth to the dark night of the old woman across the street is an obvious symbol of the progress of life. Clarissa lives between the white dawn and the dark night; *middle-aged*, she lives in the heat of the day. In comparison to a lifetime, a day is but a moment, so showing us one day in Clarissa's life is therefore rather like showing us the moment caught in order to present all eternity. The day is the surface of the life just as the moment is the surface of eternity or the wave is the surface of the sea of reality. In revealing to us one day in Clarissa's life Virginia Woolf reaches out to all her life, both through the idea that the spot of time is, in a rather mystical sense, all time, and

through the actual presentation of Clarissa's past, present, and future. In the morning, Peter Walsh brings the past to her; in the afternoon, Richard, returning from Lady Brouton's with a bouquet of roses, gives her the reality of present love; and in the evening, the old woman, whose turning out of the light Clarissa takes to be a symbolic death, introduces her to her own old age and eventual death.

If Clarissa lives in the heat of the sun, that is, if she is middle-aged, then to fear the sun is to fear life and the present moment. It is this fear she expresses at the beginning of the novel when she says it is so dangerous to live one moment. Her situation is identical to that of Orlando at the moment she wakes up to the most startling of all realizations, that it is the present moment. The present moment in Clarissa's case is a Wednesday (mid-week) in mid-June (mid-year). The day is carefully chosen to be Clarissa's and is not merely the result, as Dorothy Brewster suggests, of Virginia Woolf's having read *Ulysses*.⁷ It is one of the longest days of the year so we are indeed in the heat of the sun. In case we miss the point, a newsboy cries a headline about the current heat wave while Peter Walsh is walking to Clarissa's party in the evening.

⁷Dorothy Brewster, *Virginia Woolf* (New York, 1962), p. 108.

Image and Character

In *Jacob's Room* we encountered the question of whether one can ever really know another mind. The attitude to this question shifts in *Mrs Dalloway* with the introduction of what Virginia Woolf calls in her diary her "tunnelling" method. In essence, what happens is that the epistemological question of *Jacob's Room* is replaced by a belief that minds can share an identity, and that this identity is marked by the images that the minds hold in common. Thus if the lode of common images of one mind is followed down a vein, one eventually joins up with a similar tunnel dug in another mind. Virginia Woolf uses these commonly held images in two ways. First, identity is revealed when two minds react to the same image in the same way. Second, minds are shown to be antagonistic when they relate to the same image in opposing ways. As we shall see, the commonly held images function rather differently in *The Waves*, where they are used simultaneously to establish common identity and to create individuality.

When we consider the list of characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*, we notice how readily most of them can be labelled "good" or "bad". On the "good" side we find Clarissa, Septimus, Peter Walsh, Elizabeth, Richard Dalloway, and Sally Seton. In the other camp are Doris Kilman, Sir William Bradshaw, Dr. Holmes, Hugh Whitbread, and possibly Lady Brouton. In the second group only Doris Kilman is sufficiently drawn to engage the reader's interest beyond the point of simple dislike. However, despite the fact that Virginia Woolf by no means balances her novel by apportioning time and interest equally to the "good" and the

"bad", there is a moral dimension here not to be found in *Jacob's Room*. We see in *Mrs. Dalloway* Virginia Woolf extending her imagistic method by using certain images as moral touchstones. Just as only characters from the first group are related positively to time, so only characters from that group are related positively to the images of sun and flowers. Thus images become an important way of distinguishing between the two basic types of characters in the novel. However, despite this fundamentally paradigmatic moral structure, this is not a simple morality piece. The "good" characters are not all good; Clarissa is a snob, Sally is an egotist, and Peter Walsh is self-pitying.

Clarissa is too complex to be a mere morality character:

. . . she alone knew how different [she was], how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-room and made a meeting point, a radiance no doubt in some dull lives
 (p. 42)

Her inner life is made up of conflicting states of joy and depression. While, on the one hand, she "loved it all", on the other, her mind is sometimes preoccupied with images that suggest the meanness of life:

"There was the green linoleum and a tap dripping. There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room." (p. 35)

The most obvious device used to present Clarissa's complexity is that of the double. As Jean Guiget puts it, Septimus and Clarissa are related in their alternations

between terror and joy, which, in the form of loneliness and love, apprehension of death and ecstatic delight in existence, mark the pulse of that awareness of life whose keenness is the dominant trait of these protagonists. 8

Josephine Schaefer comments that pauses in the action in Clarissa's home in which the author supplies a commentary on the relation between Clarissa and Septimus indicate why "the two strands of the novel are needed to tell Clarissa's story; for without the presence of Septimus, Clarissa's emotions might seem minor and trivial."⁹ Through the use of Septimus, Virginia Woolf is able to push perception and action to their limits, and by relating Clarissa to Septimus, she is able to make these things relevant to the common course of life. As one of the characters in Strindberg's *The Ghost Sonata* says, "only in the madhouse do people say what they mean. Septimus speaks the truth, not only for himself but for Clarissa too."

The relationship of these two characters is evident in their parallel actions at the end of the novel. Septimus retreats into his own room but Holmes forces his way in so he jumps out the window. When Clarissa hears from Lady Bradshaw about Septimus's death she too retreats into her room and stands at the window. However, she escapes suicide, having substituted for it the symbolic suicide of throwing a coin into the Serpentine. Also, Richard does not

⁸Jean Guiget, *Virginia Woolf and Her Works* (New York, 1962), pp. 234-35.

⁹Josephine O'Brien Schaefer, p. 86.

invade her privacy, and she receives consolation from both the old woman across the way and the sound of the party behind her. Death ahead is not seen as fearful and she returns to life renewed.

Clarissa understands Septimus and is glad he has thrown his life away. She sees that men like Bradshaw force one's soul. Deep within the profound darkness of life there is something that brings happiness so that one feels nothing is slow enough, nothing can last too long:

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

Now let us see how this identity between Clarissa and Septimus is expressed through the sun image. We have already seen how Clarissa, because of her positive relationship to time, is measured favourably by the sun. The line from the dirge in *Cymbeline* runs through her mind at various times from her sighting it in Hatchard's window in the morning to the moment late that night when she feels pity for the young man she never met who just killed himself. Clarissa's positive feelings about herself are expressed in a related image when she says she will "kindle" and "illuminate" at her party, whereas, in contrast, the fearful and unhappy Rezia is described as a bird under a leaf blinking at the sun.

The sun image is carried over into Septimus's consciousness through a transformed version of the line from *Cymbeline*. This change

first occurs in Clarissa's mind: "Fear no more, says the heart. Fear no more says the heart, committing its burden to some sea. . . ." (p. 45) Septimus repeats, "Fear no more says the heart in the body, fear no more." (p. 154) The substitution of "heart in the body" for "heart of the sun" indicates Septimus's fear of his own emotions, which in the past have led to heartbreaking experiences; Clarissa too is probably afraid of emotions for she is a rather cold person. But Septimus is also brave, and Clarissa admires him for having not compromised. She, on the other hand, has invited the socially eminent Sir William Bradshaw to her party although she doesn't like him. Septimus kills himself not because he hates life, but because he will not endure "human nature" as represented by Holmes. In fact, he deeply loves life, and one of the ways this love is expressed is through the sun imagery.

In the scenes where we see Septimus in Regent's Park and later in his livingroom, the sun is a creative force. For instance, in Septimus's living room the sun (the "spot of gold") seems to create beauty and tell him nature's meaning:

At every moment Nature signified by some laughing hint like that gold spot which went round the wall -- there, there, there -- her determination to show by brandishing her plumes, shaking her tresses, flinging her mantle this way and that, beautifully, always beautifully. . . her meaning. (pp. 154-55)

When he is sitting in his livingroom before Rezia takes him off to see Sir William Bradshaw, she brings a vase of roses into the room and puts them on the table. The sun strikes them directly. He feels the whole world is clamouring for his death, but he does not want to kill himself because "food is pleasant and the sun is hot." Then,

just before his plunge to death he repeats his unwillingness to leave life behind; "He did not want to die. Life was good, the sun was hot." (p. 165) (On the other hand, when Septimus is fearful, the world threatens "to burst into flames.")

Septimus's justification for life in terms of the sun is particularly interesting if we compare him to Sir William Bradshaw. When the "weak" question life itself and ask, why live, Sir William can answer that life is good; after all, "Lady Bradshaw in ostrich feathers hung over the mantelpiece, and as for his income it was quite twelve thousand a year." (p. 112) To Septimus, life is good because the sun is hot. He expresses his attachment to the life force through the most cosmic image in the novel. But to Bradshaw, life is justified by his stuffed bird of a wife, whose will he has wholly dominated. The sun is supremely indifferent to one's fate. It is wholly separate from the self and stands for objective reality and the life force in all things. But Lady Bradshaw is a mere reflection of Sir William, who cannot love life because he loves only his own image. So instead of justifying life in terms of the sun and beauty, he turns to Lady Ostrich and money. It is little wonder he cannot provide Septimus with a reason to go on living, because all his reasons -- courage, duty, career, family, the good of society -- are only more dead birds, pat answers irrelevant to Septimus's condition.

But if Sir William is simply unaware of the sun, Holmes goes him one further by actually blocking it out when he stands in front of the window in Septimus's livingroom. Having invaded Septimus's room (a symbolic invasion of his mind), he now seeks, in imposing his

comfortable view of existence on his patient, to cut Septimus off from reality itself.

It might at first seem strange to say that Septimus, who is, after all, clearly mad, is in touch with reality, and that Holmes's therapy actually destroys his patient's contact with that reality, but it is evident that Virginia Woolf sees Holmes in just that light.

First, perhaps we should separate the two elements of Septimus's unusual experience. There is no denying that Septimus shows many of the signs of a psychotic. His relationship to time is sometimes one of despair; he sees the future as a realm of anxiety and danger. He is unstable and upon the moment announces "'Now we will kill ourselves.'" (p. 74) His crisis of identity is marked by his feeling of being invaded. The effect of his emotional experience has made him isolated, fearful, and suspicious. After Evans is killed it seems to Septimus that beauty remains behind a glass. Sitting on the train, looking out the window, he wonders if that world, remote and untouchable, can be without meaning. He feels disgusted with himself, particularly with his ability to procreate, and so he refuses to have children although Rezia wants them. When he returns to England, life and sex are repulsive to him, and when he opens his Shakespeare or Aeschylus he finds they say the same thing. While, on the one hand, Septimus has many experiences related to depression, he has, on the other hand, experiences related to mania which could be seen as mystical. The future is sometimes a realm of infinite possibility: "Why could he see through bodies, see into the future, when dogs will become men?" (p. 76) There are times when he

finds beauty and truth everywhere. He has feelings of love, empathy, consideration, and affection. Rather than feeling disgust with himself, he feels he has "come to renew society." To the psychotic mind, perceptual changes are frightening and threatening, yet to Septimus they can be exhilarating. Whereas the psychotic sees only fragments of the usual categories, Septimus sees new connections. He sees to the place where all things are united, the dead and the living, man and vegetable life. Typical of the mystic, he has experiences which give him the feeling of being at one with the world. He sees a dog start to change into a man. He thinks flowers grow through his flesh, their leaves rustling by his head. To him music is visible. The anthem he sees reverberating among the rocks is really just the song of an old man playing a pennywhistle by the public house. How then is Holmes's therapy destructive? Holmes tells Septimus that there is really nothing the matter with him. On the surface, this seems to be kindly, but it is not. Septimus knows he has experiences, both depressive and manic, which are not normal, but normal or not, these are the things that constitute reality as he knows it. Holmes doesn't try to reformulate that reality; he simply ignores it. In telling Septimus that there is really nothing wrong with him, he is actually asking Septimus to deny the reality of his own experience. In other words, he is driving Septimus even further into insanity. A measure of his lack of understanding is that when Septimus talks of suicide, all Holmes can do is retreat into his concept of duty and protest that suicide would hardly be fair to Rezia, a comment which must appear to Septimus positively silly.

On his last visit to his patient, Holmes "unfortunately" has to push aside that "nice young Italian woman" in order to get in. Even more unfortunately, his patient doesn't want to see him and jumps out the window. "The coward", cries Holmes, concerned not for his patient but for his own image, just as he was when Rezia asked about taking her husband to see another doctor. Then he administers a sedative to Rezia, more, we feel, because he does not want to have to deal with the reality of her grief than because she should be calmed down. He even lies to her to get her to take it. As always, his way of dealing with life is psychotropic. Therefore, Holmes, in standing in front of the window and blocking out the sun, symbolizes both his own nature and his relationship to his patient.

Almost all the characters in the novel are at one point or another related to the sun. Elizabeth's excursion into freedom takes place in the "sundrenched" Strand. Light is an important element in Peter's walk to Clarissa's party. The evening would wane "but London would have none of it, and rushed her bayonets into the sky, pinioned her, constrained her to partnership in her revelry." (pp. 178-179) However, Peter is more clearly associated with the reflected light of the moon than with the sun. When Clarissa looks back on her relationship with him she thinks of the garden in the morning, whereas Peter, who tends to be maudlin, remembers Clarissa sitting on the terrace in the moonlight. His grief rises "like a moon looked at from a terrace, ghostly beautiful with light from the sunken day." (p. 47) When Clarissa's presence makes such an impression on him at the end of the

novel, it is at least partly because she is still for him illuminated by the reflected light of a "sunken day", that is, by the light of the memory from his youth.

Another image widely used to indicate approval or disapproval of the characters is flowers.

The servants look after everything else, but "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself." (p. 5) When she is in the florist's shop every flower seems to burn "softly, purely" for her in "misty beds", and a later moment of illumination is described as "a match burning in a crocus." When she returns from the florist's she thinks that moments of intense enjoyment like the one she feels upon entering her house "are buds on the tree of life, flowers of darkness they are . . . (as if some lovely rose had blossomed for her eyes only) . . ." (p. 33) She thinks of her life as a bouquet when she recalls her youth where her life was something she held in her arms and presented to her parents, and Sally Seton's most vivid memory of her is of a girl with her arms full of flowers.

This positive relationship to flowers extends to the other Dalloways. Richard, unable to bring himself actually to tell his wife he loves her, brings her flowers instead, and she knows what he means. And to her mother, Elizabeth is an unsunned hyacinth.

Sally Seton finds in flowers a peace that men and women never give her. Perhaps Clarissa feels much the same, because Peter accuses her of being more interested in vegetable than human life. To Septimus, the red and yellow flowers in Regent's Park are "like floating lamps" on the grass (a phrase which recalls Clarissa's match in the crocus).

Visions which offer to the solitary traveller cornucopias are to him bunches of roses dashed in one's face. He imagines the old man playing the pennywhistle to be wound round with thick red roses, the roses from the wallpaper in his bedroom. The roses his wife puts in the room remind him of Evans, whom he thinks has risen from the dead to talk to him. In an innocently romantic escapade Peter Walsh follows a young woman wearing a carnation which burns in his eyes. To him, a woman's beauty is "a splendid flower".

Flower images are occasionally used negatively. For instance, the "pyramidal accumulation" of imperialistic Britain which weighed down on his generation makes Peter think of the flowers Clarissa's Aunt Helena used to press with Littré's dictionary. Also, Doris Kilman crushes the flowers Clarissa gives her -- which is exactly what we would expect of this unhappy woman.

Is it her fault that her body is unlovable or that do her hair as she will, her forehead remains like an egg? Virginia Woolf captures this physical and social gracelessness brilliantly: "Miss Kilman opened her mouth, slightly projected her chin, and swallowed down the last inches of chocolate éclair, then wiped her fingers, and washed tea round in her cup." (p. 146) Doris knows she will never come first with anyone and so she seeks consolation in religion and learning. But sometimes it seems her comforts are all she lives for -- her dinner, her tea, her hot water bottle at night. And there really is nothing else in life, unless she can win Elizabeth. Even her religion is not satisfactory. Her spiritual advisor supposedly gives her words of comfort:

Mr. Whittaker had said she was there for a purpose. But no one knew the agony! He said, pointing to the crucifix, that God knew. But why should she have to suffer when other women, like Clarissa Dalloway, escaped? Knowledge comes through suffering, said Mr. Whittaker. (p. 143)

No wonder Clarissa says of Doris that her soul is "rusted with that grievance sticking into it." (p. 14) Apparently her books are no real consolation either, but she lacks the self-knowledge to admit it. She is not Mary Datchet in *Night and Day* who, after losing Ralph Denham, gives herself to her work but with the clear knowledge that having lost what is best she cannot pretend that any other view of things serves instead.

There is an interesting contrast between Septimus and Miss Kilman involving hands. It shows how the man who loves life differs from the egotist. Whereas Septimus's hand lies upon the water, suggesting that he is at ease in the unifying element, Miss Kilman's hands show that she is never at ease. She can see the universe only as it relates to herself, and her egotism destroys her peace. She is incapable of perceiving the detached, indifferent, and therefore consoling universe. Her hands reveal her nature while she has tea with Elizabeth. Miss Kilman does not want her to go. Her large hand opens and shuts on the table. Elizabeth is going to her mother's party that evening. Miss Kilman thinks: ". . .if she could clasp her, if she could make her hers absolutely and forever and then die. . . ." (p. 146) But she feels Elizabeth turning against her, and her thick fingers curl inwards. The ugliness, the inward, self-directed movement is so typical of her that Elizabeth leaves like a dumb creature galloping

away in horror as again Miss Kilman's great hand open and shuts. As it shuts, it is itching to crush the flowers of existence.

We can see two major differences between *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway* in the way imagery is used to create character. First, instead of asking, as she did in *Jacob's Room*, whether we can ever truly know another human being, Virginia Woolf here shows the possibility of intuitive knowledge. Thus images created in one consciousness are echoed in another as she tunnels into her characters' minds to find the place where they meet. One conclusion to be drawn from these two novels is that where reason fails, intuition succeeds. Second, there is a new moral dimension. Thus one group of characters is positively related to certain images while the other group is negatively related to them.

Another major difference between the two novels is in structure. In *Jacob's Room* the colour images suggested life and death simultaneously, and we followed Jacob from youth to death. Thus individual colour images became paradigms of the story line of the novel. However, because of its episodic nature, the novel seemed rather to stop than to end, whereas in *Mrs. Dalloway* the two main characters are so related that everything falls into place naturally when Clarissa hears about Septimus's death. Other structural devices include unity of time and the patterning of theme and character-creating images such as waves and the sun in such a way as to create a strong sense of form. Thus structure, theme, and character are all improved because of Virginia Woolf's greater virtuosity in handling images.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PERSISTENCE OF MEMORY

In *To the Lighthouse* Virginia Woolf concentrates on personal relationships to a greater extent than in either of the two novels discussed to this point, and imagery plays a significant role in her endeavour to reveal the personalities of the characters in the novel and the nature of the attractions and dissensions that develop. The novel springs from Virginia Woolf's memory of her parents. She records in her diary when setting out to write *To the Lighthouse* that she intends to do her father "once and for all" and "her mother too". The novel is, then, like *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, a laying to rest of ghosts. When we read that Ramsay journeys to the lighthouse "for his own pleasure and in memory of dead people,"¹ we sense that the novelist is urged to her artistic journey by the same motivations.

The novel contains a group of nucleus images which give the work its particular colouration. Some of these images are eyes, the lighthouse, water, birds, and veils. Ramsay is far-sighted, has the eye of an eagle, while his wife is near-sighted, and the poet Carmichael has yellow cat's eyes. The lighthouse operates as a principle of order and as such is identified with the philosopher Ramsay. But Mrs.

¹Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York, 1955), p. 246. All further references to this book will be included in the text.

Ramsay, who sees it as through a mist, is also identified with it. Water imagery is frequently associated with Mrs. Ramsay's fecundity and her husband's aridity. Waves alternately suggest order and chaos. Ramsay in particular is often associated with birds -- a desolate sea-bird, a bird of prey, a bird leaping into space -- and Mrs. Ramsay is associated with the veil of civilization. The related image of a curtain suggests Ramsay's lack of insight.

However, it is equally useful to discuss the imagery according to tenor rather than vehicle. Taking this approach we see certain themes emerging, particularly those of intuition versus reason and love versus domination. Thus, under the theme of intuition we find Carmichael's yellow cat's eyes, the veils of civilization, Mrs. Ramsay's mind alighting exactly as a bird, and the pushing aside of the leathern curtain. Under reason we find such images as the closed leathern curtain and a stake in a channel for people to steer by. Under the theme of love we encounter sunlight, a candle, green, a yellow veil, and the veil of civilization, while under domination there are images of knives, beaks, a raised hand, and a crushed foot.

The following discussion will rely on both approaches to the imagery according to which seems to suit the discussion better at that time. The first part of the discussion, which is concerned with the search for reality in *To the Lighthouse*, begins with a discussion of vehicle; the second part, which concentrates on individual characters, often focuses on tenor, although the discussion of relationships, particularly the one between James and Ramsay, reverts to the vehicle approach. In the third part of the chapter the discussions of reality

and character come together in an analysis of the importance of Lily Briscoe's painting to the novel.

Image Patterns and the Search for Reality

To the Lighthouse is concerned with chaos and order. For instance, when we consider the water imagery we see that it is related, on the one hand, to Mrs. Ramsay's sense of chaos, and, on the other, to the unity towards which the whole book moves.

Although the water imagery has changing associations, it is not used as it is in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* where it has negative associations in the first half of the novel (for instance, the square ditch) and positive associations later (for instance, the girl standing near the shore). Rather, the wave and water images are associated with chaos and order at random, the meaning of the image being determined by the context.

There are times when the sound of the waves makes Mrs. Ramsay think of the ghostly roll of drums. (The same sound presaged Jacob's death.) Later, outraged by her husband's lack of tact, she feels bespattered by "the drench of dirty water." (p. 51) At another point the fall of the wave makes her think of the ominous lack of truthfulness in her relationship with her husband. In "Times Passes", the water-chaos theme is taken up by the omniscient narrator. The house stands deserted in the rain until it seems nothing will "survive the flood". Night and rain obliterate distinctions rather than reconcile differences: "Not only was furniture confounded; there was scarcely anything left

of body or mind by which one could say, 'This is he' or 'This is she.'" (p. 190) The fact that in both the state of complete illumination and that of complete darkness all distinctions are obliterated is interesting in that it shows how paradoxically close these opposite states are. Virginia Woolf's fiction repeatedly reveals her awareness of such opposites; it is death that makes sense of life and chaos that gives meaning to order. But in chaos individuation has not been achieved and in illumination it has been surpassed.

At another point, the wave image is linked to the momentary order which combats chaos. When Lily sees the Ramsay family through the "eyes of love", we read:

And, what was more exciting, she felt, too, as she saw Mr. Ramsay bearing down and retreating, and Mrs. Ramsay sitting with James in the window and the cloud moving and the tree bending, how life, from being made up of little separate incidents which one lived one by one, became curled and whole like a wave which bore one up with it and threw one down with it, there, with a dash upon the beach. (p. 73)

The moment of being is, of course, but a moment, and so the wave inevitably dashes upon the beach.

As she had done earlier in relation to Septimus Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf uses water images in this novel to create a sense of unity. It will be recalled that Septimus plunged to his death into a "submerged" world. Similarly, Mrs. Ramsay feels that as her eyes go round the dining room they unveil everyone, their thoughts and their feelings, "without effort like a light stealing under water so that it ripples the reeds in it and the minnows balancing themselves, and the sudden silent trout are all lit up

hanging, trembling." (p. 160) A few pages later she hears words that sound "as if they were floating like flowers on water out there, cut off from all, as if no one had said them, but they had come into existence of themselves." (p. 166) Although the imagery this time does not suggest a submerged world, it does recall Septimus's seeing flowers burning like lanterns floating on water. The passage also recalls his euphoric state when the barking of the dog and the sounds of the street seemed so pure and eternal, removed from all accident and human involvement. Mrs. Ramsay's image similarly suggests an impression that has been caught in its pure state, removed from its earthly matrix of contingencies and held separate, frozen in time for study.

In *To the Lighthouse*, images of breaking up the surface of water are used to suggest getting at reality. The imaginary midnight wanderer stirs pools left by the retreating tide and finds that good triumphs. (pp. 198-99) Lily's dipping her brush into the colours of her paints is a suggestively similar action.

While, on the one hand, water is associated with the act of getting at reality, it is also associated with the nature of the reality that is reached, as in the following passage:

Down in the hollow of one wave she [Lily] saw the next wave towering higher and higher above her. Here she was again . . . drawn out . . . into the presence of this formidable ancient enemy of hers -- this other thing, this truth, this reality, which suddenly laid hands on her, emerged stark at the back of appearances and commanded attention. (p. 236)

Lily struggles in her painting with an apparently noumenal reality that remains unchanged behind appearance. As we shall see in detail

later in this chapter, her struggle to resolve the formal problems of her canvass is a struggle to find the arrangement that will suggest this unchanging reality.

At times, water imagery suggests that life is unfathomable. We have already noted that Mrs. Ramsay says we never really know another person because the self so infrequently rises to the surface. In another place, her words to Cam seem to drop "into a well" where the waters, although clear, are distorting, "so that even as they descended, one saw them twisting about to make heaven knows what pattern on the floor of the child's mind." (p. 84) The image recalls the one used in *Jacob's Room* to encapsulate Mrs. Norman's fleeting perception of Jacob -- a pin dropped into water -- but in *To the Lighthouse* the image suggests how we fail in our attempts to communicate because words do not have meanings which can be transferred whole from one mind to the other.

Indicative of the variety of ways in which water images approach the question of chaos and order are the following images that suggest a unity of inner and outer, the self and the non-self. Mrs. Ramsay's relationship to the non-self is described as a mist curling "up off the floor of her being like a bride to meet her lover." (p. 98) and while sitting listening to her children playing cricket she hears "the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach, which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts. . . ." (p. 27) Inner and outer worlds are here brought into a stable relationship.

Part of the search for order is related to making sense of time. Lily thinks: "for these waters were unfathomably deep. Into them had spilled so many lives. The Ramsays'; the children's; and all

sorts of waifs and strays of things besides." (p. 286) The leaf image, as we will see later, is almost a substitute for the wave image in some contexts. It is used to express the passage of time when James's memory is described as layer upon layer of leaves. The symbolic beginning of time, the dawn, is described by both wave and leaf images: "a faint green quickens, like a turning leaf, in the hollow of a wave." (p. 192)

Although wave and water images are used extensively to present the theme of the search for reality, they are only one of a number of ways one can approach this theme in *To the Lighthouse*. In "Time Passes", for instance, the theme of reality finds various expressions through the narrator, through Mrs McNab, and through the imaginary mystic who wanders along the beach at night. Also, the images of the pools and the deserted house are important. Beauty and reality seem to become one in some passages: "So loveliness reigned and stillness, and together made the shape of loveliness itself, a form from which life had parted. . . ." (p. 195) Here is one of those spots of time where the mark of beauty is perceived so purely that the object seems eternal and removed from all possibility of change. Although at this point the rhetoric suggests the reality is non-human, it is also seen as a human creation. Perhaps this paradox can be understood if we consider the vacant Ramsay house.

The house stands deserted for a decade, except for the occasional presence of Mrs. McNab and her friend. Like all reality, the house seems to sing a song, but in this case the harmony is never fully achieved: ". . . there rose that half-heard melody, that

intermittent music which the ear catches but lets fall; a bark, a bleat . . . dissevered yet somehow belonging" (p. 212) How one understands reality is revealed through the interesting device of making the reader go through the experience himself. In "Time Passes" we are engaged in the very activity Andrew told Lily Briscoe that Ramsay pursues, in the sense that we too are engaged in contemplating the table when we are not there, the table, in this case being the empty Ramsay house.

Yet we are not following Ramsay exactly; while he tries to understand reality through speculative thought, we must do so through intuitive and emotional reaction to the images Virginia Woolf uses. But we too are engaged in trying to grasp the nature of the relationship between subject and object. What, we are asked to consider, happens to the object when it is no longer an object of human consciousness? Virginia Woolf's attitude is revealed by the descent into chaos that the house suffers until human presence re-establishes order. Her idea seems to be that the reality that remains independent of human existence must be ordered according to the nature of our human consciousness before we can hear, however inadequately, its music. Therefore, reality is both independent of human consciousness and dependent on it. Its existence is independent but its meaning is not. However, in our intensest moments it seems that we have reached a beauty which is completely independent of us, "a form from which life [has] parted." (p. 195)

Reality is perceived only momentarily, as when the curtain flaps wide for a second, or it is imperfectly understood, like a barely

audible song. Reality is objective, detached from human existence, like the loveliness of "a pool at evening, distant, seen from a train window, vanishing so quickly that the pool, pale in the evening, is scarcely robbed of its solitude. . . ." (p. 195) But reality is also subjective. The interplay of the two aspects of it are seen in the imaginary mystic who wanders along the beach searching in the pools for something to bring the night to order. (In this case Virginia Woolf perhaps slides from paradox into ambiguity.) He wants to make the world reflect the compass of his soul. This would seem to be a subjective approach, and yet we read:

In those mirrors, the minds of men, in those pools of uneasy water, in which clouds forever turn and shadows form, dreams persisted, and it was impossible to resist the strange intimation which every gull, flower, tree, man and woman, and the white earth itself seemed to declare (but if questioned at once to withdraw) that good triumphs, happiness prevails, order rules. . . .
(pp. 198-99)

This passage suggests, on the one hand, that there is an objective truth about life which all things declare, but on the other hand, that the pools are only mirrors of men's minds. Reality becomes a dream which persists. Clearly, however, this mystic wanderer wants something objective, so he goes on searching for something "single, hard, bright, like a diamond in the sand, which would render the process secure."
(p. 199)

Mrs. McNab is an interesting contrast to the mystic searcher. Rather than being a searcher for reality, she is an embodiment of it. Like the other old women in Virginia Woolf's novels, those derelicts who stand around street corners, she represents a level of life that has hardly

achieved human status. In her, consciousness has not yet become a burden which impresses upon her her separateness from the world around. She sings an unintelligible song; from her lips issues a sound "like the voice of witlessness, humour, persistency itself, trodden down but springing up again. . . ." (pp. 196-97) Around her dirge there seems to be twined "some incorrigible hope." Unlike the mystic, she never questions anything. She simply lurches and rolls like a ship at sea as she goes about her work, some primeval force carrying her on through life. She is also described as being "like a tropical fish oaring its way through sun-laced waters." (p. 200) These sea images suggest her unconscious life force. She is no thinker, but "something not highly conscious; something that leered, something that lurched. . . ." (p. 209) She is a force that just barely keeps back the chaos ready to engulf the Ramsay house.

There is one last road to reality, the way of art. Art can give to elements "a wholeness not theirs in life, make of some scene, or meeting of people (all now gone and separate), one of those globed compacted things over which thought lingers and love plays." (p.286)² The obvious point of departure for a discussion on this point is Lily Briscoe's painting, which is begun in the first part of the novel but not completed till the last paragraph, after a lapse of ten years. However, since the significance of the painting lies as much in its comment upon the characters as on the search for reality, I shall discuss the characters first before proceeding to the business of the painting.

²This sentence could be taken as the theme of *The Waves* also.

Image and Character

In order to understand how such images as blue eyes and knives serve to develop Ramsay's character and the nature of his relationship to James, it is necessary to enter into a discussion of Ramsay that goes beyond the imagery itself so as to be able to see how the images take their place in Virginia Woolf's art.

Until the publication of Mitchell Leaska's *Virginia Woolf's Light house*, criticism seemed to have reached a consensus in evaluating Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, the general attitude being that to the extent that their relationship is unsatisfactory, Ramsay is the villain. Leaska challenges this view by arguing that Ramsay's sympathy-mongering is the result of his wife's distance and solitude, and that their estrangement exacts its price on him too. Although Leaska's advocacy of Ramsay is a needed corrective, his position is not entirely accurate, and he has not really accounted for the cause of Ramsay's loneliness.

Ramsay is an easy character to judge too harshly because whereas his faults are obvious (he has a spectacular temper), his virtues are of the sterner kind and do not necessarily win the reader's sympathy. Further, it is difficult to tell if some of his characteristics are vices or virtues. Perhaps the clearest example of this is his desire for honesty. Ramsay is a courageous pessimist, a dour realist. He tells his children that facts are uncompromising, that one needs courage, truth, the power to endure for that passage to the

fabled land where our brightest hopes are extinguished, our frail barks founder in darkness (here Mr. Ramsay would straighten his back and narrow his little blue eyes upon the horizon). . . . (p. 11)

This fierce intellectual honesty is one of the things that makes his son James hate him (although he respects his father for it in the end). At the beginning of the novel James sees his father as "a knife, as narrow as the blade of one," (p. 10) and ten years later, on the way to the lighthouse, he retains this image as the peg to hang his animosity upon. The young James knows his father's virtues, that he is always right, that he is incapable of an untruth, but he thinks that his mother is a thousand times better. The brutality of his father's honesty in saying there will be no going to the lighthouse tomorrow because of the weather turns Ramsay's chief virtue into a fault in his son's eyes.

Ramsay's honesty is allied to his pessimism; he will allow himself no dishonest retreat from his vision of mankind's loneliness and isolation. He faces "the dark of human ignorance" as he contemplates "how we know nothing and the sea eats away the ground we stand on. . . ." (pp. 68-69) Philosophically, he is a skeptic. When Lily asks Andrew what his father's work is about he replies: "'Subject and object and the nature of reality.'" (p. 38) When she cannot understand this answer Andrew tells her to think of a kitchen table when she's not there. In his concern for what lies beyond sense data Ramsay is in the main tradition of English empiricism descended from Berkeley and Hume. He is a great speculative thinker but no genius,

being in the alphabet of thought stuck at Q: "A shutter, like the leathern eyelid of a lizard, flickered over the intensity of his gaze and obscured the latter R." (p. 54) (Images of the parting of curtains or veils frequently signify the achievement of vision in Virginia Woolf's writing.) In other words, Ramsay has learned by basic peg of logic but can get no further. Sprague finds it ironically significant that Ramsay cannot reach the letter that begins his own name.³

Ramsay's speculative nature is symbolized by his far-sightedness. He has the eye of an eagle, and the distant lighthouse, which to his wife is soft in the distant haze, is to him a clear, hard object. It is typical of him that he looks not at the flowers his wife is considering "but at a spot about a foot or so above them." (p. 102) His eye, always on the speculative distance, misses the immediate world: "He would sit at table with them like a person in a dream." (p. 107)⁴

³Claire Sprague, "Introduction", in *Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Claire Sprague (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1971), p. 10. He says that Ramsay's egotism makes him think of his own fame and as a result his insights are clouded by flashes of darkness. But this view of things doesn't agree with the statement in the novel that once his magnificent mind sets to work he forgets even his own name.

⁴Mr. Ramsay is long-sighted and cannot become part of a rhythm. He sees things from the outside, where the hateful aspect of repetition is most in evidence. His relationship with William Bankes becomes repetitive because it cannot develop into a rhythm. Similarly, Ramsay's philosophical work consists of repetition of what he did as a young man. (Allen McLaurin, *The Echoes Enslaved* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 179-80.)

His mind deals with facts, not impressions. His wife's disregard of facts in encouraging James's hopes for an expedition to the lighthouse angers him. In another place he accuses his wife of teaching their daughters to exaggerate. His wife, in turn, finds his regard for facts inhuman, and silently accuses him of wantonly rending the veils of civilization. Ramsay's temper is also unbearable. He fumes because Carmichael holds up dinner by asking for another bowl of soup, and James fears his father will burst out angrily because their boat is becalmed. But it is his attempts to pressure others into satisfying his emotional needs that are most distressing to Lily. She finds it impossible to paint when Ramsay strides about dramatizing himself and reciting out loud, "we perished each alone." He is all too reminiscent of Holmes sweeping down to devour. Lily can only think "he'll be down on me in a moment, demanding -- something she felt she could not give him." (p. 223) "You shan't touch your canvass, he seemed to say, bearing down on her, till you've given me what I want of you." (p.224) The result is that Lily hates him for making her play at painting, the one thing she must not play at. He demands sympathy because she is a woman, but Lily refuses her traditional role. She finds escape in praising his boots but is immediately ashamed of herself: "To praise his boots when he asked her to solace his soul. . . ." (p.229) Once, William Bankes, not knowing how to begin a conversation had praised Lily's shoes while she was painting. To an embarrassed person looking at the ground shoes or boots would naturally present themselves for comment. In both cases the comments are rather humorous because

they are so inappropriate. Yet in each case the speaker somehow gets across the fact that he (or she) is not talking about boots at all, but trying to say "I like you" or "I understand what you are feeling." Bankes's comment does not bother Lily and their friendship flourishes; Ramsay is at least mollified by Lily's slight attention.

If his wife is unable to give Ramsay the sympathy he needs, as Mitchell Leaska says, perhaps it is because she too rebels against being forced. On the other hand, viewed from Ramsay's position, his plight is almost tragic. He wants "his bareness made fertile, and all the rooms of the house made full of life. . . ." (p. 59) Fortunately for him, his wife is not so determined as Lily, and there are times she does satisfy him:

Filled with her words, like a child who drops off satisfied, he said, at last, looking at her with humble gratitude, restored, renewed, that he would take a turn; he would watch the children playing cricket. (p. 60)

Although Virginia Woolf is aware of Ramsay's desire to make the woman serve him, she does not seem to object to Mrs. Ramsay's reduction of her husband to a child, which is, after all, just another move in the same sex game. Seeing your master as your child is one way of coping with the psychological burden of subjugation.

Although there are moments when Mrs. Ramsay fulfills her husband's desires, his deep loneliness cannot be permanently removed by any woman. We can see this through Lily Briscoe, who acts as touchstone for the reader. Throughout the novel, she provides the most informative point of view, and it is through her consciousness

that the book's final resolution is achieved. Therefore, when she says that there is no helping Ramsay on the journey he is going, her words cannot be dismissed. In corroboration of Lily's view, William Bankes thinks Ramsay's solitude "his natural air". Near the end of the novel, when James sees his father sitting in the boat bareheaded, extraordinarily exposed, and looking very old, he thinks his father has become the physical embodiment of what is "always at the back of their minds -- that loneliness which was for both of them the truth about things." (p. 301)⁵ Finally, the imagery of the following passage makes it clear that Ramsay's loneliness has a much deeper cause than any coldness in his wife:

It was his fate, his peculiarity, whether he wished it or not, to come out thus on a spit of land which the sea is slowly eating away, and there to stand, like a desolate sea bird, alone. (p. 68)

The imagery here suggests not only Ramsay's isolation, but also his knowledge of both the chaos that is always nibbling away at the order we create around us and the destructive power of time.

It is, in the end, the very qualities of uncompromising severity, which for so long drive a wedge between Ramsay and his children, that eventually draw James and Cam to him, for they cannot resist the attraction of his undoubted intellectual courage. Further,

⁵Sprague notes that despite his gloom, Ramsay's insistence on facing the casualties of life squarely grows out of a confidence which contrasts to Mrs. Ramsay's darkness. (Sprague, p. 17).

it is his courage, stoicism, and adherence to duty for which his wife admires him, and by which he inspires both William Bankes and Charles Tansley. Like Mrs. Ramsay herself, who is identified with the lighthouse, he stands as a symbol of order in the midst of chaos. He stands one feels, as the epitome of the rational aspects of civilization. When his superb mind begins to work, all trappings and fripperies fall away from him; he forgets fame, losing his egotism until "even his own name was forgotten by him. . . ." (p. 69) He keeps a vigilance which spares no phantasm and he luxuriates in no illusion. Standing at the edge of the lawn (intellectually, he is always "on the edge") he inspires in his wife

reverence and pity, and gratitude too, as a stake driven into a bed of a channel upon which the gulls perch and the waves beat inspires in merry boatloads a feeling of gratitude for the duty it is taking upon itself of marking the channel out there in the floods alone. (p. 69)

As with the images of his standing on a spit of land or on the edge of the lawn, the imagery here once again suggests his isolation. The image of the channel marker also suggests that Ramsay, like his wife, is identified with the lighthouse. The fact that both Ramsays are related to the lighthouse gives added meaning to the scene of reconciliation at the end of the novel where James realizes that the lighthouse seen distinctly by his far-sighted father is no less real than the blurred image seen by his near-sighted mother. While James sees reality from the angle of vision of both parents, the reader sees both parents in the one image.

Cam and James set out on the journey to the lighthouse under protest. Not wanting to go in the first place, they conspire

together against the tyranny of their father. Cam, for instance, refuses to say she will name her puppy after her father's old dog. By the end of the journey both children are reconciled with their father and it is his courage which has won them over. As the boat touches the island, James sees his father as if he were stepping ashore to declare defiantly, "'There is no God.'" (p. 308) Cam sees him as if he were leaping into space. The significance of her vision becomes clear if we remember first, that Lily once desired to throw herself from a cliff, which was not a death wish but an expression of her desire to plunge courageously into the chaos of reality (for her, flinging one's self upon the water of chaos is plunging into painting), and second, that Ramsay told his children that one needs courage, truth, the power to endure, for that passage to the "land where our brightest hopes are extinguished. . . ." (p. 11) Surely Cam is aware now of why her father makes this journey. No loss can weaken his determination to search, even though he finds only disillusionment. If he goes to the lighthouse to recapture the essence of his wife, he goes knowing the possibility of failure.

Perhaps James' reconciliation with his father is even more important than Cam's since we know more about the nature and depth of his antagonism.

James fastens upon the knife as a symbol of his father. He sees him "as lean as a knife, narrow as the blade of one." (p. 10) The scissors which he has in his hand do not seem a powerful enough implement with which to attack his father, so he wishes for an axe or a poker. Certainly both have phallic significance, and perhaps we see

an indication here of James's sexual jealousy. But these things have a fairly simple and more general meaning, so we need not restrict ourselves to a Freudian interpretation. James's antagonism to his father is more than sexual jealousy. It is a deep antagonism that touches all aspects of their relationship. He finally finds adequate expression for it while in the boat with his father on their way to the lighthouse. He has always hated the "twang and twitter of his father's emotion which vibrating around them, disturbed the perfect simplicity and good sense of his relations with his mother." (p. 58) The images which as a boy he associated with his father have grown out of his earlier vision of his father as a knife, that is, as a destroyer: "Standing between her knees, very stiff, James felt all her strength flaring up to be drunk and quenched by the beak of brass, the arid scimitar. . . ." (p. 59) The sexual connotations are again obvious, the boy at this point literally taking his father's place as sexual partner, but they still do not spell out the entire nature of the antagonism. Even at this early age Ramsay's demand for sympathy angers James. A decade later James is still angry enough to say to himself that he will "take a knife and strike him to the heart," (p. 273) if Ramsey says anything because the boat is becalmed. Mrs. Ramsay has been dead for years so it is more reasonable to assume that there is a continuing reason for the antagonism James feels for his father than that he has never gotten over childhood sexual jealousy. What James wants to kill is not the man but the tyrant, not his mother's lover but his own oppressor, "that fierce and black-winged harpy, with its talons and beak all cold and hard that struck and struck at

you. . . ." (p. 273) We are reminded of the earlier scimitar and brass beak images. The persistence of the images of knife and bird of prey over a decade shows the depth of the antagonism, and even if James does dramatize himself a little as a Promethean figure, his feelings are understandable.

While he is going to the lighthouse, other images which help explain his relationship to his parents swim into James's mind. Ramsay's tyranny in making his children go to the lighthouse is like a wheel crushing a foot in the grass: "But whose foot was he thinking of, and in what garden did all this happen?" (p. 275) The garden is the past, which centred around his mother. The process of going back in memory is described as a journey back into the green forest of youth: "The turning back among the many leaves which the past had folded over him, peering into the heart of the forest where light and shade so chequer each other. . . ." (p. 275) The reader might recall that Virginia Woolf sometimes establishes a connection between images of waves and leaves. The heart of the forest, as well as the depths beneath the waves, is a mysterious and alluring place, and in this case James's penetration into the forest of memory probably reveals an attempt to reach the sense of unity he felt with his mother as a child, just as the plunge into water represents in Virginia Woolf's writing the achievement of unity with reality. James is in a position not dissimilar to Clarissa Dalloway's when she wanted to recapture the white dawn of youth. Clarissa had to find a new reality in the heat of the sun, just as James, as we shall see, does not simply return to the paradisaical state of childhood, but finds instead a new unity and a new reality.

The journey into the past brings James to a scene of women gossiping in the kitchen while the blinds are sucked in and out by the breeze. He recalls that at night, over everything, over bowls and plates, over red and yellow flowers, "a very thin yellow veil would be drawn, like a vine leaf. . . ." (p. 276) The world grows still and dark but "the leaf-like veil was so fine, that lights lifted it, voices crumpled it; he could see through it a figure stooping, hear, coming close, going away, some dress rustling, some chain tinkling." (p. 276) The yellow veil is the veil of civilization as Mrs. Ramsay understands it; she thinks her husband rends it. But Ramsay, envisaged as a stake in the channel, represents civilization too. This complexity is one of the things James comes to understand on the way to the lighthouse. The stooping figure in his vision is certainly his mother, and it is in the paradise of his youth that the wheel went over the foot. Thus the images of cruelty which James associates with his father recur at this point: ". . . something arid and sharp descended even there, like a blade, a scimitar, smiting through the leaves and flowers even of that happy world and making it fall." (p. 276) That last word, "fall", is surely crucial. Since James has been living with the idea that his mother's world was paradisaical whereas his father's is fallen, when he finally achieves a reconciliation with his father he is also accepting his place in the world of experience. So far, he has tried to repress the father side of his nature by clinging to the tie with his mother, but, at the conclusion of the novel, one of the many reconciliations of opposites is that which takes place within James himself.

James's latent identification with his father is indicated very early in the novel and confirmed at the end. Mrs. Ramsay first sees how James resembles his father: ". . . he appeared the image of stark and uncompromising severity with his high forehead and his fierce blue eyes, impeccably candid and pure, frowning slightly at the sight of human frailty. . . ." (p. 10) The fierce blue eyes epitomize the father side of James's nature. (Similarly, William Bankes's clear blue eyes indicate the clarity of his good sense.) On the other hand, Mrs. Ramsay's near-sighted eyes, which denote her intuitive nature, tend to turn grey. In the past, James has always seen the lighthouse from the mainland as "a silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye. . . ." (p. 276) This is surely his mother's angle of vision. But he does share his father's fierceness and intensity so that when he finally sees the lighthouse as a clear, sharp image, he is not only seeing it as his father does, for a change, but accepting that part of his own nature which till now he has tried to deny. Thus he reaches a new unity which is a synthesis of the mother and father elements in his own nature.

Part of the reason James accepts his father is the praise he gets for steering the boat, but more important is his vision of his father as an old but defiant man, his stoical face outlined against the "waste of waters running away into the open. . . ." (p. 301) It is also such images of Ramsay that reconcile the reader to this passionate, stoical man. We remember him throwing his plate out the window, embracing his children by storming about reciting poetry out loud, narrowing his little blue eyes upon the horizon, gazing at a spot

about a foot above the flowers, and sitting bareheaded in the boat reading his book. But what we remember most is Ramsay about to land at the lighthouse:

He rose and stood in the bow of the boat, very straight and tall, for all the world, James thought, as if he were saying, "There is no God," and Cam thought, as if he were leaping into space, and they both rose to follow him as he sprang, lightly like a young man, holding his parcels, on to the rock. (p. 308)

Our final impression is of a man of immense vitality and intellectual courage who commands respect even where he cannot win sympathy. At the end, the man stands before us, intensely there. As the foregoing discussion has, I hope, shown, Virginia Woolf prepared most carefully for this moment of illumination when the "wheel of sensation" turns, transfixing with radiance for a moment, Ramsay stepping ashore.

Whereas her husband's appeal is to the moral sense, Mrs. Ramsay strikes the eye immediately with her beauty. What lies behind this beauty? Rumours of a former lover persist. However, maybe there is nothing "but an incomparable beauty which she lived behind, and could do nothing to disturb." (p. 46) Sitting in the wicker armchair in the drawing room she wears to Lily's eyes the august shape of a dome. Lily thinks that her unchanging beauty could be offensive to some who found it monotonous. Many years later Lily recalls that "Mrs. Ramsay might be annoyed because somebody was late or a plate was chipped but all the time one would be thinking of Greek temples. . . ." (p. 291) While talking to her on the phone, William Bankes sees her as "Greek, straight, blue-eyed." (p. 47)

Whereas her husband wrestles with the alphabet of thought, Mrs. Ramsay's intelligence is that of intuition. We are told she knew without ever having learnt: "Her simplicity fathomed what clever people falsified." (p. 46) Her mind alights "exactly as a bird". No feminist, she takes the whole of the male sex under her protection "for their chivalry and valour, for the fact they negotiated treaties, ruled India, controlled finance. . . ." (p. 13) Perfectly happy with the politics of current sexual relationships, she wants Lily and William to marry and convinces herself they will (but they don't) on the meagre evidence that they take a walk together.⁶ Marriage is an obsession with her. She wants Paul Rawdley and Minta Doyle to marry. They do, and settle into a pattern of accepted adultery. In this area Mrs. Ramsay's intuition cannot be trusted because her desires obscure reality.

To Mrs. Ramsay, the value of domestic life lies in the civility it engenders. She cannot bear incivility to her guests, especially the poor students who admire her husband. When a scene with her husband is averted, she feels that ruin has been veiled; that domesticity has triumphed. Ramsay's ability to rend so wantonly the "thin veils of civilization" appals her. But one must ask whether this desire of hers to avoid ugliness cannot be just as destructive of honest human relationships as her husband's bullying.

⁶Claire Sprague notes that the general feeling of the relationship between William Bankes and Lily Briscoe is remarkably like that between Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey. (Sprague, p.13).

The veil of civilization is an image we have already encountered in James' consciousness where the world of innocence was covered by a thin yellow veil. Mrs. Ramsay is the epitome of that aspect of civilization which soothes away any form of nastiness. When she says goodnight to her children she wraps her shawl (obviously similar to a veil) around the skull which James insists on keeping in the room but which frightens Cam. During the "Time Passes" section of the novel the shawl unwinds, thus revealing the skull, while the entire house, uninhabited by woman the civilizer, settles down into chaos.

If Ramsay's most obvious fault is that he demands sympathy, his wife's main shortcoming is that her view of people is coloured by her own needs. For instance, Lily Briscoe is annoyed at the way Mrs. Ramsay pities William Bankes. She senses that part of Mrs. Ramsay's weariness is the result of pitying people, but further, that this pitying gives Mrs. Ramsay the strength to live again. Lily thinks that Mrs. Ramsay's judgement of Bankes is wrong because it is one of those intuitive reactions of hers to people that arises out of some need of her own. Mrs. Ramsay pities men as if they lacked something and in this way she seems to gain power over them. Yet she dominates women also. Only long after Mrs. Ramsay's death does Lily feel she can stand up to her. It is only the self-sufficient poet Carmichael that Mrs. Ramsay cannot charm. He wants neither a rug or a newspaper, and she is annoyed.

However, the Ramsays become for Lily, no matter what criticisms she might make of them individually, the symbols of marriage:

"So that is marriage, Lily thought, a man and a woman looking at a girl throwing a ball." (p. 110) This scene becomes for her a moment of illumination where the symbolic meaning momentarily emerges. Like all such moments, this one is gratuitous:

And suddenly the meaning which, for no reason at all, as perhaps they are stepping out of the Tube or ringing a doorbell, descends on people, making them symbolical, making them representative, came upon them, and made them in the dusk standing, looking, the symbols of marriage, husband and wife. (pp. 110-11)

The Ramsays' relationship is one of two solitudes in which the loneliness of the partners alone is certain. While Ramsay stands like a forlorn seabird, his wife retreats into the "wedge-shaped core of darkness". Yet, under such conditions, love still exists. Mrs. Ramsay realizes fully the inadequacy of human relationships and that even the most perfect is flawed, that even loving her husband as she does, their relationship could not bear the examination which her instinct for truth instructs her to turn upon it. But although imperfect, this relationship has its power. Mrs. Ramsay is able to handle her husband's emotional demands. She is "a rain of energy, a column of spray," which sustains him: "and into this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself. . . ." (p. 58)

The imagery and rhetoric with which Virginia Woolf describes the Ramsays' relationship tells us as much about the author as the characters. Her father is the model for Ramsay and she records in her diary that if he had lived she could have had no career as a writer.⁷

⁷*A Writer's Diary*, p. 135.

It seems likely that there is a strong personal reason for the judgment that Ramsay has "the fatal sterility of the male". (This is not the only place in her writing that Virginia Woolf seems to display a general dislike of men. I am not thinking of *Three Guineas*, which is a quite justified attack, but such things as the intrusion of the author into the narrative of *Jacob's Room* to announce that a woman is nicer than any man.) Mrs. Ramsay is able to console him to give him the sympathy he needs, making "his bareness . . . fertile." She repeats Charles Tansley's praise to him but knows this is not enough: "He must be assured that he too lived in the heart of life; was needed, . . ." (p. 59) The full difficulty of her task is apparent only when we see Lily thrust into the same position.

Although she loves her husband, even reverences him, Mrs. Ramsay draws back because his presence can dominate her very thoughts making her "feel his mind like a raised hand shadowing her mind . . ." (p. 184) This feeling undoubtedly contributes to her reticence about telling him she loves him. Perhaps, too, she feels words cheapen her feelings. Anyway, she is able to communicate her love without speaking: "And she looked at him smiling. For she had triumphed again. She had not said it; yet he knew." (p. 186) And this is the last we see of Mrs. Ramsay. But what do we make of her?

First, there is no doubt that she is the novel's central figure. Her similarities to the two protagonists of *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa and Septimus, would by itself indicate that she, more than any other figure, represents the author's deepest concerns. Whereas Clarissa

sees life as a narrow bed in an attic room, Mrs. Ramsay sees the endless boredom of "an infinitely long table of plates and knives." (p. 125) To some extent she shares Septimus Smith's anxiety and finds life "terrible and hostile, and quick to pounce. . . ." (p. 92) There can be little doubt that characters who display this tendency to anxiety, in some cases to the point of psychotic disintegration, are the result of Virginia Woolf's own mental states. One needs only to read her diary to be convinced of this. One suspects, for instance, that Mrs. Ramsay is as much a portrait of the author as of Virginia Woolf's mother. On the other hand, there is no such identification of writer and character in the case of Mr. Ramsay, who is obviously disturbed by what he does not understand and exerts the psychological power of his presence to drive the dark thoughts from his wife's head.

Left to herself, Mrs. Ramsay becomes "a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others." (p. 95) She arrives at a state of skepticism even more disturbing than her husband's, but does not reach her conclusions through reason. For instance, she thinks that we cannot know others because "it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is all unfathomably deep. . . ." (p. 96) We see only the surface, the day world of their personalities. Giving expression to one of the principal ideas embodied in *Jacob's Room* and reiterated by Bernard in *The Waves*, Mrs. Ramsay says that the character sketches we compose of our friends are haphazard, incomplete at best: ". . . now and again we rise to the surface and that is what you see us by." (p. 96) However, if contemplation leads her to skepticism, it also shows her a way out. The wedge-shaped core of darkness ranges over infinitely vast areas. It

seems to her that when she retreats into the infinite depths of the self that possibilities are limitless. She feels she is pushing aside the "thick leather curtain of a church in Rome." (p. 96) The retreat into the self paradoxically destroys egocentricity because imagination overcomes the isolation of the human condition. For instance, in the following passage the descent into the self reaches its climax when identity with the lighthouse is achieved:

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

Mrs. Ramsay's process of enlightenment has three distinct stages: the sense of disintegration, the retreat into the self, and the overcoming of the confinement of personality through imagination. The first stage is therefore not necessarily an evil if it leads to the third. In Septimus's case it did not. Mrs. Ramsay's powers of imagination, on the other hand, fortunately restore the world:

It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone, one learnt to animate things, trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one. . . . (p. 97)

Of all the identifications Mrs. Ramsay feels, it is, of course, the one with the lighthouse that is most important. A lighthouse is a point of order rising from the faceless chaos of the sea. Lily, while striving to complete her painting, realizes that her memory of Mrs.

Ramsay brings something permanent: "In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing . . . was struck into stability." (p. 241) Also, the lighthouse is identified with the Ramsay house. When Lily thinks of the eternal passing and flowing, she looks at the leaves, a frequent image of flux in Virginia Woolf's novels, and one often related to waves. A moment later Lily looks at the house, "with its windows green and blue with reflected leaves." (p. 241) The house looks like a lighthouse, the symbol of order amidst the waves. This identification of the house and lighthouse was first made during the dinner scene in "The Window" where the dining room, its windows reflecting the light of eight candles on the table, became a lighthouse. Mrs. Ramsay's beauty and force are symbolized by the candles. When she soothes her husband she feels as if "all her energies were being fused into force, burning and illuminating. . . ." (p. 58) We are told that "inside the room seemed to be order and dry land . . ." while on the outside there was "a reflection in which things wavered and vanished waterily." (p. 147) Those in the room have "a common cause against the fluidity out there." (p. 147) Mrs. Ramsay feels that "something immune from change" shines out. Out of such moments, "the thing is made that endures." (p. 158)

Since it is through imagination that Mrs. Ramsay finds reality, it is not surprising that poetry is important to her:

And the odds and ends of the day stuck to this magnet;
her mind felt swept, felt clear. And then there is was,
suddenly entire; she held it in her hands, beautiful
and reasonable, clear and complete, the essence sucked
out of life and held rounded -- the sonnet. (p. 181)

The image of the sphere is repeatedly used in Virginia Woolf's novels to indicate that reality has been achieved.

Imagery and Lily's Painting

With Mrs. Ramsay's sonnet, we are brought back to the final road to reality, the way of art. It would seem appropriate then to look now at Lily's painting and examine the ways in which it is significant to the novel.

To this point we have been discussing how the imagery in *To the Lighthouse* is used to examine themes and to present the characters and the relationships that exist among them. We have seen, for instance, that water imagery is important to the theme of chaos versus order, that Ramsay is characterized by images that stress his reason and isolation while Mrs. Ramsay is characterized by images of beauty, darkness and intuition, and that the relationship between James and Ramsay is depicted through images of knives and axes. Lily's painting, which acts as a coda for the whole novel, brings all these things together.

Before commenting in detail on the imagery associated with the painting itself, I would like to say something in general about Virginia Woolf's ingenuity in introducing the painting into the novel.

In a very interesting explanation of the structure of *To the Lighthouse*, Sprague picks up Henry James's comment in the preface to *The Ambassadors* that there is the story of one's hero and also the story

of one's story itself. Sprague points out that while James put the stories of his stories into his prefaces, Virginia Woolf put the story of creating *To the Lighthouse* in the novel itself. Lily performs the function of Conrad's Marlow or Virginia Woolf's own Bernard in *The*

Waves:

The goal is to include the creation of the story in the story itself, as an element so important that it tends to supplant the more conventional notion of "story" as the main focus of the work. The use of double characters, one rooted in life (and death), the other in art, is also a common feature she shares with many other novelists. In this mode the "life" character (like Mrs. Ramsay) lives or represents the human reality of the story, and the narrator or observer (Lily Briscoe) tries to get at the form and essence of the story through art. This is most obvious when the life character dies and we discover that the artist and his experience have been the central concern all along, that his commitment to form and meaning (rather than the other's commitment to action) is the real clue to whatever significance life may have. 8

The novel has two main sections. The first part, "The Window", is dominated by Mrs. Ramsay; the third part, "The Lighthouse" is dominated by Lily. In "The Lighthouse" Lily is grappling with the memory of Mrs. Ramsay just as Virginia Woolf was grappling with the memory of her mother in "The Window".⁹ Lily's aesthetic problem is to find a way of relating the mass on the left to the mass on the right. In a similar way, Virginia Woolf had to find a way of relating the time past ("The Window") with time present ("The Lighthouse"). Lily, in her moment of

⁸Sprague, p. 7.

⁹Ibid., p. 12.

insight, adds one stroke in the middle and solves her problem. Virginia Woolf's stroke in the middle is the short "Time Passes" section. Thus Lily's painting is a very complex metaphor for the novel itself.¹⁰ A detailed analysis of the painting brings out the full subtlety of the metaphor.

Although the third part of the novel is called "The Lighthouse", more attention is given to Lily Briscoe's painting than to the lighthouse itself. Besides being an image of beauty, the painting is the epitome of all art and a symbol of the reality for which Lily searches. The painting embodies Lily's aesthetic beliefs and is produced out of the battle she carries on with reality in the act of painting. Those two things, Lily's aesthetic beliefs, and her battle with reality, require further discussion.

There are various statements in the novel about the nature of painting as an experience for the artist which seem to come directly from the novelist. Lily's feelings of fear and excitement when setting out are exactly those Virginia Woolf records at various points in her diary. Lily feels like a swimmer about to plunge into the waves when she starts a painting. All chaos will break over her head. When she is submerged in the water there seems to be no order. Yet, paradoxically, art also gives her a detached point of view. The waves "shape themselves from the cliff top, but to the swimmer among them are divided by steep gulfs, and foaming crests." (p. 235) The job of the artist

¹⁰McLaurin, p. 201.

is to plunge into the midst of life and create there the order that is achieved by the detached eye. Art is to be created out of the perfect tension between immediacy and detachment and this tension will be revealed in the art itself. Lily thinks her painting should be beautiful and bright on the surface,

feathery and evanescent, one colour melting into another like the colours on a butterfly's wings: but beneath the fabric must be clamped together with bolts of iron. It was to be a thing you could ruffle with your breath; and a thing you could not dislodge with a team of horses. (p. 255)

Her painting, if she is successful, will be on the one hand all motion and flux, and on the other, set and unchanging. Suitably, Lily begins with a series of brown strokes, the colour associated with Ramsay. (His shoes are brown, as is the boat he takes to the lighthouse). The brown lines are the basic structure, the rational basis (Ramsay is the epitome of the rational approach to existence) over which the imagination lays its colouring.¹¹

The balance of opposites must be achieved within the artist before she can transmit her vision to the canvass. When Lily

¹¹McLaurin goes further than Daiches in analyzing the colour symbolism in the novel. He sees white as a symbol of science and reason and yellow as the avoidance of logical meaning. On the other hand, he finds Daiches' identification of red and brown as the colours of individuality and egotism, and blue and green as the colours of impersonality too rigid. Red, he suggests, sometimes stands for the public world. (He might also have noted that red stands for passion when associated with Paul Rayley.) Blue may indicate space. The colours, he points out, may be used to shape the space of the novel rather than to mean something. (McLaurin, pp. 193-94)

feels she has bogged down she recognizes the cause is her failure to find the proper balance between the inner and the outer worlds. She has not achieved "that razor edge of balance between the opposite forces of Mr. Ramsay and the picture." 9p. 287) Although at one time Ramsay might have been something of an inspiration (the brown lines), he is now a distraction. He represents the outer world demanding Lily's sympathies, telling her she must not practice her art. Yet Lily is unwilling to plunge so far into imagination that the real world is completely forgotten. At other times, Virginia Woolf stresses the similarity of art and life. Lily asks if there is "no learning by heart the ways of the world." (p. 268) Everything seems to be a "leaping from the pinnacle of a tower into the air." (p. 268) The same image is used when she thinks about entering the world of art where she feels like ". . . a soul reft of body, hesitating on some windy pinnacle and exposed without protection to all blasts of doubt." (p. 237) Perhaps what the reader is meant to take from all this is that the worlds of reality and imagination are reconcilable because there is an essential similarity between the worlds of life and art.

The close relationship between life and art is also seen in the fact that the life adventure -- Ramsay's reaching the lighthouse, and the art adventure -- Lily's vision -- occur simultaneously. Further, when Lily wants to know the meaning of life she expresses herself in terms one would think more suitable to art. She feels for just a moment that if she and Mr. Carmichael demanded an explanation of life that "beauty would roll itself up; the space fill; those empty flourishes

would form into shape; if they shouted loud enough Mrs. Ramsay would return." (p. 268) Lily seems to be talking about life as if it were an artist's canvass. And then, when she does finally have her vision, Mrs. Ramsay does return and Lily is able to add the final stroke to the painting, thus filling up the canvass.

The painter's difficulties do not end with her trying to achieve a proper balance between the inner and the outer worlds or with establishing to her own satisfaction the nature of the relationship between life and art. There is also the inadequacy of the human being to consider:

It was a miserable machine, an inefficient machine [Lily] thought, the human apparatus for painting or feeling; it always broke down at the critical moment. . . . (p. 287)

The painter's abilities are, however, no less adequate than the writer's, and because words are inadequate everyone is affected daily, not only in art, but in life:

Words fluttered sideways and struck the object inches too low. Then one became like most middle-aged people, dangerous, furtive, with wrinkles between the eyes and a look of perpetual apprehension. For how could one express in words these emotions of the body? (p. 256)

Given these problems and limitations of art, what does Lily aim for, what does she think she can accomplish? As she dips her brush into the paint she looks for the reality behind appearances just as the imaginary mystic does when he dips his stick into the pools on the beach. One wants, Lily thinks, "to be on a level with ordinary experi-

ence, to feel simply, that's a chair, that's a table, and yet at the same time it's a miracle, it's an ecstasy." (p. 300) Her desire to remain in touch with the common objects of sense data while reaching for what lies beyond or beneath them expresses exactly Virginia Woolf's own desire to unite the particular image with the single reality in which she believed.

The process of moving from specific object to the reality beyond is paralleled by a change in the artist. Through art Lily escapes the limits of ordinary experience. Her image-making faculty comes to life so that her mind throws up from its depths scenes, names, faces, ideas, and memories "like a fountain spurting over that glaring, hideously difficult white space while she modelled it with greens and blues." (p. 238)¹² The image of the fountain, which here symbolizes the image making faculty, relates that faculty to other water images of the novel and in doing so suggests the relationship between the image making faculty and the basic life force, which is symbolized at various points by water, for instance, where Mrs. Ramsay is able to satisfy her "arid" husband. In this case, the image making faculty becomes the life force in the sense that it reclaims Mrs. Ramsay from death.

¹²Although McLaurin does not cite this passage as an example, the use of white here fits into his symbolic scheme to the extent that white represents a world in which art and imagination have not entered.

If art can be a permanent record of the past recaptured, it is a serious endeavour, and Lily is justly annoyed with Ramsay for forcing her into playing at it. When she picks up her brush she feels that she is in the presence of this ". . . formidable ancient enemy of hers -- this other thing, this truth, this reality. . . ." (p. 236) Reality lays hands on her, emerges "stark at the back of appearances" (p. 236) and commands her attention:

Other worshipful objects were content with worship; men, women, God, all let one kneel prostrate; but this form, were it only the shape of a white lamp-shade looming on a wicker table, roused on to perpetual combat, challenged one to a fight in which one was bound to be worsted. (p. 236)

Feeling as she does, Lily can only regard Ramsay's sympathy mongering while she is trying to paint as an unjustifiable intrusion on her privacy, indeed, upon her artistic spirit.

In considering the specific purpose and nature of Lily's painting we note that her work, although abstract, is not wholly without reference to objects. When Mr. Bankes asks her if Mrs. Ramsay and James can be reduced to a purple shadow¹³ without irreverence, Lily replies that her painting is not of them in his sense. Bankes is a naive realist in matters of visual art. But it is clear that in both the original attempt and the finished painting done ten years later,

¹³ Sprague notes the aptness of reducing Mrs. Ramsay, whose essence is a wedge-shaped core of darkness, to a triangular purple shape. (Sprague, p. 31).

that Lily's art is concerned with formal, not naively representational problems. Just as in her mind she strives to balance inner and outer, so in her art she struggles to resolve the masses, "to connect this mass on the right hand with that on the left." (pp. 82-83) When she tells herself to move the tree further to the middle it is not the tree as natural object but as an element in the design that she is concerned with. Art must bring the parts together just as Mrs. Ramsay brought everything together at her dinner party on that evening ten years earlier. Lily pitches her easel in the very spot where it stood ten years earlier: "There was the wall; the hedge; the tree. The question was of some relation between those masses." (p. 221) It seems that the resolution she achieves on the canvass will be symbolic of the resolution of the various elements in her life. For instance, the past is very much on her mind. As she squeezes her tube of green paint she thinks about the Rayleys whose marriage has turned out badly. She goes on "tunnelling her way into her picture, into the past." (p. 258) Although colours may be suggested by the "model" in front of her, they are sometimes associated with people not present. For instance, red is repeatedly associated with Paul Rayley. Lily thinks of him sitting on the red plush seats where he plays chess with a tea merchant from Surbiton. The memory of Paul bursts "as suddenly as a star slides in the sky" (p. 261) and a reddish light burns in her mind "covering Paul Rayley, issuing from him. . . . The whole sea for miles around ran red and gold. Some winey smell mixed with it and intoxicated her. . . ." (p. 261) When she thinks of Paul in love a vision of fire rises in her

mind. Like Clarissa Dalloway, Lily is repulsed by this particular form of passion:

And the roar and the crackle repelled her with fear and disgust, as if while she saw its splendour and power she saw too how it fed on the treasure of the house, greedily, disgustingly, and she loathed it. (p. 261)

An understanding of the role memory plays in Lily's painting is important in coming to grips with Mrs. Ramsay's importance to Lily and to her art.

It is Mrs. Ramsay who inspires the stroke that completes the painting. Mitchell Leaska, in disagreement on this point, argues in his book *Virginia Woolf's Lighthouse*, that the completing stroke is inspired by Ramsay. He begins by examining the role of the hedge in the novel. He puts forward the idea that this hedge operates not as an object but as a symbol of the barrier that exists between the Ramsays. He first notes there are nineteen references to the hedges in the novel. (As his appendix amply illustrates, Leaska is very much taken up with counting.) After quoting no less than ten of them he goes on to say:

These repeated juxtapositions of the hedge and Mrs. Ramsay begin now to assume great significance. For Virginia Woolf is no longer talking about a hedge, it is clear, but rather about a barrier, and psychic blockade, an emotional wall. ¹⁴

He goes on to say that Lily wants to know what went on in Mrs. Ramsay's mind, her imagination, her desires, what the hedge meant to her. Then

¹⁴ Mitchell Leaska, *Virginia Woolf's Lighthouse* (New York, 1970), p. 119.

he jumps to the last paragraph of the novel and quotes: "There it was -- her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something." (p. 309) He concludes that Lily has finally understood the real Mrs. Ramsay and the barrier that existed between husband and wife, and further, that she now understands too the barrier between Ramsay and his son James. As a result, argues Leaska, Lily no longer wants Mrs. Ramsay but instead wants Mr. Ramsay who has become the positive force. Although he does not actually say so, Leaska leaves hanging in the air the implication that it is Ramsay who inspires the final stroke of the painting (although that final stroke, according to him, is a representation of the hedge). However, I think the text demands a different interpretation.

When Lily first attempted her painting, William Bankes commented that she had reduced Mrs. Ramsay reading to James to a purple shape. When she makes a fresh attempt ten years later she realizes that Mrs. Ramsay's earlier presence must have altered the design a good deal. (Similarly, Mrs. Ramsay's presence altered Lily a good deal.) She recalls Mrs. Ramsay's ability to give shape to a scene by her mere presence. For instance, the recalled scene with Charles Tansley on the beach seems to depend on her. Lasting illumination never comes, thinks Lily, and the best one can hope for is a match "struck in the dark". Mrs. Ramsay could bring such light, such insight because she seemed to say, "Life stand still here. . . ." (p. 240) It seems that Lily needs Mrs. Ramsay's presence now so that life will again be struck still, enabling the artist to complete her work. Mrs. Ramsay's absence becomes oppressive to Lily. The drawing-room steps, where before Mrs. Ramsay

and James had cast a purple shadow, now seem "extraordinarily empty". It is at this point that the steps, the frill of the chair inside, the puppy, the wave and whisper of the garden, seem to become "curves and arabesques flourishing around a centre of complete emptiness." (p. 266) It is fairly clear by now that the emptiness is Mrs. Ramsay's absence. Twenty-five pages later we are reminded that the drawing-room step is still empty, and a few pages further on, when someone goes into the drawing-room and by chance throws an odd-shaped triangular shadow over the steps, Lily is very much affected. The shadow alters the composition and the effect is interesting. Lily goes on with her painting. A wave of white sweeps over the window pane:

"Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay", Lily calls out, for there she sits in her perfect goodness, flicking her needles to and fro, knitting her reddish-brown stocking, and casting her shadow on the step. (p. 300)

The paragraph describing this vision ends with the words, "There she sat".

It becomes now rather difficult to accept Leaska's theory about Lily's state of mind at the end of the novel. It is true that immediately after this vision comes to her she wants Mr. Ramsay, but not because he is now the positive force but rather because she has "something she must share". We know Ramsay's journey is in honour of dead persons, in particular, in search of his wife. But while Ramsay is on his way to the lighthouse, Lily has found Mrs. Ramsay right here at the house and wants to share the experience. Also, there seems to be no justification for saying that Ramsay becomes *the* positive force. He might well be a positive force but he does not replace Mrs. Ramsay. In Lily's vision

Mrs. Ramsay sits there "in perfect goodness". Also, the concluding words, "There she sat" are so reminiscent of the ending of *Mrs. Dalloway* that they make it clear that Virginia Woolf sees Mrs. Ramsay as one of those people with the power of being intensely present. There is nothing in Virginia Woolf's writings to suggest she would abandon such a character for another. Further, we can see in Lily's vision an answer to the ending of *Jacob's Room*. When Bonamy stands at the window calling out Jacob's name and Mrs. Flanders hopelessly holds a pair of Jacob's shoes in her hands asking "what she should do with them?" there is a deep sense of loss. The shoes, the wicker chair, the flowers in the vase, the room itself have lost their meaning because Jacob, the centre of the room, is now gone. Similarly, with Mrs. Ramsay absent, things are arabesques around an empty centre. However, when Lily recaptures Mrs. Ramsay the centre returns, the scene is once more complete, and the painting can be finished. No longer are we forever cut off from the dead.

All this shows that there is no movement away from Mrs. Ramsay. There is, however, a new relationship established between Lily and Ramsay as she begins to understand him, just as there is between James and his father when James understands that his father's perception of the lighthouse is as valid as his mother's. In fact, the inspiration for the final stroke of the painting might be said to come from both the Ramsays. We have seen earlier in the novel that they have both been identified with the lighthouse. The lighthouse therefore symbolically draws together the qualities of these two people. Lily looks out to sea to find out if Ramsay has reached the lighthouse but she cannot see

for the mist. But Lily and Carmichael both feel Ramsay must have made it. Then we read: "With sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there in the centre. It was done; it was finished." (p. 310) Her vision comes to her as if the mists have parted. The final stroke seems to be the artistic equivalent of the lighthouse. The particular object that inspires the stroke is not, as Leaska argues, the hedge, but, as McLaurin so sensibly points out, the tree.¹⁵ Once, inspired by the presence of Mrs. Ramsay at the dinner table, Lily suddenly came upon the solution of relating the mass on the left to the mass on the right: move the tree to the centre. Ten years later she recalls the solution (p. 262) and a short time later, inspired by the return of Mrs. Ramsay, she completes her painting. She is inspired both by her new sympathy for Ramsay and her remembrance of Mrs. Ramsay. The last stroke fills in the centre of the painting and gives the whole thing meaning, just as Mrs. Ramsay's presence could give meaning to an entire room. The centre is no longer an empty space, and reality -- in one case the reality of art, in the other the reality of life -- rounds itself.

¹⁵McLaurin, p. 186. Also, perhaps the lighthouse, a vertical object like the tree, has something to do with the last stroke. (See Nancy Topping Bazin, *Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision* (New Brunswick, 1973), p. 46).

CHAPTER FIVE

SIX CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF A HERO

The Waves is the culmination of more than a decade of inward voyaging for Virginia Woolf. The novel consists almost wholly of the interior monologues of six characters, all friends from childhood to middle age. A seventh never gets to "speak" and dies half-way through. The book is arranged in nine chronological sections or unnumbered chapters,¹ all of which are introduced by lyrical interchapters which progressively describe a sea coast scene from sunrise to sunset. These interchapters depict a world unaffected by humankind, and when, at the end of the ninth chapter, Bernard finally falls silent, there is a tenth interchapter consisting of the single line: "*The waves broke on the shore.*" (p. 383)²

¹Rantavaara summarizes the sections of the novel as follows: (1) early school, (2) public school, (3) university for the men, (4) settling into professions, (5) Percival's death, (6) prime of life, (7) no longer young, (8) friends meeting to recollect and analyze the past, (9) Bernard's summing up. (Rantavaara, p. 10).

²Collins points out that the characters represent various abstracts of humankind: Rhoda of alienated identity, Louis of conflict against the world, Neville of absolute clarity, Jinny of sensual life, Susan of natural life, Bernard of interrelationships, and Percival of the idealized concept of mankind outside the self. He also comments on the musical technique of the interchapters where motifs are developed, diminished, and interwoven, and analyzes how these interchapters are related to the chapters. For instance, images of birth and first consciousness in the first interchapter are appropriate to the opening chapter which is concerned with early childhood. (See Robert G. Collins, *Virginia Woolf's Black Arrows of Sensation: "The Waves"* Ilfracombe, England, 1962), pp. 11-15).

Freedman provides an interesting comment on the symbolic importance of the sun in the first interchapter;

Introduction to Conventions

Before analyzing the imagery, first in terms of patterns and structures, and second, in terms of characterization, I would like to say something about the novel's conventions.

During the period of gestation between *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, Virginia Woolf records in her diary "a paradigm" for "a new kind of play":

Woman thinks.
He does.
Organ plays.
She writes.
They say.
She sings
Night speaks.
They miss.

Although she cannot at the time see the clear outline of her new art form, it will be "away from facts; free; yet concentrated; prose yet poetry; a novel and a play."³ The paradigm recalls her desire to get everything in, to record the atoms as they fall upon the mind. For some time after the date of this diary entry she works on *Orlando*, but nine months later she writes, "Yes, but *The Moths* [her original title for *The Waves*]. That was to be an abstract mystical eyeless book: a play-poem!"⁴ Two weeks later she adds:

(Footnote 2 continued)

The first section of the novel demonstrates [an] analogy between the action of the sun and the process of awareness. It concerns itself with *creation*, both in a cosmological and in an epistemological sense. The rising sun differentiates and ultimately creates the forms it illuminates.
(Freedman, p. 263).

³*A Writer's Diary*, p. 103. ⁴*Ibid.*, p. 134

Say that the moment is a combination of thought; sensation; the voice of the sea. Waste, deadness, come from the inclusion of things that don't belong to the moment; this appalling narrative business of the realist; getting from lunch to dinner: it is false, unreal, merely conventional. Why admit anything to literature which is not poetry? ⁵

Obviously, the paradigm of the playpoem represents something other than a realistic scenario, and the novel which develops out of it cannot be read as a series of realistic dialogues. The characters do not talk to each other, or to be more accurate, when they actually speak they do not say exactly what is recorded (there are a few exceptions to this rule which we will come to later); rather, what is set down on the page captures the essence of their communication. The fact that the "he said's" and "she said's" cannot be taken at face value becomes apparent when we note that the children in the nursery speak with a sophistication beyond their years. Also, when the characters are alone, their thoughts are still introduced with the same formalistic "he said" or "she said". The effect of this device is to put public and private utterance on the same footing, to remove, in fact, any distinction. The "he said's" and "she said's" are not used with their customary rhetorical force. For instance, when Bernard says, "'I see a ring . . . hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light.'" (p. 180) the words "Bernard said" stand for something like: at that moment in time and in that place Bernard existed in a certain mode of

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 136.

being largely conditioned by the factors which will now be recorded. The passages of "dialogue" which constitute *The Waves* represent something more than spoken words, even more than the conscious thoughts of the characters. Not only consciousness but subconsciousness as well as physiological states might be included.⁶

Let us now take an example of the "dialogue" of *The Waves* and see how it works. The following passage is typical. Susan, her jealousy aroused because she has seen Jinny kiss Louis, is apparently talking to Bernard:

"And I am squat, Bernard, I am short. I have eyes that look close to the ground and see insects in the grass. The yellow warmth in my side turned to stone when I saw Jinny kiss Louis." (p. 184)

The first two sentences could, if read by themselves, be taken as a rather formalized representation of Susan's speech, but there is no way the third sentence can be so read because no child would actually formulate

⁶Collins comments that the words "Jimmy said" or "Bernard said" do not refer to either dialogue or monologue but are used "simply to indicate awareness and shifting from one to another." (Collins, p. 9). Humphrey points out that there is no auditor assumed and that the character is not speaking to the reader as, for example, the speaker of a stage monologue is. "In short, the monologue is represented as being completely candid, as if there were no reader." (Humphrey, p. 25). Freedman calls the soliloquies of the novel "poetic constructions of the subjects to which they refer in which all speech, internal as well as external is replaced by 'silent' monologue." (Freedman, p. 257).

the image of the yellow warmth turning to stone. In fact, Susan does not say this at all. She does, however, have an experience which Virginia Woolf has rendered imagistically. It might be that Susan has said nothing to Bernard, in which case she has conveyed all this to him by running past him into the trees, throwing herself on the ground in anger, and screwing up her handkerchief into a tight ball.

The method Virginia Woolf uses in *The Waves* tends to remove idiosyncrasies of speech. Her characters are individualized not by the way they speak but by the way they relate to certain images. Her omission of that traditional signpost of character, idiosyncratic speech, follows naturally from the formalistic "he said", and further erases the boundary between dialogue and interior monologue. The result is that the reader is forced to forget about the habits of speech and enter directly into the habits of mind and sensibility of the various characters. At this point he can't fail to notice that the modes of existence of the characters are created largely through the novel's imagery.

The six characters who speak seem to be basically alone, each with his own thoughts and experiences, although, as we shall see, they are really six facets of one character. Their isolated existence is punctuated by periods of fellowship and communication, the most noticeable of which are the two dinner parties held at Hampton Court, the first to say good-bye to Percival, and the second arranged by Bernard in honour of Percival's memory. But even here, what we get is frequently the essence of the communication rather than the exact words spoken. We are given some and must infer the rest. For instance, we know Louis has at some time told Jinny about why he is attracted to his attic room

when she "says", "'My imagination is the body's. Its visions are not fine spun and white with purity like Louis's. I do not like your lean cats and your blistered chimney-pots.'" (p. 329) Similarly, when Rhoda picks up Bernard's image of Percival "riding along on a flea-bitten mare," (p. 270) we know Percival has been their subject of conversation. Again, when Bernard "says" Louis's heroes "'wore brown bowler hats and talked about selling pianos for tenners,'" (p. 352) we know Louis has confided to Bernard his feelings about the scene in the restaurant where he was eating alone and felt excluded from the common stream of English life. On the other hand, Rhoda confides in no one and thus when Bernard thinks about her suicide and says, "'Perhaps one pillar, sunlit, stood in her desert by a pool where wild beasts come down stealthily to drink,'" (p. 351) the tentative "perhaps" alerts us to the fact that Bernard has divined the very image of Rhoda's own mind because he is imaginative and sympathetic.

The passages which come closest to conventional dialogue are those where the two "conspirators", Louis and Rhoda, talk to each other. The difference from the rest of the novel is indicated by parentheses. It is interesting that Virginia Woolf makes thought and feeling the real centre of existence whereas speech is only parenthetical. Similarly, in *To the Lighthouse* the deaths of Mrs. Ramsay, Prue and Andrew were recorded in parentheses. However, even in these parenthetical utterances we do not encounter ordinary realism. There is an obvious poetic heightening of speech:

(" Look, Rhoda", said Louis, "they have become nocturnal, rapt. Their eyes like moths' wings moving so quickly that they do not seem to move at all."

"Horns and trumpets", said Rhoda, "ring out. Leaves unfold; the stag blares in the thicket. There is a dancing and drumming, like the dancing and the drumming of naked men with assegais."

Again, there is more recorded here than was said in words at the time.

Imagery, Patterns, and Structure

Freedman points out that in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf perfected a method whereby characters were linked through shared experiences or scenes, whereas in *The Waves* the links depend upon imagery perceived by the poet and reader.⁷ In the rest of this chapter I intend to analyze these images in two ways. First I shall examine five groups of images -- (1) night and day, (2) doors, (3) rings, (4) spheres, (5) waves -- so as to show how the images move from consciousness to consciousness thus creating the feeling that the six characters are one. The effect of this patterning of the images is to strengthen the sense of unity and structure in the novel. Second, I shall analyze how each of the characters is developed as an individual by examining his or her particular relationship to various images. Taken together, these two approaches will illustrate how Virginia Woolf embodied in this novel her love of the particular and of the moment, while at the same time expressing her belief that behind all appearances reality is one thing.

⁷Freedman, p. 267.

The idea that we live in two worlds symbolized by darkness and light is a theme that Virginia Woolf wrote about frequently, and which, of course, forms the central idea for her second novel, *Night and Day*. In *The Waves*, images associated with day or light suggest variously fact, society, the outer world, clock or historical time, and the air (as contrasted with the subterranean world). Images of night or darkness frequently suggest imagination, the inner life, mental time, and the submerged or underground world. In general, then, these two images suggest what E.M. Forster refers to as the seen and the unseen worlds, the worlds of the Wilcoxes on the one hand, and of the Schlegels on the other. However, as we shall see, Virginia Woolf sometimes reverses the general significance of these images so that light has positive associations and dark negative ones.

When Louis, hiding from the other children in the bushes says:

"I am a boy in grey flannels with a belt fastened by a brass snake up here. Down there my eyes are the lidless eyes of a stone figure in a desert by the Nile." (p. 182)

perhaps the snake on his belt is meant to suggest associations with the paradise myth. Thus the snake would stand for knowledge of good and evil and loss of innocence (Jinny's kiss). When the first Eden is lost, another, this time one of the imagination, is substituted. It is frequently symbolized by the oasis of the Nile, an image found throughout the novel.

The socially defined world of grey flannels is his factual world of the day; the underground world where his eyes are lidless (the image of a leather curtain denotes lack of insight in Virginia Woolf's novels), is that of his imagination, the night world. Similar imagery recurs with the same symbolic suggestiveness when Bernard says:

"Let us now crawl . . . under the canopy of the currant leaves, and tell stories. Let us inhabit the underworld. Let us take possession of our secret territory" (p. 189)

Louis's world of imagination is shattered when Jinny discovers his hiding place and bursts in to kiss him on the neck. In this context it is fitting that she should be the one to destroy his night world of imagination because she is the character most associated with the day. Her eye becomes the sun to Louis: "'Now something pink passes the eyehole. Now an eyebeam is slid through the chink. It's beam strikes me.'" (p. 183) Rhoda, on the other hand, is the character who is most a creature of the night. Louis, speaking of the upper day world says: "'Up here Bernard, Neville, Jinny, and Susan (but not Rhoda) skim the flowerbeds with their nets.'" (p. 182) It is significant he does not include Rhoda, who later becomes his mistress. Elsewhere, Rhoda identifies herself with the night when she says, "'I desired always to stretch the night and fill it fuller and fuller with dreams.'" (p. 318)

Louis is aware that he lives this divided existence of day and night, but he doesn't understand that others live in this state too. For instance, his comments about Bernard at the railway station illustrate the discrepancy between Bernard's outward appearance and

his inner reality. Bernard, who is going to school for the first time, invents phrases to interpose between himself and the staring faces. He looks at Louis and Neville and thinks how composed they look. Ironically, Louis is thinking to himself, "'Here is Bernard. . . . He is composed; he is easy. He swings his bag as he walks. I will follow Bernard, because he is not afraid.'" (p. 195)

All the characters are aware of the dualities of existence, although each may express this in a slightly different form. Jinny, the least introspective of all, says simply. "'I burn, I shiver . . . out of this sun, into this shadow.'" (p. 182) The change from one state of being to another is recorded simply on the level of sensation. Jinny's physical mode of existence is stressed when she says:

"But my imagination is the bodies [sic]. I can imagine nothing beyond the circle cast by my body. My body goes before me, like a lantern down a dark lane, bringing one thing after another out of the darkness into my ring of light. I dazzle you; I make you believe that this is all." (p. 264)

Louis, on the other hand, copes with the divided condition of his existence differently:

"But when the darkness comes I put off this unenviable body and inhabit space. I am then Virgil's companion, and Plato's But I am also one who will force himself to desert these windy and moonlit territories, these midnight wanderings, and confront grained oak doors. I will achieve in my life . . . some gigantic amalgamation between the two discrepancies so hideously apparent to me." (pp. 210-11)

Louis resembles very much in aim, if not in temperament, one of those E.M. Forster characters whose goal is to connect.

Bernard is similarly conscious of the discrepancy between the unseen and the seen worlds, between the inner reality and the publicly observable behaviour that creates the clock time of recorded events. He thinks about how difficult it is to touch reality, and how, despite this, the impulse of life runs through us in our night long vigils. But then he concludes:

"That is, I shaved and washed; did not wake my wife, and had breakfast, put on my hat, and went out to earn my living. After Monday, Tuesday comes." (p. 362)

It is impossible to resist exclaiming how brilliant Virginia Woolf's juxtaposition of inner and outer reality is in this instance. However, more to the point under discussion, we note that Bernard identifies night with inner reality and so by implication the world of Monday or Tuesday is the day world. His identification of objective time and the public world with day is obvious in an earlier passage where he comments that our orderly progress through life is a convenient lie. Beneath the lie there is always,

". . . even when we arrive punctually at the appointed time with our white waistcoats and polite formalities, a rushing stream of broken dreams, nursery rhymes, street cries, half finished sentences and sights . . . that rise and sink even as we hand a lady down to dinner." (pp. 353-54)

Inner time is flexible but historical time is inexorable. However, we notice that a record of the publicly observable events misses the real flow of life, cannot catch the sea deep reality of the secret and dark self. As for this inner world, "There is nothing one can fish up in

a spoon; nothing one can call an event. Yet it is alive too and deep, this stream.'" (p. 354) Bernard recounts how he might be walking down the Strand when he suddenly finds the phrase he has been searching for, as if something swims up into consciousness to enclose for all time some notion that has been haunting him. Here the night and the day worlds are no longer antagonistic. Virginia Woolf records a similar reconciliation of two worlds in the essay "How Should One Read a Book?" where she notes how the world outside the library window becomes better for us as we glance up from the pages of our book.

In some passages, images of dark and light respectively suggest, on the one hand, civilization, reason, and order, and, on the other, chaos. For instance, Louis says, "'we are extinct, lost in the abysses of time, in the darkness,'" (p. 332) and Bernard complains that the random flicker of light we call brain and feeling is powerless. Meanwhile, our lives stream away "'down the unlighted avenues, past the strip of time, unidentified.'" (p. 334) On the other hand, Louis finds positive value in historical time when he complains that "'the lighted strip of history is past.'" (p. 332) and Bernard reinforces this development in the suggestive power of the light imagery when he comments that "'Our English past [is] one inch of light.'" (p. 333) Much earlier in the novel, light is associated positively with the world of imagination when Bernard says:

"Let us now crawl under the canopy of the currant leaves, and tell stories. . . . Let us take possession of our secret territory, which is lit by pendant currants like candelabra. . . ." (p. 189)

The clearest and most persistent positive use of light imagery comes, of course, in the italicized prologues to each chapter. In these we follow the progress of the day from darkness into light, and back into darkness again. The structure of the novel therefore recalls *Mrs. Dalloway*. However, by separating the progress of the day from the interior monologues or "speeches" of the novel, Virginia Woolf has done away with the necessity of the flashbacks that would be required to tell the story of the characters' lives had everything been restricted to a single day, as it is in *Mrs. Dalloway*. In the inter-chapters light becomes the agent of creation. The ninth interchapter, for instance, suggests the return of chaos with the withdrawal of light:

The light had faded from the toolhouse wall and the adder's skin hung from the nail empty. All colours in the room had overflowed their banks. The precise brush stroke was swollen and lopsided; cupboards and chairs melted their brown masses into one huge obscurity

. . . .
The substance had gone from the solidity of the hills. (p. 340)

Light, then, suggests variously creation, the existence of meaning, or, on the other hand, the rigid and deceiving world of publicly observable events, the mere surface of reality. Darkness may suggest either inner reality and imagination, or chaos and universal dissolution. As a result of the way these images are related to the concept of historical time, public time is seen as both a convenient lie and the embodiment of meaning. Although it may frustrate us, it may also keep us sane, as is seen when Rhoda fears being "'blown for ever outside the loop of time.'" (p. 189)

The door image functions in a similar way in that it may represent either the outer or objective world (when it is closed) or inner illumination (when it is opening).

Louis, looking back upon his childhood, recalls that while he dreamed of the Nile and was "'reluctant to wake'", he forced himself to bring his fist down on the grained oak door of the headmaster's study. This door seems to represent for him the passage into the world of orderly business and accomplishment. In similar fashion a door sometimes represents for Rhoda the objective reality of the world around her. When she is alone she often falls down into nothingness and must bang her hand "'against some hard door'" to call herself, "'back to the body'", (p. 204).

Usually, however, doors are swinging doors, turning doors, opening doors, or about-to-be-opened doors, and in these attitudes they stand in a general way for experience. The first frightening experience associated with a door is recorded when Neville says he heard about the dead man "'through the swing door'". but as one might expect, it is Rhoda who most fears what comes in through the door': "The door opens; the tiger leaps . . . here the door opens and people come; they come towards me. Throwing faint smiles to mask their cruelty. . . ." (p. 247) Later she says that the swing door goes on opening, bringing in strangers, people who "'brush disagreeably with their familiarity, their indifference, and the sense of the world going on without us.'" (p.259) Louis regards the opening door with something of

Rhoda's fear. In the eating-house where he has his meal amidst the English clerks whose hats and accents make him painfully aware of his own colonial beginnings, he sees the door perpetually opening and closing and comments, "'I am conscious of flux, of disorder; of annihilation and despair.'" (p. 239) At the first dinner party he says, "'Do not move, do not let the swing-door cut to pieces the thing that we have made that globes itself. . . .'" (p. 276)

During this dinner party the swing-door becomes a focal point for the reader who, like the characters in the novel, awaits expectantly Percival's arrival. Much of this expectancy is presented through Neville's consciousness. Tension is gradually increased as Jinny or Bernard arrive, but not the one desired.

In Jinny's case too, the door represents anticipation. Watching the door swing open and shut, she tells herself that the next time it opens her whole life will be changed. But it is only a servant bringing the glasses. Then the one she wants comes: "'The door opens. Oh come, I say to this one, rippling gold from head to heels.'" (p. 247) In fact, Jinny provides the clearest contrast to Rhoda here: "'Every time the door opens I cry 'More!'" (p. 264). Or she says:

"Emerged from the tentative ways, the obscurities and dazzle of youth, we look straight in front of us, ready for what may come (the door opens, the door keeps on opening)." (p. 273)

Yet Jinny is not blindly optimistic. As Bernard says of her,

"Without illusions, hard and clear as crystal, she rode at the day with her breast bared. . . . But the door still opens. Who is coming in? she asks, and rises to meet him. . . ." (p. 368)

As she puts it herself, "'The door goes on opening. The room fills and fills with knowledge and anguish, many kinds of ambition, much indifference, and despair.'" (p. 297)

But if it is Jinny who provides the most obvious contrast to Rhoda in relation to the door image, it is Bernard who has, as in all things, the last word. The importance of the perfect moment at Percival's dinner party is that it proves that life is not so mean that we cannot control and create. It is Bernard who expresses this idea as the diners are leaving:

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 illumined and everlasting road. (pp. 276-277)

Finally, at the end of the novel, at the conclusion of his dinner in an unnamed restaurant with an unnamed companion, he says, "'But now let the door open, the glass door that is forever turning on its hinges.'" (p. 379) and he goes on to express his complete confidence in his own fearlessness in face of the eternal shock of the waves of experience.

If the door images can be divided into two categories -- those that suggest the outer world of hard reality and those that suggest the flux of experience -- it can be further seen that in both cases the door symbolizes the connection between the self and the non-self.

Like the door images, the many ring images (and related images such as loops) function dramatically; that is to say, their significance emerges out of the situation and particular character involved, although in some cases the image takes on a symbolic meaning that reaches beyond both the situation and the character. We have then what we might call

restricted and expanded uses of these images, although these two categories cannot always be strictly separated. In the restricted usage there is usually a hint of a larger symbolic meaning; it is a matter of stress.

Dealing first with the restricted, dramatic use of this image, we could take as an example Rhoda's fear of being "'blown for ever outside the loop of time.'" (p. 189) Another example is Louis's comment on the sounds of London:

"The roar of London . . . is around us. Motor-cars, vans, omnibuses pass and repass continuously. All are merged in one turning wheel of single sound. All separate sounds . . . all churned into one sound, steel blue, circular." (p. 269)

The reader will recall that it was Louis who desired to forge some gigantic amalgamation out of the two worlds of imagination and action. It is not surprising then that he characterizes the world of poetry with the same images he uses for the world of action. For instance, we find him saying in the eating-house, "'I will read in the book that is propped against the bottle of Worcester sauce. It contains some forged rings, some perfect statements, a few words, but poetry.'" (p. 240) and elsewhere he speaks of spending his life, "'in effort to make a steel ring of clear poetry" (p. 264)

Susan uses the ring image negatively. She reacts to the news of Bernard's engagement with: "'A circle has been cast on the waters; a chain is imposed. We shall never flow freely again.'" (p. 274) She again expresses her sense of the constricting power of circumstance when she says, "'Life stands round me like a glass round the imprisoned reed.'" (p. 309)

Bernard uses the ring image in an ambiguous way. Near the end of the novel he describes the gradual accretion of personality in terms of this image: "'Nevertheless, life is pleasant, life is tolerable. Tuesday follows Monday; then comes Wednesday. The mind grows rings; the identity becomes robust; pain is absorbed in growth,'" (p. 355) or he says, "'Tuesday follows Monday. . . . Each spreads the same ripple. The being grows rings, like a tree.'" (p. 373) This is ambiguous because the pleasant Monday, Tuesday existence Bernard describes is also the dull world of machine-like regularity which locks one into a way of life. When Bernard hears of Percival's death he first escapes from the routine by going into a gallery, but when he returns to the common street the "machine" takes over. In other words, becoming a tree is beautiful but dangerous; it is too comfortable.

It is interesting also to note that while Bernard, like Louis, associates rings with literary art, the difference in the way he does this suggests how he differs from the colder, less comfortable Louis. He says at one point, "'When I cannot see words curling like rings of smoke round me I am in darkness -- I am nothing.'" (p. 267) He also asks, "'But what are stories? Toys I twist, bubbles I blow, one ring passing through another.'" (p. 275) In the first instance, Bernard's rings of smoke contrast sharply with Louis's rings of blue steel, denoting Bernard's easy-going nature and less precise mind. In the second instance, the image of rings passing through one another characterizes Bernard's narrative art which contrasts to Louis's hard, self-contained, non-narrative poems which he forms always as a single ring.

When we turn to the expanded use of the ring, sphere, and related images, we note that they are often used to suggest something transcending individuality, and that the symbolic meaning which emerges is related to the idea of the creation of the perfect moment.

One of the most frequently used sphere images is the drop. Jinny, for instance, says that the torments and divisions that wrack others are solved for her night after night by the touch of a finger so that her body becomes so fluid it forms into "'one full drop, which fills itself, which quivers, which flashes, which falls in ecstasy.'" (p. 329) When Rhoda comments about the moment created at Percival's dinner she says, "'The world that had been shrivelled rounds itself,'" (p. 270) and when she feels the perfect moment is gone she says, "'The circle is destroyed. We are thrown asunder.'" (p. 274) Louis's comment upon the same experience is:

"For one moment only . . . before the chair breaks, before disorder returns, see us, fixed, see us displayed, see us held in a vice."

"But now the circle breaks." (p. 274)

Then as the party breaks up, he pleads, "'Do not move, do not let the swing door cut to pieces the thing that we have made that globes itself here.'" (p. 276) Finally, there is Bernard. His comment about the drop that forms upon the roof of his soul will remind the reader of Jinny's use of the water drop image, whereas his statement:

"Drop by drop . . . silence falls. It forms on the roof of the mind and falls into pools beneath. For ever alone, alone, alone -- hear silence fall and sweep its rings to the farthest edge." (p. 332)

while again reminding the reader of Jinny, also draws attention to an introspective nature quite different from hers. At other times Bernard says, "'Ideas break a thousand times for once they globe themselves,'" (p. 285) or "'The illusion is upon me that something adheres for a moment, has roundness, weight, depth, is completed.'" (p. 341) Both these statements could have been made by any one of the six characters, as could, "'Let us again pretend that life is a solid substance, shaped like a globe, which we turn about in our fingers,'" (p. 350) although, coming from Bernard, who increasingly becomes, as the novel proceeds, the author's spokesman, the words possibly carry more weight than if they came from, for instance, Susan. And, of course, the final word is again Bernard's. Combining light and ring imagery, he says:

"Suddenly a river snatches a blue light. The earth absorbs colour like a sponge, slowly drinking water. It puts on weight; rounds itself; hangs pendant; settles and swings beneath our feet." (p. 375)

This passage, which comes only eight pages before the end of the novel, carries us right back to the beginning as we recall the very young Bernard looking up (whereas in adult life the world hangs pendant "at our feet") at a brass knob which is created for him by light: "'I see a ring,' said Bernard, 'hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light.'" (p. 180) Thus, for the reader, the novel circles back upon itself, rounds and globes itself. Also, the passage recalls the prologues to the various chapters, especially the prologue to the last chapter quoted above. Thus Bernard's utterance implies a further, unwritten prologue, a new beginning as the sun rises once more.

To conclude this discussion of image patterns let us turn to the obvious subject of wave and related water images. As Rantavaara comments, the waves serve not only as content but determine the rhythm of the novel:

It is the ebb and flow, the rhythmical motion of the surge that reflects itself in the main stylistic devices, repetition, accumulation, and anthithesis. The sentences grow and move like waves: figure is heaped on figure, there are eddies and undercurrents, rollers and swelling surges. ⁸

The various descriptions of the waves in the introductory passages serve mainly to describe the passing of the day, which in turn becomes symbolic of the cycle of life, although further use is sometimes made of these prefaces by tying them in with the main body of the novel. For instance, "*They [the waves] fell with the concussion of horses hooves on the turf,*" (p. 250) recalls Louis's first utterance, "I hear something stamping. . . . A great beast's foot is chained. It stamps, and stamps, and stamps." (p. 180)

Rhoda frequently expresses her depression in terms of sinking beneath the waves. In one place she says, "With intermittent shocks, sudden as the spring of a tiger, life emerges heaving its dark crest from the sea." (p. 219) At another particularly painful moment she is wakened from introspection by the voice of a shop girl and comments:

"And then she speaks; her voice wakes me. I shoot to the bottom among the weeds and see envy, jealousy, hatred and spite scuttle like crabs over the sand as she speaks." (p. 286)

⁸Rantavaara, p. 27.

Louis's fear of life is most frequently characterized in terms of the third wave which sounds like a chained beast stamping. The image here suggests Louis's inordinate fear of the non-rational part of existence. The image which characterizes his poetry, a ring of steel, suggests that his art is tightly controlled, even to the point of having passion and animal qualities purged from it. When he senses that the perfect moment at Percival's dinner party is over he says, "'But now the circle breaks. Now the current flows. Passions lay [sic] in wait down there in the dark reeds. . . .'" (p. 274) On the other hand, he feels positive associations with the wave image when he says he would like to feel close over him, "'the protective waves of the ordinary. . . .'" (p. 214)

Bernard's descent into watery depths stands in contrast to Rhoda's experience. He desires to "'go under'" to visit "'the profound depths,'" to exercise occasionally his prerogative "'to explore.'" (p. 254) Here the submerged world represents the world of imagination, and there are none of Rhoda's scuttling crabs or Louis's fear of the passions. However, Bernard is not blindly optimistic: "'My little boat bobs unsteadily upon the chopped and tossing waves. There is no panacea . . . against the shock of meeting.'" (p. 322) When the watery world is distressing to Bernard he tends to feel simply boredom and dullness rather than Rhoda's intense pain. Twice he speaks of being swept along in a current of things (pp. 326, 355) and school is a place where nothing breaks "'with its fin that leaden waste of waters.'" (p. 346)

Like the other images, the water image has both restricted, idiosyncratic suggestive power and more general symbolic implications.

For instance, the themes of loss of the sense of self, on the one hand, and of achievement of unity on the other. Sometimes the image simply stands for experience itself, as does the door image.

I have already mentioned that Rhoda fears sinking into chaos. For instance, she says, "'I sail on alone under white cliffs. Oh, but I sink, I fall!'" (p. 193) Also, there is the puddle that she cannot cross because its reality seems to destroy her own sense of self identity: "'I came to the puddle. I could not cross it. Identity failed me. We are nothing, I said, and fell.'" (p. 219) Arriving at the train station in London, Neville, in the uproar under the glass roof that sounds like "'the surge of a sea'" (p. 224) feels his sense of self almost perish. And, as has been mentioned above, Bernard's sense of the tedious greyness of existence and Louis's fear of chaos and subsequent loss of the self in an ordered universe are expressed in terms of wave and water images.

The very opposite feelings, those of a sense of transcendental unity, are also expressed in water imagery. Just before she feels herself sinking, Rhoda says: "'Out of me now my mind can pour. I can think of an Armada sailing on the high waves. I am relieved of the hard contacts of collisions.'" (p. 193) When she throws her violets for Percival onto the Thames she cries, "'consume me, carry me to the furthest limit.'" (p. 318)

The waves are, most simply and most inclusively, a symbol for all experience. Bernard's recollection of the baths that Mrs. Constable gave the children establish the identity of water and experience. He says at one point: "Old Mrs. Constable lifted her sponge and water poured over us. . . . We became clothed in this changing, this feeling garment of flesh." (p. 261)

It seems then that we are what we perceive. The self becomes the accretion of moments taken out of the flux of reality. Again Bernard says:

"Then Mrs. Constable raised the sponge above her head, squeezed it, and out shot, right, left, all down the spine, arrows of sensation. And so, as long as we draw breath . . . we are pierced with arrows of sensation." (p. 342)

The process of life is a continuous baptism in the flux. The two possibilities are that we either build life and meaning out of these arrows of sensation or capitulate before their onslaught. Even those who triumph are never sure they will remain beyond the terror of chaos. Perhaps terror is too strong a word to use with regard to Bernard, but even he, just a few pages before his final affirmation, feels despair because of the dullness of his existence: "The shock of the falling wave which has sounded all my life, which woke me so that I saw the gold loop on the cupboard, no longer makes quiver what I hold." (p. 379) Then the exhilaration of life returns:

"Once more, I who had thought myself immune, who had said, 'Now I am rid of all that,' find that the wave has tumbled me over, head over heels, scattering my possessions, leaving me to collect, to assemble, to heap together, summon my forces, rise and confront the enemy." (p. 380)

The enemy is death -- that state of existence where neither sun or shadow fall, where one is beyond the probe of the double hook of sensation -- the state of torpor where no thing casts a shadow. And so, bearing the lance of Percival, the archetypal British hero, Bernard rides out against death: "'Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death.'" (p. 383)

Image and Character

There are seven characters in *The Waves*. Six of them "speak" to the reader while the seventh, Percival, remains a shadowy, mythical figure seen only through his six reflectors, the other characters. These other six characters are arranged in certain configurations. In this, *The Waves* harkens back to *Mrs. Dalloway*, although this time the patterns are more complex.

First, the characters are divided into three pairs: Rhoda and Louis, Susan and Bernard, Jinny and Neville.⁹ These pairings at once compare and contrast the characters. Rhoda and Louis are the two conspirators who become lovers. Rhoda is eventually overcome by chaos and commits suicide, while Louis lives a life divided between outward order and inner fears. Susan and Bernard are the only two who marry. Susan is closest to nature; the simplest of the six, she hates and loves. Bernard, while like Susan close to the norm of human existence, is a man of great sympathies, and, although he is aware of chaos and boredom, he also has a sense of the unity of reality and the strength to resist the forces that destroy us. That leaves Jinny and Neville. Neville loves the achievements of civilization but not its pomposity, and he is without Jinny's vivacity. Like Jinny, he has a series of lovers.

⁹As Collins notes, these are the pairings established during the walk in the garden after the dinner party in Chapter Eight. (Collins, p. 33). The reader might also consult schematic arrangements provided by Richter. (Richter, pp. 247-248). In both the diagram of the Mental Realm and that of the Physical Realm, horizontal lines drawn from Bernard, Neville, and Louis would connect up with Susan, Jinny, and Rhoda respectively.

There are further ways in which the six characters group themselves. For instance, the fact that there are an even number of male and female "speaker's" draws attention to Virginia Woolf's theory, taken from Coleridge, that the best creative minds are androgynous. Also, there are three who are basically outsiders, Rhoda, Louis, and Neville, and three who are not, Susan, Bernard, and Jinny. Neville is alienated but he is in, as his pocketful of cards shows. Louis, on the other hand, is excluded, not alienated. He is out and wants into the fraternity of bowler hats that speak without Australian accents. A further contrast between Louis and Neville can be seen in the fact that order is a mask Louis works very hard to create, for Neville it is something that he secretes from the depths of his nature. There is also a contrast between Susan's respectability and Jinny's impulsive gaiety. Also, whereas Susan clutches, Jinny gives. However, the pairings first mentioned remain the most important. Also, the order in which I have set them down illustrates how the characters are arranged on a continuum that reaches from chaos (Rhoda) to order (Neville). The most significant battle takes place on the middle field of Bernard.

With these things in mind, let us now examine these six characters in pairs, starting at one extreme with Rhoda and Louis and working in a kind of dialectical fashion through Jinny and Neville, to the middle, to Susan, and finally, to Bernard, the storyteller, who embodies at the end of the novel the synthesis made out of all the others.

Rhoda

Rhoda succumbs to the strain of an identity crisis which manifests itself in her relationships to the outer non-human world, to time, and to others. As a child she hides behind Susan so she will have no face in the mirror:

" . . . Susan and Jinny have faces; they are here. Their world is the real world. . . . They know what to say if spoken to. . . . While I have to look first and do what other people do, when they have done it."(pp. 203-04)

This inability to believe in her own reality pursues her into adult life: At both dinner parties she says she has no face. Also, there is her childhood encounter with the puddle:

" . . . in the middle, cadaverous, awful, lay the grey puddle in the courtyard, when, holding an envelope in my hand, I carried a message. I came to the puddle. I could not cross it. Identity failed me. I was blown like feather. I was wafted down tunnels."
(p. 219)

Rhoda's experience is based on Virginia Woolf's own past. She records in her diary that life is the strangest thing because it has in it the essence of reality: "I used to feel this as a child -- couldn't step across a puddle once, I remember, for thinking, how strange -- what am I? etc."^{9a} Like the young Virginia Woolf, Rhoda, confronted with the reality of the non-self, cannot answer "What am I?" Suddenly there is no self to act. Her reaction to this condition is to cling desperately to the outside world as if her actual touching of objects will make her part of what is real. In this way she tries to stop the drift into annihilation: "'I laid my hands against a brick wall.

^{9a}A Writer's Diary, p. 100.

I returned into my body over the grey, cadaverous space of that puddle.'" (p. 219)¹⁰ We see Rhoda repeat this action elsewhere. Lying in bed she says, "'I will assure myself, touching the rail, of something hard. Now I cannot sink.'" (p. 193) However, she slips into her dangerous dream world and must rouse herself again by contact with hard reality: "'Oh, to awake from dreaming! Look, there is the chest of drawers. Let me pull myself out of these waters.'" (p. 193) Images of hardness are associated with a sense of self-identity; images of softness with the disintegration of self:

"Month by month things are losing their hardness; even my body now lets the light through; my spine is soft like wax near the flame of the candle. I dream. I dream." (p. 205)

In another place she feels everything dissolving around her in a tremendous shower, but once more she pulls herself out of the chaos of her dream world through concentrating on solid objects:

"Yet that tree has bristling branches; that is the hard line of a cottage roof. . . . Putting my foot to the ground I step gingerly and press my hand against the hard door of a Spanish inn." (p. 319)

As the self disintegrates, the outer world fades and the process of dissociation sets in. It seems that Rhoda can, however, at least at this point in her life, recreate a centre of consciousness, a self, that is in contact with the hard objects of outer reality.

Doors symbolize the dividing point between the inner and outer worlds. In this case the touch of the door recalls her to reality, as

¹⁰Collins points out that it is ironical that Rhoda, who "has no body" becomes Louis's lover. (Collins, p. 26).

it does in an earlier passage where she says, "I have to bang my head against some hard door to call myself back to the body." (p. 204) Elsewhere, as pointed out above, the door is the thing through which the hostile outer world intrudes on her dream life,

Rhoda's loss of self-identity reveals itself in her relationship to time as well as to the objects and people of the outer world. She does not expand the interval and thus conquer time; instead, she slips out of the sequence of historical time and lives in dreams. When she is still a child, the long hand of the clock marches ahead "in search of water" while she identifies with the hour hand which stumbles painfully among the "hot stones in the desert." (p. 189) Surely this is not conquering time but losing it. Historical time is the medium of events; it holds them together. But for Rhoda such relationships between events do not work: "One moment does not lead to another. The door opens and the tiger leaps." (p. 265) For her there is no continuity to life:

" . . . I perceived from your coats and umbrellas even at a distance, how you stand embedded in a substance made of repeated moments run together; are committed, have an attitude, with children, authority, fame, love, society; whereas I have nothing. I have no face." (p. 330)

Even as a child she felt the terror of a discontinuous existence: "'Oh, save me from being blown forever outside the loop of time.'" (p. 189)

As well as being afraid of time, Rhoda is afraid of people, particularly of the touch of sex. Freedman notes her dread of being pierced by the bird's beak.¹¹ This symbol of repugnant male sexuality

¹¹Freedman, p. 248.

was used in *To the Lighthouse* in connection with Ramsay. Richter suggests a mythical interpretation by linking Rhoda with Leda, seeing a reinforcing mythical allusion in Rhoda's leitmotif "the nymph of the fountain always wet," which suggests Arethusa, a nymph who fled the embraces of the river-god Alpheus by turning into a fountain.¹²

If the real world is such a torture, then one way out is to build upon the darkness of the dream world, to exchange day for night, reality for dream, ugliness for beauty, and the world of the living for that of the dead. We can trace this process in Rhoda if we follow the use of the flower image in the novel.

"All my ships are white," says Rhoda as she rocks white petals in a brown bowl. "I do not want red petals of hollyhock or geranium." (p. 186) The exclusion of red seems to indicate a desire to exclude the real world. One petal alone does not sink in the bowl, but sails into the world of dreams, ". . . into icy caverns where the sea-bear barks and stalactites swing green chains . . . and reaches the islands where the parrots chatter. . . ." (p. 187)¹³ Repeatedly, the images of Rhoda's dream world are exotic rain forests, oases, and the underwater world. Visions of single columns standing by pools are always located on the other side of the world, that is, in the night world of imagination. The underwater world is similarly antipodal to the ordinary world of land reality. Jinny shows she understands in which land Rhoda

¹²Richter, p. 175.

¹³See McLaurin for a discussion of the parrot as a symbol of repetition, particularly, p. 171.

dwells when she says, "I do not . . . lie . . . like Rhoda, crumpled among ferns . . . while I dream of plants that flower under the sea, and rocks through which the fish swim slowly. I do not dream.'" (p. 203) The image of water-flowers is reinforced just a few pages later when Rhoda says:

"I will sit by the river's trembling edge and look at the water lilies, broad and bright. . . . I will pick flowers; I will bind flowers in one garland and clasp them and present them -- Oh! to whom?" (p. 213)

The reader will remember that Clarissa Dalloway says the same thing about her party; she wonders to whom she will present it.

Rhoda is so isolated that there is no one except the dead Percival to give her garland to. So she buys a bunch of violets which she throws upon the waters of the Thames as her gift to him: "'This is my tribute to Percival: withered violets, blackened violets.'" (p. 287) Although her flowers are not from the water, as she promised, they do represent the world of the dead. Perhaps the importance of purple to Rhoda is illustrated by the following passage taken from the first dinner scene. She says:

"The flames of the festival rise high. . . . The great procession passes, flinging green boughs and flowering branches. . . . They throw violets. They deck the beloved with garlands and with laurel leaves. . . . The procession passes. And while it passes, Louis, we are aware of downfalling, we forebode decay. The shadow slants. We who are conspirators, withdrawn together to lean over some cold urn, note how the purple flame flows downward." (pp. 272-73)

While the procession in celebration goes by (or so she visualizes) Rhoda experiences the inverse of the flame of life. She doesn't throw her

garland while the hero is alive, and when he is dead she chooses violets rather than laurel because of their association with the downward flame of disintegration which provides a kind of "darkness visible" in her night world.¹⁴

Although her life ends in suicide, Rhoda strives for affirmation:

"Yet there are moments when the walls of the mind grow thin; when nothing is unabsorbed, and I could fancy that we might blow so vast a bubble that the sun might set and rise in it and we might take the blue of midday and be cast off and escape from here and now."
(p. 331)

The "here and now" that she wishes to escape from is the world of conflicting, chopped-up pieces, in particular the world where the inner world (midnight) and the outer world (midday) are so opposed. This theme of reconciling what one is with what one is expected to be is a very old theme with Virginia Woolf. For Rhoda, these two areas of her existence usually create only tension and opposition because while her inner dream world is immune from change, the outer real world is threatening; the breath of the wind is like "a tiger panting". Thus Rhoda retreats from life into the abstract precision of her vision of placing the square on the oblong, or else, when the tiger leaps and the swallow dips her wings "'in dark pools on the other side of the world,'" (p. 262) she goes

¹⁴Collins suggests that the tossing of the violets is a plea for death. Rhoda has broken off with Louis and is next seen "at the end of the earth" climbing a hill in Spain. But death is not granted, life still assaults her. "Now, however, there is 'only a thin sheet' between her 'and the infinite depths'. Soon the wave will come dissolving her." (Collins, p. 27).

with the swallow into the world of dreams, and in the end drowns in those dark pools.

Louis

Louis is fearful: "'I hear something stamping', said Louis. 'A great beast's foot is chained. It stamps, and stamps, and stamps.'" (p. 180) The stamping is, as McLaurin notes, an example not of natural rhythm, but fearful repetition.¹⁵ Childhood is not for him a time of unalloyed innocent pleasure. Even while dashing himself with "'the bright waters of childhood'" (p. 221) he hears the stamping beast. The way fear and horror intrude into his childhood joys presages the way in which he is to be pulled by contrary forces in adult life, for instance, forces related to order and chaos, the day world and the night world. He is torn between the public self and the private self, between the character presented to the world and the multi-dimensional personality of his internal existence. He is drawn, on the one hand, to the world of steamships and, on the other, to that of poetry. He aims for and achieves an office with a mahogany desk and turkish carpets, and yet keeps an attic room where he looks out upon scrawny cats and chimney pots.

The son of a Brisbane banker and self-conscious of his accent, Louis wants to lose his individualism in the mass culture of English respectability and authority. For him, the headmaster Dr. Crane lays

¹⁵McLaurin, p. 130.

all terror with the authority of his crucifix. Just as Rhoda copies Susan, Louis imitates Bernard's accent. But he remains an outsider: "'I repeat, I am an average Englishman; I am an average clerk,' yet I look at the little men at the next table to be sure I do what they do.'" (p. 239) At school he wants to join the boasting boys at their play, to be like Percival who blunders off through the grasses with the little boys following subserviently behind him. Yet he is afraid of the boys too because they leave butterflies trembling with their wings pulled off. Their philistinism and brutality seem to be symbolized by their "'big red ears that stand out under their caps.'" (p. 207)

Lacking "'those simple attachments by which one is attached to another,'" (p. 346) Louis seeks communion through ceremony. He loves the orderly progress of the boys going into the school chapel, two by two: "'I like the dimness that falls as we enter the sacred building We put off our distinctions as we enter.'" (pp. 197-98) Ceremony is to him what solid objects are to Rhoda; it keeps back chaos: "'Blessings be on all traditions on all safeguards and circumspections!'" (p. 214)

Whereas for Rhoda the door symbolized the intrusion of the public world into her private existence, for Louis the door symbolizes his entrance into English public life. At school he forces himself to knock on the headmaster's oak door. Later he goes in at the oak door to enter the business world. There he finds order and takes pride in establishing the trade lines which he thinks of as binding the world together.

On the other hand, he finds the public world restricting, and thus his feelings are ambivalent. He is attracted to both inner and

outer worlds, as various images indicate. For instance, his inner and social selves are represented respectively by the images of roots and leaves and his grey suit and belt buckle:

"My roots go down to the depths of the world, I am all fibre. . . . Up here my eyes are green leaves, unseeing. I am a boy in grey flannels with a belt fastened by a brass snake up here."(p. 182)

Socially, he is placed and defined by his clothing, which acts as a body mask. And the public mask works surprisingly well. Bernard sees him as someone who has formed unalterable conclusions on the true nature of what is to be known, although the reader knows Louis is full of contradictions, doubts, ambivalences, and ambiguities. We know that he longs at times to escape from social experience, that once away he does not wish to "'come to the top'". "'Down there'" he sees the lidless eyes of a figure in the desert by the Nile: "'I see'", he says, "'women passing with red pitchers to the river; I see camels swaying and men in turbans.'" (p. 182) His dream world recalls Rhoda's with its own exotic images of solitary pillars in the desert.

And yet, he cannot give himself up fully to the world of imagination symbolized by the women with red pitchers on their heads. One of the reasons is that he feels guilty when history or philosophy distract him:

"The weight of the world is on our shoulders; its vision is through our eyes; if we blink or look aside, or turn back to finger what Plato said or remember Napoleon and his conquests, we inflict on the world the injury of some obliquity." (p. 292)

This commitment to the world of action seems to demand the transformation of the multi-dimensional personality into the clear outline of public, observable character. Louis says: "'But if I do not nail these impressions to the board and out of the many men in me make one . . . then I shall fall like snow and be wasted.'" (p. 293) He thinks of his commitment to the world of action in terms of hatchets falling on blocks of wood and fists rapping on oak doors. Trying to forge the mask of his public character, he practices his signature. However, the mere repression of the private self won't work, so he seeks instead some way of reconciling the two basic parts of his nature. Similarly, he tries to reconcile the present time of the world with the past time of history. Let us have a further look at this struggle to achieve a symbiosis out of apparently conflicting impulses and attitudes.

Louis is attracted to the inner world. As a child he says, ". . . I do not wish to come to the top and live in the light of this great clock, yellow-faced, which ticks and ticks." (p. 188) The yellow face of the clock suggests the sun, indicating that Louis's fear of the progress of time is linked with his fear of the day world of ordinary reality. Perhaps too, the sound of the clock which "'ticks and ticks'" recalls for him the beast which "'stamps and stamps'". This association would further reinforce his fear of the process of time. Certainly he articulates his fear of time fully when an adult:

"But listen", said Louis, "to the world moving through abysses of infinite space. It roars; the lighted strip of history is past and our Kings and Queens; we are gone; our civilization; the Nile; and all life. Our separate drops are dissolved; we are extinct, lost in abysses of time, in the darkness." (p. 332)

Louis attempts to reconcile himself to time. First, he forces himself to live in time present, in the world of business and action and, second, he tries to link time past, which he finds attractive, with time present, thus linking his night world with the day world. First, then, he fulfils his commitment to the present:

"But if I now shut my eyes, if I fail to realize the meeting place of past and present, . . . human history is defrauded of a moment's vision. Its eye, that would see through me, shuts -- if I sleep now, through slovenliness, or cowardice, burying myself in the past, in the dark. . . ." (p. 220)

On the other hand, he cannot ignore the inner, private life, which he identifies with time past, and if he is to live at the meeting point of time present and time past, then he must preserve the past:

"Everyday I unbury -- I dig up. I find relics of myself in the sound that women made thousands of years ago, when I heard songs by the Nile and the chained beast stamping." (p. 263)

As the image of the chained beast, which symbolizes the process of time, indicates the destructive power of time is timeless. However, if the past can be dug up through some form of *temps retrouvé*, then history will be part of the present and time will not be so horrible. However, Louis wants to reach beyond his own private history and embrace the social or cultural history of western man.

He speaks of himself as achieving an amalgamation of discrepancies. These discrepancies are past and present, private and public, inner and outer, art and business, imagination and reality:

"But when darkness comes I put off this unenviable body -- my large nose, my thin lips, my colonial accent -- and inhabit space. . . . But I am also one who will force himself to desert these windy and moonlit territories, these midnight wanderings, and confront grained oak doors. I will achieve in my life . . . some gigantic amalgamation between the two discrepancies so hideously apparent to me." (pp. 210-211)

His way of effecting this amalgamation is to move constantly back and forth between the two rooms, office and attic, which symbolize the two parts of his being. The office is the place of action where he combats the chaos he fears in the world of inaction and imagination. In the attic he composes poems as a bulwark against the apparently meaningless flux of the real world. He says he will not submit to the "'aimless passing of billycock hats and Homburg hats and all the plumed and variegated head-dress of women.'" (p. 240) Through his art he can give permanence to the flux:

"To me is addressed the plaint of the wandering and distracted spirit -- (a woman with bad teeth falters at the counter). Bring us back to the fold, we who pass so dejectedly, bobbing up and down, past windows with plates of ham sandwiches in the foreground. Yes, I will reduce you to order." (p. 240)

Perhaps the fact that he regards art as a reduction of life indicates there is something sterile about his art, an idea reinforced by his characterization of his poems as rings of steel.

In the business world, he finds he must bring order to the multiplicity of his own personality in order to act; his name, incised clearly on a sheet of paper, seems to sum up his many selves. Similarly, through poetry he imposes a simplicity on life, giving it a clear structure:

"'All separate sounds -- wheels, bells, the cries of drunkards are carved into one sound, steel blue, circular.'" (p. 269)

Neville

Neville is clear-sighted; in particular, he is the first to know death. He is therefore important to the novel insofar as he introduces one half of the life-death polarity around which the drama of the novel turns. When he overhears the cook talking about the dead man, he associates his feeling with the "'unmitigable tree": "'I shall call this stricture, this rigidity, 'death among the apple trees' for ever'". (p. 191) He sees all deaths as one death and the tree is associated, as Collins points out, with the first judgment, "banishment from the Garden, the punishment of death."¹⁶

Like Louis, Neville loves order, but unlike him he is not attracted to the traditions and trappings of order. His attitude to ceremony is seen in his reaction to the headmaster on prize day: "' . . . I cannot endure the Doctor's pompous mummery and faked emotions. . . .'" (p. 216). Bernard's assessment of the Doctor (he reports the Doctor's voice almost breaks as he says good-bye to the boys) indicates the unfair harshness of Neville's view. Neville's youthful dislike of social form is carried into his later years when he sardonically reflects on the impressive list of papers he is able to produce: "'These papers in my private pocket -- the clamour that proves I have passed -- make a

¹⁶Collins, p. 20.

faint sound like that of a man clapping in an empty field to scare away crows.'" (p. 323) To Neville a civilized man clothed in nothing but his official respectability is merely a scarecrow.

Although he scorns the false rigidity of ceremony, Neville fears the chaos of life. Bernard thinks of him as one who hates wandering and mixed things together. Neville himself says he finds it intolerable that beautiful architecture and silly chattering shop-girls should exist in the same reality. His relentlessly logical mind makes the reconciliation of such contrarities difficult.

Neville is like Jinny in that he represents "the tragedy of sex."¹⁷ As McLaurin notes, the parrot on the curtains in his room symbolize the repetition nature of his sexual needs. Although he sees himself in absolute contrast to Susan as one whose life contains no repetitions, his pederastic dream never changes.¹⁸ Nonetheless, just as Jinny opposes time with rouge and handkerchiefs, Neville opposes it with his aesthetic point of view. At the final dinner party he says we must "'oppose ourselves to this illimitable chaos . . . to this formless imbecility.'" (p. 333) Early in life he fastens upon the order of the verb tenses that Bernard recites. He seems to be attracted to the patterns that life makes rather than to life itself, which is too various

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁸McLaurin, p. 173.

and apparently without coherence and meaning. Bernard says of him that he wants life to bear the permanence and order of the little boys in caps who always turned their heads at the same moment when the break with cricket players went round the corner. Sometimes the turn of sensation gives Neville this sense of order and permanence, as when he stands in the doorway and watches Fenwick with his mallet poised for a blow:

"Then suddenly descended upon me the obscure, the mystic sense of adoration, of completeness that triumphed over chaos. . . . His mighty mallet descended; the vision broke."(p. 210)

What he adores is the one reality that seems to be caught in a moment of vision: "'Nobody guessed the need I had to offer my being to one god. . . .'" (p. 210) For him this god or reality is to be found through immersion in the flux and not in the ceremonies of society. Ceremony is based on roles and roles are the characters we give ourselves. These characters obscure the underlying personality, the reality of our being. The "'roaring waters'" are more stable than the platforms of certainty we build of our I am this's and I am that's. (pp. 270-71)

Neville goes on to say that "'speech is false'". This knowledge, combined with his awareness of his intellectual predisposition, makes him realize the inadequacy of his situation. On the one hand, he lacks that intuitive understanding which allows Percival to understand more Shakespeare or Catallus than even Louis, and, on the other, he does not *feel* the flight of the ball through his body. His

knowledge is that of the head. His conclusion is that he will be all his life a "'clinger to the outside of words'". (p. 207)

The most intellectual of the characters in the novel, Neville dreams of the scholar's life:

"That could be a glorious life, to addict oneself to perfection; to follow the curve of the sentence wherever it might lead, into deserts, under drifts of sand, regardless of lures, of seduction; to be poor always and unkempt, to be ridiculous in Picadilly." (p. 235)

But we know from the evidence of his papers that he is not poor and unkempt. This sardonic man will never be ridiculous in Picadilly. But he still thinks in the images of the dreamer, and like Rhoda and Louis he longs for an exotic desert land.

Perhaps it is because he is the most intellectual of the characters that Virginia Woolf chooses him to utter the most sustained didactic passage in the novel. His subject is the nature of art. In a room full of people he takes a book from a shelf:

"To read this poem one must have myriad eyes. . . . One must put aside antipathies and jealousies and not interrupt. . . . Nothing is to be rejected in fear or horror. The poet who has written this page . . . has withdrawn. . . . One must be skeptical, but throw caution to the winds and when the door opens accept absolutely. Also sometimes weep; also cut away ruthlessly with a slice of the blade, soot, bark, hard accretions of all sorts. And so (while they talk) let down one's net deeper and deeper and gently draw in and bring to the surface what he said and she said and make poetry." (pp. 313-14)

That Neville is here speaking for the author is suggested by the similarity of his last sentence to the paradigm for the play-poem Virginia Woolf recorded in her diary, but what is not too clear is how he begins

about reading poetry and gets around to discussing how it is made. Much of the early part of the paragraph is reminiscent of the theory of art propounded by Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. First, there is the idea that there is no subject matter unfit for art, and second, that the artist withdraws, leaving the poem to stand as a free object. Neville then goes on to talk about how the reader must be ruthless in cutting away accretions of all sorts, but one suspects that by now he is thinking as much about the writing of poetry as the reading of it. For the reader, the hard accretions would be the conditioned ways of seeing things. For the poet, they would include not only seeing with old eyes, but working with old conventions, for instance, the outworn conventions of realism (to switch to novels for a moment) which Virginia Woolf characterized as the dreary business of getting from lunch to dinner. By the time he gets to the last sentence of the quoted paragraph, Neville is surely thinking about creating as well as reading poetry. If this last sentence is taken to refer to reading poetry, then it implies that the reader makes the poem by active participation in the creative experience; through his own imagination he completes the poem. But the part about bringing in poetry out of what he said or she said indicates that Neville is now thinking more of the poet than of the reader, because what he said and she said come from the room, not the book. Perhaps the solution is that having learned to make poetry out of what is on the page, one continues to poetize reality. In other words, Virginia Woolf expects her reader, having made poetry out of the "he said's" and "she said's"

of *The Waves*, to see the world in the same imaginative way. If this is so, then Neville is equating life and art in the sense that he sees one should experience both creatively, not merely letting the atoms of experience fall upon the mind (although total acceptance is the necessary first step), but infusing them with beauty through the operation of the imagination, and in doing so, creating order out of the flux of the shower of atoms of experience, for, as we have seen earlier, beauty and design are inseparable. The feeling that by the end of the paragraph Neville is talking about more than just reading poetry is strengthened by the way he uses the net image elsewhere. He says, "'But to myself I am immeasurable; a net whose fibres pass imperceptibly beneath the world. My net is almost indistinguishable from that which surrounds it.'" (p. 324) These images of net and fibre occurred particularly in *Mrs. Dalloway* and are variations of Virginia Woolf's famous images of life as a transparent envelope or luminous halo. The objects that are brought to the surface can come from outer reality as well as the depths of the inner world, and out of these one fashions poetry or life -- they are much the same thing. The artistic attitude to life therefore expands consciousness by placing the consciousness in immediate relation to its object, making the two, in fact, hardly distinguishable, thus overcoming the confinement of individual personality. The artistic attitude is, therefore, the answer to solipsism. Neville lives in a state of tension held between objectivity and subjectivity, in the oxymoronic condition of passionate detachment and detached identification.

Jinny

Jinny, like Neville, bridges the division between inner and outer, but her method is different because, as she says, her imagination is of the body. Yet she is, like Neville, a rationalistic and unsentimental character.

Jinny also provides contrasts and comparisons to most of the other characters in the novel. In her love of the day she is Rhoda's opposite. Her desire for novelty and challenge in love makes Susan seem stodgy, even cowardly in comparison. Susan is a passionate leech whereas Jinny never commits herself to only one person. She is never sentimental in love: ". . . we have sunk to ashes, leaving no relics, no sunburnt bones, no wisps of hair to be kept in closets such as your intimacies leave behind them." (p. 330) With disdain for whatever might become maudlin, she remains romantic and intense. Her lightness and beauty are foils to Susan's plodding earthiness. She lives in the froth of the city whereas Susan settles into the timeless rounds of country life. Both women accept rhythms of life, but they are different rhythms. Susan accepts the rhythm of nature, Jinny the rhythm of her own sexuality. Jinny is attracted not to the rhythms of the country but to gaiety and glitter. Also, she labels Louis's chimney pots a "'scranne! beauty'". Like Neville, she wants the companionship of one person, but whereas his relationships are serious to the point of being sombre, hers are delightful seductions -- so much so that one questions whether she is merely frivolous.

On the other hand, Jinny is aware of the dark side of life. Perceiving the dualities of existence, she chooses very early to be a creature of sun and blood. Her awareness of opposites is suggested early in the novel where she says, "'The back of my hand burns . . . but the palm is clammy and damp with dew.'" (p. 181) Elsewhere she says, "'I burn, I shiver . . . out of this sun, into this shadow.'" (p. 182) Her choice is indicated soon after this when she wants a yellow (sun-coloured) dress for parties. This is to be expected since gold and its related colours have always attracted her. Her first recorded moment of consciousness is: "'I see a crimson tassel . . . twisted with gold threads.'" (p. 180) Whereas crimson is the colour of blood and suggests her love of the body's pleasures, gold is the colour of beauty and civilization. Her attraction to gold fits in with her love of the day. "'I hate darkness and sleep at night . . . and lie longing for the day to come. I long that the week should be all one without divisions.'" (p. 212) Here she is in complete contrast to the night-loving Rhoda. Jinny seems to carry day into night. She sees herself attracting lovers while sitting on a "'gilt chair'". She wants to be signalled out by men at parties in "'brilliant rooms'". For her, gold is also the colour of love: "'Rippling with gold, I say to him 'Come. . . .'" (p. 272) She comments, "'Now the fruit is swollen beneath the leaf. The room is golden, and I say to him 'Come '" (p. 273) and later adds, "'For now my body, my companion which is always sending its signals, the rough black, 'No', the golden 'Come' in rapid running arrows of sensation, beckons.'" (p. 298)

Throughout her life Jinny is primarily interested in her body. At school she doesn't like the small looking glass which shows only her head and so goes up to the next landing where there is a full length mirror. It is her awareness of her physical being that propels her toward her lovers rather than a desire for emotional attachment and stability, as is the case with Susan:

"My blood must be bright and whipped up, slapping against my ribs. . . . All is rippling, all is dancing; all is quickness and triumph. . . . I begin to feel the wish to be singled out; to be summoned, to be called away by one person who comes to find me. . . ." (p. 206)

In contrast, for Susan love is a dependent relationship. Jinny always reaches out with her body and in this way overcomes the isolation of self. A man smiles at her reflection in the train as they pass through a tunnel (intentionally phallic?) and instantly her body "'puts forth a frill under his gaze.'" (p. 218)

When we consider the general scheme of three sets of two characters explained above, Jinny seems to function as a physical counterpart to Neville. The combination of similarity and difference in these two characters is seen in the following passage:

"Yes", said Jinny, "our senses have widened. Membranes, webs of nerves that lay white and limp, have filled and spread themselves and float round us like filaments" (p. 269)

The image of the web of nerves clearly recalls the passage where Neville speaks of letting down one's net and bringing to the surface whatever he said or she said and thus creating poetry, but the stress on the

physical is all Jinny. As she says elsewhere:

"My imagination is the bodies [sic]. . . . The torments, the divisions of your lives have been solved for me night after night, sometimes only by the touch of a finger under the table cloth as we sat dining -- so fluid has my body become, forming even at the touch of a finger into one full drop, which fills itself, which quivers, which flashes, which falls in ecstasy.
(p. 329)

She bridges the division of inner and outer through the body, her achievement being here symbolized, as such moments of being are elsewhere in Virginia Woolf's novels, by the rather Keatsian image of the slowly secreted full drop which hangs pendant like a ripe fruit. Through her body she escapes the ravage of time and of growing old: "'Time's fangs have ceased their devouring. We have triumphed over the abysses of space, with rouge, with powder, with flimsy pocket-handkerchiefs.'" (p. 334) This is a life based on sybarite and sophisticated pleasures. If Jinny reminds the reader of any other character, it is Clarissa Dalloway, although the differences are pronounced. However, like Clarissa, Jinny is a creature of the city. The country highroad is dull to her. She misses there the shop windows and the "'bleared eyes of blue glass let into the pavement.'" (p. 190) Her habitat is Picadilly and the West End, the tube and the brightly lighted room. Her world is indeed one-sided, never far from Mayfair and never close to Whitechapel. But to her it is the real one. She wants to stand always at the centre of the civilized world, and that is how she sees the places she inhabits.

The most appealing thing about Jinny is her courage. Like many of Virginia Woolf's characters, she refuses to settle into a "comfortable dogmatism":

"I cannot tell you life is this or that. I am going to push out into the heterogenous crowd. I am going to be buffeted; to be flung up, and flung down among men, like a ship on the sea." (p. 298)

The reader will recall how Rhoda saw her life as a white petal floating in a brown bowl. Sinking was always imminent. Jinny has no such fear. In middle age she may be slightly ridiculous as she continues to pursue the young men who pause at her doorstep to straighten their white ties, but if she is ever tempted to indulge in self-pity she sees movement out of the corner of her eye and is again in pursuit of life. Bernard sums her up: "Without illusions, hard and clear as crystal, she rode at the day with her breast bared. . . . But still the door opens. Who is coming in? she asks. . . ." (p. 368)

Susan

We pass now to the last of our three pairs, Susan and Bernard. They are the only characters in the novel who marry. This fact suggests something borne out by many details, that they are the closest to the common person in life style, emotions, and psychology. Bernard's easy compassion makes him more appealing than either the bitter and divided Louis or the critical and rationalistic Neville. Susan's clutching, passionate love is undoubtedly more common than the free love

of Jinny or the conspiratorial attachment that Rhoda forms.

Whereas Bernard is the most fully developed character in the novel, Susan is, with the one exception of that will-o'-the-wisp Percival, the least developed and to my mind the least interesting. It is difficult to say why Virginia Woolf rather neglected her but it does seem that Susan did not really engage her imagination. This is peculiar since she fits into a group of characters, ranging from Sally Seton in *Mrs. Dalloway* to Mrs. Swithin (Mitchell Leaska points out her name is "S-within") in *Between the Acts* who are highly intuitive, perhaps to Virginia Woolf the female quality. But they frequently find their self-expression in motherhood, a role Virginia Woolf herself wanted nothing to do with. Perhaps in Susan's case Virginia Woolf's repugnance of motherhood overcame her adoration of intuition.¹⁹

Susan characterizes herself as one who is "'not afraid of heat, nor of the frozen winter.'" (p. 192) These images suggest how she differs from Jinny. When Jinny thinks of heat and cold, it is in terms of her hand -- the burning back, the clammy palm. In comparison to Susan, her images are restrained and rather of the indoor variety. In contrast, Susan here typically relates herself to natural cycles. The images of hands raises another contrast. When they are children, Jinny spins her fingers on the table cloth as if they are "'dancing in the sunshine,

¹⁹To Collins, Susan is "an emotional abstract, resembling at times, a South Counties Earth-mother." He sees her as a figure of mindlessness and as such loved by Percival, the societal ideal. He also notes that the yellow slab she sees on the first page of the novel serves as a symbol of sunlight, harvest, and domesticity. (Collins, p. 24).

pirouetting.'" (p. 192) Susan's fingers are usually seen twisting and screwing her pocket-handkerchief in anger and frustration. We can envisage from what she says that in later life Jinny's hands beckon lovers; Susan's, in contrast, become red from housework. Even their handkerchiefs distinguish them. Whereas Jinny speaks of conquering time "'with rouge, with powder, with flimsy pocket-handkerchiefs,'" (p. 334) we can hardly imagine the worried thing Susan screws up into a ball as being of the flimsy variety.

Whereas Jinny wants to feel that she is at the physical centre of civilization, Susan dislikes the city. She would rather not spend the night in London; to her the railway station echoes and booms hollowly. While Jinny wants shop windows along the country highroad, Susan complains that the people in London look at nothing but shop windows.

Whereas Jinny is a romantic in the popular sense of being one who pursues romantic love, Susan is a romantic in the philosophical sense of being one who achieves a deep identification with nature:

"At this hour, this still early hour, I think I am the field, I am the barn, I am the trees; mine are the flocks of birds, and this young hare who leaps, at the moment when I step almost on him. Mine is the heron that stretches its vast wings lazily; and the cow that creaks as it pushes one foot before another, munching; and the wild, swooping swallows, and the faint red of the sky, and the green when the red fades; the silence and the bell; the call of the man fetching cart-horses from the fields -- all are mine. . . . Now the day stirs. Colour returns. The day waves yellow with all its crops. The earth hangs heavy beneath me." (p. 242)

As with Jinny, the moment of greatest joy is associated with yellow, but the difference is significant. Jinny associates gold with the moment of sexual triumph whereas Susan's eye fastens upon the yellow

field during her moment of romantic identification with nature. Whereas the first thing Jinny sees is a scarlet tassel with gold threads, the first thing Susan notices is "a slab of pale yellow . . . spreading away until it meets a purple strip." (p. 180) The purple strip suggests her sombre, passionate nature and yellow and purple together suggest her particular forms of joy and passion in the same way gold and scarlet suggest Jinny's qualities.

As one might suspect of such a romantic as Susan, she dislikes school. Longing instead for the farm, her pets, and her father, she hates the antiseptic smell of pine and linoleum, the wind bitten shrubs and the sanitary tiles. Later in life she recalls that there was the "'drawing out of chairs on the linoleum'", but from the attic there was a view of "'a field unstained by the corruption of this regimented, unreal existence.'" (p. 262) As in *Mrs. Dalloway*, in which Clarissa mentions with disfavour the green linoleum in her room, Virginia Woolf uses this mean material to indicate repulsion. Susan encounters linoleum again in her finishing school in Switzerland. Tiles are also repulsive to her. In the first school she associates them with Jinny, of whom she is jealous because of Louis: "'Jinny always dances in the hall on the red encaustic tiles. . . .'" (p. 202) Susan dislikes everything about Jinny, including her physical gaiety which wins the affection of both boys and teachers. Susan sums up her school time as "'crippled days, like moths with shrivelled wings unable to fly.'" (p. 211) In contrast, Jinny's golden signal is like "'a dragon-fly flying taut.'" (p. 298)

But Susan is not merely against the meanness and regimentation of school; she is sincerely anti-intellectual. She might seem to be envious of Bernard because he rises with words and phrases whereas she is "'tied down to single words'", (p. 185) but on a closer examination we can't help notice her pride in her simplicity. We also see that Bernard comes to long for her simplicity in language. (See the discussion of Bernard that follows.) Susan's anti-intellectualism is present in such statements as, "'The only sayings I understand are cries of love, hate, rage and pain,'" (p. 266) and "'When you are silent you are again beautiful.'" (p. 266) or "'I do not understand phrases.'" (p. 267) Against intellectualism Susan poses her animalism: "'When I came into the room tonight', said Susan, 'I stopped, I peered about like an animal with its eyes near to the ground. The smell of carpets and furniture disgusts me.'" (p. 266) It will be remembered that in contrast, Louis's dream of success included Turkish carpets and mahogany. Susan's passion and identification with the forces of nature are perhaps admirable but they also give her all the virtues of a she bear. Her cry is always, "'I love . . . and hate.'" (p. 185) Above all else she desires emotional intensity, and intimacy: "'I grasp, I hold fast', said Susan, 'I hold firmly to this hand, any one's, with love with hatred; it does not matter which.'" (p. 334) (But it is appropriate that it is Bernard's hand she finds; she has always loved this man who is her partial double.) She sees clearly the difference between herself and Jinny: "'I do not want, as Jinny wants, to be admired. I do not want people, when I come in, to look up with admiration. I want to give, to be given. . . .'" (p. 211) She imagines herself talking to a lover at a ball and again

her emotional intensity contrasts with Jinny: "'The veil drops between us. I am admitted to the warmth and privacy of another soul.'" (p. 247) But once admitted there, operating under a territorial imperative of the emotions, she wants to dominate: "'I love with such ferocity that it kills me when the object of my love shows by a phrase that he can escape.'" (p. 267) She is uncomfortably like Doris Kilman. Bernard sees this egoism in her clearly: "'To be loved by Susan would be to be impaled by a bird's sharp beak, to be nailed to a barnyard door.'" (p. 258) The beak image recalls the tyranny of Ramsay.

Jinny characterizes herself as a buffeted ship breasting the seas unafraid. Susan's reference to the sea image is equally characteristic, although quite different: "'My children will carry me on; their teething, their crying, their going to school and coming back will be like the waves of the sea under me.'" (p. 266) For Jinny, life is the antagonist she battles joyfully; for Susan, life is the natural and rhythmical support of her existence.

Finally, the impression Susan creates is summed up by her own description, which is characteristically given in terms of natural forces, and which, by the way, recalls her first utterance, "'I see a slab of yellow . . . spreading away until it meets a purple stripe.'" (p. 180) She says of herself:

"I shall possess more than Jinny, more than Rhoda, by the time I die. But on the other hand, where you are various and dimple a million times to the ideas and laughter of others, I shall be sullen, storm-tinted, and all one purple." (p. 266)

Bernard

We come now to Bernard, who is clearly the most important character in the novel, the storyteller who sums up in a brilliantly sustained last chapter monologue the lives of all the characters.

Of all the characters in the novel, including Jinny, Bernard has the greatest curiosity about life. His early cry is "'let us explore'". With Susan he runs to Elvedon where they see a woman sitting writing while gardeners sweep the leaves. This experience remains with him throughout his life, becoming symbolic of a reality that exists beyond our control:

"On the outskirts of every agony sits one observant fellow who points, who whispers, as he whispered to me. . . , 'The willow grows on the turf by the river. The gardeners sweep with great brooms, and the lady sits writing.' Thus he directed me to that which is beyond and outside our own predicament; to that which is symbolic and thus perhaps permanent. . . ." (p. 349)

Elsewhere he says, "'The lady sat writing. Transfixed, stopped dead, I thought, 'I cannot interfere with a single stroke of those brooms.'" (p. 343)

His desire for experience also leads him into awareness of the flux of reality. While at times he is aware of something "'which is symbolic and thus perhaps permanent,'" on other occasions he stresses that one should nevertheless avoid absolutes: "'Let a man get up and say, 'Behold, this is the truth', and instantly I perceive a sandy cat filching a piece of fish in the background. Look, you have forgotten the cat, I say.'" (p. 305) His skepticism is also seen in

his attitude to our knowledge of others: "'But let me dip again and bring up in my spoon another of these minute objects which we call optimistically, 'characters of our friends' --Louis. '" (p. 345) These two things -- skepticism and a belief in a reality behind the flux of life -- are the cornerstones of Bernard's worldview.

One of the images he fastens upon to express his belief in an objective, unchanging reality is, of course, the willow tree where the gardeners sweep and the lady sits writing. There is also the willow tree by a river where he once sat with friends at college:

"I was saying there was a willow tree. Its shower of falling branches, its creased and crooked bark had the effect of what remains outside our illusions yet cannot stay them, is changed by them for the moment, yet shows through stable, still, and with a sternness that our lives lack. Hence the comment it makes; the standard it supplies, and the reason why, as we flow and change, it seems to measure." (pp. 350-51)

But with adult life comes disillusionment and anxiety, so the scene at Elvedon takes on new meaning:

"The gardeners swept; the lady at the table sat writing. But now I made the contribution of maturity to childhood's intuitions -- satiety and doom; the sense of what is inescapable in our lot; death; the knowledge of limitations; how life is more obdurate than one had thought it." (p. 363)

To express the moment of illumination where permanence is seen behind the flux, Bernard uses the image of a drop of water. The two images, the tree, symbolic of outer reality, and the drop, symbolic of the pure moment of being, come together in the following passage:

"But I paused, looked at the tree, and as I looked in autumn at the fiery and yellow branches, some sediment formed; I formed; a drop fell -- that is from some completed experience I had emerged." (p. 352)

Here the use of the water image suggests that one is the summation of one's moments of pure being. At other times Bernard speaks of "'time letting fall its drop'" (p. 303) or of the drop of time "'tapering to a point'". (p. 304) Both images again suggest reality being distilled from the flux.

The following passage also joins these two images of tree and drop of water so that they symbolize outer reality and the moment of being respectively. Two figures standing with their backs to the window appear against the branches of a spreading tree:

"With a shock of emotion one feels, 'There are figures without features robed in beauty, doomed yet eternal.' In the pause that follows, while the ripples spread, the girl, to whom one should be talking says to herself, 'He is old'. But she is wrong. It is not age; it is that a drop has fallen; another drop. Time has given the arrangement another shake. Out we creep from the arch of the currant leaves, out into a wider world. The true order of things -- this is our perpetual illusion -- is now apparent. Thus, in a moment, in a drawing-room, our life adjusts itself to the majestic march of the day across the sky." (p. 365)

This is an immensely skillful piece of writing. First, the scene is so clearly and economically presented. An old man stands in a drawing room talking to a young woman. It is still light out. Suddenly their conversation comes to an unexpected halt and the young woman thinks that her aged companion's mind has wandered. It has, but not in the way she thinks. Rather, his attention is riveted on the scene before him. He is struck by the painful beauty of the couple before him, their beauty,

their mutability. The tree recalls the willow tree of outer reality, and the yew trees of death of Hampton Court. Bernard's ambiguity towards the couple -- he is aware of both their abstract (featureless) and perfect beauty, which makes them imperishable, and their humanity, which marks them as doomed -- is paralleled by his ambivalence toward human knowledge. This moment seems to reveal the shape of reality, but it is, he goes on to say, our perpetual illusion to think we have seen reality face to face. The passage suggests that one goes on building reality out of the moment but what one builds constantly collapses. Also, the creeping out from under the currant leaves, an image from the first chapter, suggests entrance into adult life as well as movement from ignorance into illumination. But then the next sentence casts doubt on what has been achieved. Finally, the paragraph ends with a reference to the "'majestic march of the day'", which not only calls the reader's attention to time but to the interchapters of the novel, thus juxtaposing in the reader's consciousness the timeless epiphany and the time-centred process of the rising and setting sun.

This experience is typical of Bernard in that his insights are usually triggered by people rather than by nature or chimney pots. Unlike Neville or Jinny, he does not react to only one person at a time. Rather, unwilling to rush forward to take up the burden of individual existence, he wants to listen in wise passiveness to the almost wordless song of the world around him. He thinks of himself, to change the metaphor, as a stream reflecting all that passes.

Bernard's surroundings always help define him. This is a theme that Virginia Woolf has already dealt with at length in

Jacob's Room. Bernard says, "'But now let me ask . . . which of these people am I? It depends so much upon the room.'" (p. 230) Later he adds, "'Thus my character is in part made of the stimulus [sic] which other people provide, and is not mine, as yours are.'" (p. 267) He thinks of his personality as partaking in the flux of life:

"I am made and remade continually. Different people draw different words from me.

Thus there is not one person but fifty people whom I want to sit beside tonight." (p. 268)

In contrast, Neville, the epitome of single-minded clarity, wants only one person.

Bernard is androgynous. He comments upon himself: "'But joined to the sensibility of a woman (I am here quoting my own biographer) Bernard possessed the logical sobriety of a man.'" (p. 227) In fact, he represents the synthesis of the emotional and intellectual forces in *The Waves*.

His wider view of things also shows up in his ability to see the general pattern of things without losing the individual. It is the panorama of life that attracts him, "'seen not from the roof but from the third story window . . . not what one woman says to one man, even if the man is myself.'" (p. 344) His angle of vision leads into abstraction, as with the featureless figure robed in beauty. But for him the process of abstraction never abandons the human form. What he wants is not the reality of the single voice but that of the general murmur:

". . . I am drawn irresistibly to the sound of the chorus chanting its old, chanting its almost wordless, almost senseless song that comes across courts at night; which we hear now booming round us as cars and omnibuses take people to theatres." (p. 347)

This passage reveals Bernard's relationship to some characters in the other novels we have discussed.

He is like Peter Walsh who is attracted to the unintelligible song of the woman across from the tube station, and this woman in turn reminds us of the prostitute with the violets in *Jacob's Room* and Mrs. McNab in *To The Lighthouse*. The song Bernard is attuned to is the almost inarticulate song of outer reality and of common humankind. In fact, Bernard is the one character in the novel who could act as the repository of the struggles and insights of the other characters. Unselfconscious and at ease, he moves surely through the world. Neville describes him entering the dining room at Hampton Court:

"That is Bernard. As he pulls off his coat he shows, of course, the blue shirt under the arm pits. And then, unlike the rest of us, he comes in without pushing open a door, without knowing that he is in a room full of strangers. He does not look in the glass."
(p. 259)

On the train Bernard talks to strangers, delights in any camaraderie, no matter how short, but always wishes whatever is established could go on forever:

"Over us all broods a splendid unanimity. We are enlarged and solemnized and brushed into uniformity . . . because we have only one desire -- to arrive at the station. . . . I do not want the connection which has bound us together sitting opposite each other to be broken." (p. 252)

He wants people around him because, as he puts it, left by himself he sees the "'thin places'" in his own stories. People relieve him of endless self-analysis and self-criticism. He wants, therefore, the panorama of life: "'The private room bores me, also the sky.'" (p. 304) He rejects both the merely particular and the non-human absolute of the speculative thinker.

Neville is the first to see the value of Bernard's storytelling: "'Let him describe what we have all seen,'" he says, "'so that it becomes a sequence.'" (p. 200) Yet he feels that Bernard misses much: "'He tells our story with extraordinary understanding except what we most feel.'" (p. 223) What Neville does not himself see is that Bernard too questions his own abilities, and, indeed, the very art of the storyteller itself, far more deeply than Neville ever will. First, Bernard feels that he lacks creative power. He feels that the real novelist could go on indefinitely imagining whereas he needs the admixture of other personalities or his stories seem thin. He attributes his lack of invention also to his divided consciousness which, never given up wholly to creativity, is always aware of "'grey ashes in a burnt out grate.'" (p. 230) In the moment of birth in the world of imagination he is conscious of death in the world of fact. Second, he is further aware that he can never get at the whole truth through his art: "But why . . . impose my arbitrary design? Why stress this and shape that and twist up little figures like the toys men sell in trays in the street?" (p. 306) The reader might recall that as a child Bernard rolled pieces of bread into the shapes of men. He is

still at it, giving shape to experience, finding sequence in events; yet he despairs of expressing the whole truth:

"I must tell you a story -- and there are so many, and so many -- stories of childhood, stories of school, love, marriage, death, and so on; and none of them are true. . . . How tired I am of stories, how tired I am of phrases that come down beautifully with all their feet on the ground. . . . I begin to long for some language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement." (pp. 341-342)

Terence Hewet was similarly dissatisfied with the novelist's inability to catch the whole reality. He wanted to write about the things people didn't say. To understand Bernard fully as a storyteller we must, therefore, consider in some detail his attitude to language.

To begin with, there is no doubt in his mind that it is his function to be a storyteller. In fact, because he depends upon the stimuli of other people he will, as he sees it, be forgotten when his voice is silent; others will not remember him "'save as the echo of a voice that once wreathed the fruit into phrases.'" (p. 268) The image of wreathing fruit clearly distinguishes his art from Louis's neatly turned poems characterized as rings of steel. Bernard's problem seems to lie, therefore, not in any agony over whether he should be a storyteller or not, but in the nature of words themselves. They are not close enough to a cry to reveal what we really experience.

At first Bernard sees words as the way of giving meaning to an otherwise unintelligible universe, but later he comes to be dissatisfied with his own "'wreathed phrases'" because they don't convey

the immediacy of experience. While still a child he says:

"I must make phrases and phrases and so interpose something hard between myself and the stare of housemaids, the stare of clocks, staring faces, indifferent faces, or I shall cry." (p. 195)

Here language is not a barrier but a buffer. But later he sees that he is but "'superficially represented'" by what he says. Words not only do not represent all of reality, they mean different things to speaker and listener: "'Who is to foretell the flight of a word? It is a balloon that sails over tree tops.'" (p. 256) Given this condition, it seems to Bernard that the area of language that is most sure is that of images: "'more and more bubbles [sic] into my mind as I talk, images and images. This, I say to myself, is what I need.'" (p. 233) This movement into the particles of language takes place not only within Bernard but, of course, within Virginia Woolf herself as over the years she develops her creative abilities.

The image is the linguistic representative of the sense datum, or as Virginia Woolf calls it, the arrow of sensation. For instance, for Bernard, the creation of consciousness is centralized in the bath at the first school:

"Then Mrs. Constable raised the sponge above her head, squeezed it, and out shot, right, left, all down the spine, arrows of sensation. And so, long as we draw breath . . . we are pierced with arrows of sensation" (p. 342)

He sees this experience as not only the baptism into life but the beginning of the creation of the self:

"Yes, ever since old Mrs. Constable lifted her sponge and pouring warm water over me covered me with flesh I have been sensitive, percipient. Here on my brow is the blow I got when Percival fell. Here on the nape of my neck is the kiss Jinny gave Louis. My eyes fill with Susan's tears. I see far away, quivering like a gold thread, the pillar Rhoda saw, and feel the rush of the wind of her flight when she leapt." (p. 377)

Like Jinny's, Bernard's imagination is of the body, but his is not merely self-regarding. It is empathetic; it is creative; it is the poet's imagination which confers negative capability.

As an artist of language, Bernard must find the language with which to present his version of reality, a reality made up of discreet moments of sensory experience. A purely imagistic language, which would seem to be the appropriate one, would be a language without rules of syntax which would record the random atoms of experience. The unordered sequence goes on inside as well as outside. At one place Bernard speaks of the disordered sequence of arrows of sensation *from* his spine, suggesting that, triggered by an orange light or olive leaves, the memory gives out its own unordered series of impulses.²⁰ Memory is as gratuitous as the world around one: "I am titillated inordinately by some splendor Arrows of sensation strike from my spine, but without order." (p. 284) Bernard describes the gratuitous nature of the outer world by speaking of its message as a fin suddenly turning in the water: "This bare visual impression is unattached to any line of reason, it springs

²⁰Richter comments on Virginia Woolf's move away from the mind and body split and her vision of the human being as a mind-body-feeling gestalt. See particularly p. xi.

up as one might see the fin of a porpoise on the horizon." (p. 307) The language which corresponds accurately to such a universe -- gratuitous and composed of arrows of sensation -- will be non-linear. In fact, such a language will paradoxically try to escape the boundaries of language. Thus Bernard comes to look for something that is almost wordless: "I begin to long for some language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on pavement." (pp. 341-42)²¹ Near the end of the novel, after a period of depression followed by a sense of renewal, Bernard records his feeling of walking in a new world never trodden before, where he is unable to speak except "'in a child's words of one syllable'", (p. 376) and he records how he now feels when he has finally gotten out from under the shelter of phrases. At end of the novel he renounces his function as story-teller, and, as it were, breaks his magic staff; the story must end:

²¹ Virginia Woolf wanted to de-novelize the novel, as Chekhov, whom she greatly admired, had de-dramatized drama, and T.S. Eliot was de-poetizing poetry. Only, Chekhov had gone, and Eliot was going, in the opposite direction, from ornate language to outward simplicity in vocabulary and expression (through there was plenty of complicity involved in connotations and ambiguity). All three would prefer silence-- Mallarme's 'significant silence' -- or at least expression condensed in the extreme. They point out that there is no language for the deepest human emotions.

. . . Virginia Woolf discarded simplicity in expression and proceeded to the other extreme, to suggestion by word magic, as it were, in the manner of a Keats, of Gerard Manley Hopkin's, or the symbolists rather than that of an Eliot. She broke the frontiers of the novel stepping over in the direction of lyric poetry while Eliot was proceeding from poetry to prose. (Irma Rantavarra, p. 38).

I need a little language such as lovers use, words of one syllable such as children speak. . . . I need a howl; a cry. . . . Nothing neat. Nothing that comes down with all its feet on the floor. None of these resonances and lovely echoes that break and chime from nerve to nerve in our breasts making wild music, false phrases. I have done with phrases. (p. 382)

Like so many twentieth century writers -- Conrad, the Blast Group, Hemingway, for example -- Virginia Woolf fears the power of rhetoric. In *Heart of Darkness*, before Marlow meets Kurtz he thinks of him only as a voice. And Kurtz turns out to be no more than a voice, for his beautiful sentences have only concealed from himself his own moral nature. Finally, at death, Kurtz reverts to complete gesture. If, as Bernard says, he will be remembered only as a voice then does he not run the risk of being just one more hollow man? The only way out seems to be to find a new, more accurate language which escapes from the beautiful phrases, a language tied securely to one's immediate reality because it is a howl or a cry. Assuming that a character presented as sympathetically as Bernard is speaking for the author, we can see why the image meant so much to Virginia Woolf and why no appreciation of her work can get very far without taking this fact into account.

As Bernard moves towards the realization that language is inadequate, he simultaneously moves towards an understanding of the complete adequacy of life itself. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus struggled to maintain life but found in it such discouragement that his longing for the unity of death got the better of him. Although both novels are concerned with the struggle against death-in-life, they differ in that Bernard, unlike the shell-shocked Septimus, does not contemplate

killing himself, but rather realizes that the choice is his to be, on the one hand, carried on by the flood, that is, to be caught up in the machine (the metaphor varies) or, on the other, to be man alive. The whole book moves towards the resolution of this problem, and at the end, Bernard, identifying with the semi-mythical Percival, envisages himself riding into battle against death.

The death that Bernard rides against is passivity of the spirit. Looking back upon childhood years, he tells us that it was then that he first became aware of those enemies "'who change, but are always there; the forces we fight against.'" (p. 343) He comments that "'to let oneself be carried on passively is unthinkable.'" (p. 343) He asks, "'... how can we do battle against this flood; what has permanence?'" (p. 334) Inner reality is equally changeable: "'Our lives too stream away, down unlighted avenues.'" (p. 334) All of this is again reminiscent of Pater's "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance*: the world is a flux and habits of perception and conception are death; reality is a web constantly forming and reforming on the stream. As Bernard puts it: "'How fast the stream flows from January to December! We are swept on by the torrent of things grown so familiar that they cast no shadow.'" (p. 355) The eye, seduced into this passive state is an eye that has lost the "innocence" which invests the world with the sense of miracle, giving reality meaning. To such an eye everything is mere repetition; nothing is seen for the first time and reality is replaced by its own lifeless husk.

When Bernard hears of Percival's death he experiences one of those moments where he breaks free of the narrower scope of the usual state of existence. However, such a moment of being cannot last,

and he returns to the lower round of human existence: "'The machine then works.'" (p. 281) Just what he means by this is explained in the following:

"I am now at the zenith of an experience. It will decline. Already I no longer cry with conviction, 'What luck!' Exaltation, the flight of doves descending is over. Chaos, detail, return. I am no longer amazed by names written over shop windows. I do not feel why hurry? Why catch trains? The sequence returns; one thing leads to another -- the usual order."
(p. 283)

In a lifetime of flood, wind, and machine, there are a few moments of light and flowers. But always, after the most beautiful of moments, for instance, the second dinner to honour Percival, there comes a dissolution:

"I could not recover myself from that endless throwing away, dissipation, flooding forth without one willing it and rushing soundlessly away out there under the arches of the bridge. . . . I could not recover myself from that dissipation. So we parted." (p. 370)

But things are not entirely bleak because one can escape the machine and subjugate for the moment the outer world through the use of imagination. As the party to say good-bye to Percival breaks up, Bernard ruminates that they have proved they are not mere slaves of fate but are masters and creators who have added to "'the treasury of moments'":

"We too have made something that will join in the innumerable congregations of past time. We too, as we put on our hats and push open the door, stride not into chaos but into a world that we can subjugate and make part of the illumined and everlasting road."
(p. 276)

Is this not Bernard's equivalent of burning with a gemlike flame?

Art may help, as it does when Bernard, stricken with the news of Percival's death, turns into the art gallery in order to hold back the world of action for a time, or one may turn to the beautiful objects of nature and find in them both inspiration and a symbol of the perfection one can create in life, as when Bernard says by way of epitomizing the experience of the second dinner party, "'The flower, . . . the red carnation that stood in the vase on the table of the restaurant when we dined together with Percival is become a six-sided flower; made of six lives.'" (p. 335) The use of the image of the red carnation in this instance suggests the positive or creative aspect of time. In the same passage Bernard juxtaposes this image of creative time with an image of destructive time, the yew tree, traditionally associated with death:

"Marriage, death, travel, friendship, . . . town and country; children and all that; a many-sided substance cut out of this dark; a many-faceted flower. Let us stop for a moment; let us behold what we have made. Let it blaze against the yew trees." (p. 335)

Although Percival's life has gone out, it has been reclaimed from the darkness by having become beautiful in time, and if there is a note of sadness in Bernard's voice, there is also one of joy. Later, looking back upon the experience, he recalls that for a moment the six of them, "'out of the measureless abundance of time past and time to come, burnt there triumphant.'" (p. 369) The image of the flaming carnation is recalled when Bernard mentions how the six of them burnt there "'against the bricks, against the branches.'" (p. 369) Now the images suggest the

opposition of spirit (the burning) and matter (the bricks and branches), while at the same time the branches help recall the earlier opposition of carnation and yew tree. After the moment of illumination, the spot of time once again gives way to change, fading before the ineluctable onslaught of fact.

Towards the end of the novel Bernard becomes despondent. At his lowest point, before regaining his courage, he feels that his self has disappeared; also, that there is no echo. That is, there seems to be no assurance of the continuation of outer reality. The reader might recall that shortly before she committed suicide Virginia Woolf complained in her diary of the lack of echo. For Bernard, life has become a grey sea where no fin breaks the surface of boredom. He adds: "'This is more truly death than the death of friends, than the death of youth.'" (p. 374) As Virginia Woolf said in *Jacob's Room*, it is not disease or war that age us but the look in people's eyes as they run up the steps of omnibuses, for there we read the despair of living death. However, Bernard regains his vitality. Identifying with Percival, he visualizes himself as a knight charging into battle against death.

Here we leave him:

"It is death against whom I ride with my spear couched and my hair flying back like a young man's, like Percival's when he galloped in India. I strike spurs into my horse. Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death." (p. 383)

Percival

We come at last to Percival. S.P. Rosenbaum points out a significant difference between him and Jacob. Although both characters are seen from the outside, the earlier novel shows what Jacob was conscious of, whereas *The Waves* shows how Percival exists in the minds of the six characters:

If *Jacob's Room* is about the problem of other minds, *The Waves* is about the problem of our own. The different aims require different forms for each novel, but not different epistemologies. All of this can be illustrated in the preoccupation of the six characters with apprehending their developing identities. 22

One's identity is defined by what one identifies with, and each of the characters identifies with this societal hero.

Percival is not, in the ordinary sense of the word, idealized, although he is a cultural hero of sorts. Louis says of him that he is heavy, that he walks clumsily, that he "blunders through grasses!" Neville sees him as spiritually unimportant. On the other hand, Louis sees him as a medieval commander who will "certainly attempt some forlorn enterprise and die in battle." (p. 200) The forlorn enterprise turns out to be imperialism. And if, as Neville says, Percival understands nothing when he reads a detective novel, at the same time he understands everything because he is directly related to life. Intellectual intelligence is not the only kind; there is also a life intelligence. Neville sees him as a blue-eyed pagan staring with

²²Rosenbaum, p. 351.

fixed indifference. His movement when he flicks his hand to the back of his neck is so beautiful that Neville comments, "'For such gestures one falls in love for a lifetime.'" (p. 199) Percival is all gesture; he is not divided from reality by language. Perhaps that is why Bernard, who is dissatisfied with language calls him "'the complete human being whom we have failed to be, but at the same time, cannot forget.'" (p. 369) For Rhoda, in his presence "'the world that had been shrivelled rounds itself,'" (p. 270) and he is symbolized by the six-sided carnation, thus replacing the spiritual ideal of Mary, traditionally symbolized by the rose.

We can also approach Percival through his name. Sir Percival of medieval legend was raised in innocence in the forest by his mother and given only "a lyttel Scot's spere" to play with. Upon arriving at Arthur's court he was called the flower of chivalry by a strange maiden who had never smiled, despite the fact that his behaviour was very crude. He joined Galahad in the search for the Holy Grail and in the English legend caught a glimpse of it. In the German version he was wholly successful. Like his medieval counterpart, the Percival of the novel has some connection with Scotland. Also, he too is innocent, as his appeal to the younger children at the school suggests. Percival becomes a flower just as Sir Percival is called the flower of chivalry. Percival is clumsy; Sir Percival is crude.²³

²³Richter carries the symbolic identity of Percival further by identifying him with Attis-Adonis. (Richter, pp. 126-27). Rantavaara sees him as an Antinous figure. (Rantavaara, p. 15).

In summary, then, what a strange hero Percival makes! A clumsy, unintellectual man who falls off his horse and dies. In many ways a common man who loves the most common of women, Susan, but is rejected by her. An ideal man constantly undercut by irony.

Some Conclusions About The Imagery

The imagery in *The Waves* functions both as a method for uniting the six characters and for delineating the differences among them. Although the same images dwell in every consciousness, the way each character relates to them marks his individuality. The effect is to juxtapose the general and the individual. Thus the handling of character parallels the handling of time where the moment and the sweep of time are held up to the reader's view simultaneously.

We can see *The Waves* as an answer to the question of other minds posed back in *Jacob's Room*. It would seem that one is linked to others not by learning about other minds but by sharing with them certain images.

Just as there is within the human community both the universal and the individual, so we have within the individual both changelessness and growth. The basic identities of the characters are established on the first page, and the later imagery modifies the personality within the parameters established at the outset. A short survey of the lives of the six characters will show how this is so.

The first utterances are:

"I see a ring," said Bernard, "hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light."

"I see a slab of pale yellow," said Susan, "spreading away until it meets a purple stripe."

"I hear a sound," said Rhoda, "Cheep, chirp; cheep, chirp; going up and down."

"I see a slope," said Neville, "Hanging down in a drop against the enormous flanks of some hill."

"I see a crimson tassel," said Jinny, "twisted with gold threads."

"I hear something stamping," said Louis, "A great beast's foot is chained. It stamps, and stamps." (p. 180)

Although some of these utterances are more enigmatic than others, they all contain, as Freedman notes, the future of the characters.²⁴ Bernard's loop of light is symbolically related to both his stories composed of interlocking wreaths of words and his need for human communion. Susan's pale yellow slab and the purple suggest both the way of life she loves best and her dominant passions. Neville's unmoving globe suggests a known reality and thus indicates his clear-sightedness. In contrast, Bernard's shimmering ring, although more exciting, is seen less clearly. Rhoda's hearing of the bird sounds the warning note of her later anxiety, particularly her sexual fears symbolized by her dread of being pierced by the bird's beak. Jinny's sensuous perceptions of gold and crimson indicate her nature. Louis's fear is symbolized by the stamping beast. We notice also that only the two destined to become lovers, Rhoda and Louis, hear; the others see. In both cases their fear is

²⁴Freedman, p. 248.

conveyed not only through the imagery but through repetition,²⁵ a device that lends itself to aural more than to visual imagery.

When we look at the memories of the characters in Chapter Eight, we see the continuity of their personalities.²⁶ Bernard's memories centre on sense impressions: water running down the spine, the gardeners and the lady writing. His first utterance was very impressionist, and he remains a man of the senses. Susan recalls passion: the boot-boy making love to the scullery-maid. Rhoda recalls terror: the tiger panting. Neville remembers feelings of anxiety: the dead man, the unmitigable tree. He always saw most clearly, and so was the first to comprehend death. Jinny recalls joy: a dancing leaf, and Louis remembers the isolation of a lonely corner in the garden.

If we look at the characters in middle-age we see both change and continuity in their lives. For a while, Bernard loses his sense of joy in the physical world. However, travelling in Italy he begins to move from stupor back to life.²⁷ Susan, dedicated to nature and biology, has found life's meaning in her children. Jinny bravely faces the fact she will soon no longer be attractive to men, and Neville's analytic

²⁵For a discussion of the uses of repetition (denoting fear and constricting forces) and rhythm (denoting reconciliation with the universe) see McLaurin's chapter on *The Waves* in his book *Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved*, pp. 128-148.

²⁶Rantavaara, p. 32.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 17.

mind has partially reconciled him to life. Rhoda descends into fear and kills herself. Louis, still lonely, sits in his attic room.

Finally, is this a significant novel, and is it a success? Rantavaara levels at it, although in a mild way, the kind of criticism it will probably always receive:

On closing the book after concentrating on the surface story, the reader is left with a feeling of admiration for the ambitious effort of the novelist. But some lack of complete satisfaction is also felt; the pieces of the puzzle have not yet been put in their places to make a satisfactory coherent whole. Thus, as a novel proper, *The Waves*, an extended metaphor, is, however, naturally not exhausted by the unravelling of the plot, however close the reading may be. It is, above all, as the autobiography of a mind that *The Waves* maintains the reader's interest. 28

Such criticism is by no means perverse. The prejudices and assumptions that lie behind it are after all, those of the mainstream of our literary culture. But these assumptions should be looked at carefully and the consequences noted.

The most obvious answer to Rantavaara is, of course, that *The Waves* is not "a novel proper" and so should not be judged as falling short of being what it isn't. But Rantavaara's criticism strikes a little deeper than that; it denies that what Virginia Woolf set out to do can be done, in other words, that the play-poem she envisaged is by its nature unsatisfactory. This is the reason for Rantavaara's desire to draw the reader's attention to the inadequacy of the surface

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 22.

story. *The Waves* marks the end of more than a decade of experimentation for Virginia Woolf. During that time she pursued a course which is to use the phrase coined by Richter, an "inward voyage". *The Waves* marks the furthest point on this voyage, now to be interrupted by *The Years*. Even more than in the previous three novels, Virginia Woolf here concentrates on the reactions of her characters rather than on the events themselves, until the whole outer world seems to be bracketed. Rantavaara's criticism really asks whether such subjectivity can carry a novel. In other words, are we convinced that reality is as it is portrayed in the novel, or do we, at least in part, reject the novelist's phenomenological view of life. Although we all realize that we know things only through their effect on us, most of us believe that birth, death, and the joys and sorrows of our fellows have an importance and a reality independent of our responses. Although Virginia Woolf believed in a single reality behind all appearances, the stress is so much on the mind that the world tends to disintegrate, and we lose what Virginia Woolf herself referred to as Defoe's earthen-ware pot. Ultimately, what lies behind Rantavaara's criticism is the belief that after a literary work reaches a certain bulk, some form of traditional narrative technique is needed to sustain it, to give the reader the sense that, as Rantavaara puts it, all the pieces have fallen into place.

In the last analysis there was no way to answer directly Rantavaara's criticism because its assumptions are so opposed to the assumptions of the novelist. Counter arguments must take other tacks -- by pointing out, for instance, the poetic qualities of the novel, or

noting that it is surely more than the autobiography of a mind; it intends to be, and largely succeeds in being, the autobiography of a culture, and finally, that its appeal is not ultimately its autobiographical element at all but its poetry, just as in Shakespeare it is not what happens but the particular colouration of the poetry that makes each play different and beautiful. One remembers Cordelia not because she died, but because her voice was low and soft.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This study began with the thesis that there are philosophical reasons for Virginia Woolf's reliance upon imagery in her program to re-form the novel. In seeking to record experience as it is lived, Virginia Woolf reduces it to the atoms of experience which are represented by the image. The image can lead in two ways, out into the ultimate reality that lies beyond all appearances or back into the self.

First, the image is the literary representation of the particular through which the one reality lying behind all appearances is reached. Through the image the writer encapsulates the "moment of being". Images such as a match burning in a crocus are the eye of the needle through which the character passes to reach the universal.

Second, the characters relate to objects in the outside world in such a way that these objects act as metaphors for their states of existence. A character feels "like" something; the image is used as an objective correlative.¹ Two explicit examples of this are Clarissa Dalloway's identification with Big Ben and Mrs. Ramsay's identification with the third stroke of the lighthouse. Similar, but not quite so explicit identifications are those of Clarissa and Septimus with the sun. On the other hand, Holmes's relationship with the sun is such that

¹Richter, p. 181.

the reader sees into Holmes while he himself remains blind.

We see in these novels both a movement towards abstraction and what Richter calls Virginia Woolf's "inward voyage". John Graham argues that beginning at the time of the writing of *Orlando*, Virginia Woolf became increasingly dissatisfied with the psychological approach to fiction and sought ways to present the impersonality that appears in *The Waves*.² Although it is true that abstraction is really noticeable only after *To the Lighthouse* (signs of it in *The Waves* are the reduction of all speech idiosyncrasies to one pattern and the use of the formalistic "he said"), we have seen indications of what is to come as far back as *Jacob's Room*. The psychological novel of the Henry James type seems to work best when the point of view is centred in or restricted to the central character, because such methods allow for the most dramatic presentation. But in *Jacob's Room* the centre of consciousness is already moving into the impersonal "one". *Jacob's Room* also hints at how Virginia Woolf will later use imagery to create the impersonality of *The Waves*. Images are used to move the reader from one character to another. At this point such an image is related to some object or event seen or thought of by both characters, and is a merely mechanical device to link the parts of the novel. The same method is used in *Mrs. Dalloway* in, for instance, the skywriting scene. However, by the time we come to the refrain from *Cymbeline*, which runs through Clarissa and Septimus's

²John W. Graham, "Point of View in *The Waves*: Some Services of Style," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 39 (April, 1970), 193-211.

mind in various forms, the imagery indicates not only a common experience of Shakespeare but a shared attitude to life. Imagery used in this way signals characters who are capable of intuitive understanding of one another. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, this understanding is apparent in Clarissa's comments on Septimus's suicide. In *The Waves*, all the characters share the central images, which leads to their being subsumed by Bernard in the last chapter where he becomes the generalized, abstract human being. By this point Virginia Woolf is presenting reality not as the psychological realist sees it but as Bernard sees it -- from the third story window.

While the imagery moves one out to abstraction, it also moves one in from the world of hard facts. There is a continuing displacement of "what happens" as Virginia Woolf concentrates more and more on reaction instead of event. This inward voyage goes, it seems, as far as it can in *The Waves*, and thus Virginia Woolf reverses direction in her next novel, *The Years*. This decentralization of fact has a philosophical basis. If one is skeptical of our rational understanding of other minds, a corollary of that skepticism will be that actions are poor indicators of what other people are really like. The novel was once organized around a series of actions that created a plot, and what happened was meant to tell the reader significant things about the character. But when the significance of fact and action are called into doubt plot loses its position of importance and the novelist concentrates instead on the character's reaction to the outside world. Although action cannot be totally eliminated from the novel, nor totally discredited as having any truth value, the shift in emphasis from the

plot oriented novel to the introspective novel is clearly evident in Britain in the early decades of this century. Thus Virginia Woolf encapsulates part of the outside world in the image, then, by showing us the function of that image in her character's consciousness, shows us his reaction to outer reality.

Two subjects I have devoted considerable space to in this study are the relationship of imagery to structure and of imagery to character. While, in comparison to *Jacob's Room*, the characterization has become abstract in *The Waves*, the structure has become more noticeable. A considerable amount, though by no means all of this new structure is the result of the ways Virginia Woolf developed to handle her imagery.

The most obvious way imagery functions in aid of structure is when it is used to create leitmotifs. In *Jacob's Room*, leitmotifs, particularly those built around the primary colours, are used to tie the parts of the narrative together and present the theme of double-consciousness of life and death. These images, which suggest both the joy and horror of existence, are used most frequently in the early chapters but make a noticeable reappearance near the end of the novel, giving it a roundedness.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, elements of structure are the unities of time and place. The sun image is particularly important to the temporal setting as the reader is kept conscious of the progress of the sun throughout the single day in which the action is set. The sun image is also central to the paradigmatic moral structure of the novel because it divides the characters into two groups. Another structural device dependent upon imagery is the formal arrangement of scenes. The sound

of Big Ben, for instance, is important, as Schaefer's analysis shows. Also, the similarity of the window scenes in which Septimus kills himself and Clarissa sees her old neighbour going to bed helps the reader see the relationship between the two central characters. The structural devices used in *Mrs. Dalloway* include leitmotifs, unities of time and place, the natural cyclical scheme of the progress of the sun, the division of characters on moral grounds, and the formal arrangement of scenes.

In *To the Lighthouse*, most of these structural devices are repeated, with the exception of the use of the cycle of the day, while the use of a theoretical scheme borrowed from music is new. Leitmotifs abound -- the blue eyes and the lighthouse itself, for instance. Parts One and Three maintain unity of time and the whole novel maintains unity of place. The symbolic structure relating to the quest theme of the novel is handled mainly in terms of the formal arrangement of the scenes in the first and third parts. The three parts of the novel seem to imitate musical form. There are two long movements joined by a short, quiet second movement, in the pattern of, for instance, Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto*, (No. 5).

In *The Waves*, the novel which most concentrates on the inner life, the unities of time and place are no longer present, but this remains a highly structured novel. The leitmotifs are more numerous than ever before. There is a symbolic structure of birth, life, death, and implied rebirth in the image-laden interchapters. While the main body of the novel follows the natural course of the lives of the characters, the interchapters follow the natural cycle of the day. In the first four chapters the characters grow and the sun climbs in the

sky. In Chapter Five there is a turning point with Percival's death and the sun moves into the western sky. In the last four chapters the characters decline; so does the sun. A formal arrangement of scenes is apparent in the two dinner parties at Hampton Court which occur in Chapters Four and Eight.

Characterization and the way character is created through imagery evolve considerably from *Jacob's Room* to *The Waves*. In *Jacob's Room* the images depict Jacob as a boy and young man -- almost any educated middle class boy and young man. The red, yellow, and blue imagery both presents his youth and intimates his death, but Jacob's mind is not revealed as having any idiosyncratic relationship to the images. The images associated with his youth do not, for instance, reveal his feelings as the images of scimitar, yellow veil, and crushed foot reveal young James's relationships to his parents in *To the Lighthouse*. The restricted role of the imagery in *Jacob's Room* is the result of the author's decision to imitate our knowledge of others minds by showing the character almost wholly from the outside only.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, two changes are noticeable. The images often come from the character rather than from the narrator, and some function as moral touchstones. The first change results from a shift in point of view which allows the characters to speak directly to the reader. The second results from developing the social lives of the characters. Interactions with social forces and society as a whole create antagonisms where the author takes sides. This development is not pursued. In neither *To the Lighthouse* or *The Waves* does Virginia Woolf so clearly divide the good from the bad.

The images in *To the Lighthouse* reveal both the nature of the various characters and the relationships that develop between them. Images of isolation depict Ramsay's essence while his wife's nature is conveyed by images such as the "wedge-shaped core of darkness". Images such as knife and scimitar capture James's feelings toward his father. A single image may reveal different things about different characters. The image of blue eyes not only reveals Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's intellectual and intuitive natures respectively, but is tied in with James's evolving relationship to his parents.

In *The Waves*, imagery reveals the nature of the characters and shows how one human being is linked to others. Neither is entirely new in Virginia Woolf's writing, but the imagery is exploited in these areas to a greater extent than before. Often the characters are shown to differ by the way they relate to the same image. Doors and rings are good examples. To a much greater degree than ever before, both the shared identity of minds and intuitive understanding are developed in this novel and then taken to their limits in Bernard's summing up.

Finally, while the structure of the novels becomes more apparent and the methods of creating character through imagery become more complex, the themes remain much the same from *Jacob's Room* to *The Waves*.

These novels combine an elegy for youth and beauty with a call to courage needed to outface the ravages of time and the dullness that bleeds away life. All four novels have young men who die, all of them directly or indirectly as a result of fulfilling the demands of empire, as if Virginia Woolf were saying that life and the political

realities of Britain are incompatible. It is reasonable to speculate that there is a biographical basis for these young men -- Thoby Stephen-- although he did not die serving British imperialism.

There is a partial parallel between Jacob Andrews and Thoby. Thoby took sick while in Greece and died shortly after his return to England. Jacob gets back from Greece safely but later dies in the war. In the next novel, Septimus returns from the war on the continent and commits suicide. In *To the Lighthouse*, Andrew is blown up while fighting in France. In *The Waves*, the idealized Percival dies while helping run the empire in India. The recurring figure of the young man who dies is contrasted to the old women who survive -- the street singers, the hawkers, and the chars. The first represents the flower of civilization; the second the fish-like unconscious force that keeps humanity going.

The recurrence of these young men, along with the death of Rhoda, suggests the fascination death held for Virginia Woolf. When Clarissa Dalloway hears about Septimus's death she approves because he prevented what is important from dropping into the corruption of the Holmes-Bradshaw world. In Rhoda we again encounter a figure who cannot resist the solace of death. It is once again inviting to venture into biographical speculation. It seems that Virginia Woolf wants to remove the barrier between the living and the dead. Her novels are filled with characters based on her own dead -- Thoby, her parents, and her half-sister Stella in the case of Prue Ramsay. Thus Septimus not only represents Thoby but becomes a mask for the author herself. It is easy, as J. Hillis Miller has said, to see in Septimus's suicide a prefiguring of Virginia Woolf's own death.³ The same, of course, can

³Miller, pp. 122-23.

be said about Rhoda's.

These novels express an almost mystic embrace of death. On the other hand, they show the courage exemplified by Bernard which combats the drift towards death. One must take note of the difference between the embrace and the drift because, as we have seen in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the embrace of death may be seen as the very opposite of the drift.

The role of the imagery in presenting the themes of fleeting youth and beauty is related to Virginia Woolf's Pater-like view of existence. Always conscious of how one must hold on as long as possible to the beautiful moment, Virginia Woolf uses her images to present a world of intense beauty about to die -- like the colourful butterflies that come pelting across the orchard in *Jacob's Room*. The images flash into the reader's consciousness, leaving an aura of beauty. Because such beauty must die, the note of elegy is struck, and these novels seem to be attempts to grasp what will not stay. They express a longing for beauty that drifts beyond one's grasp like a disembodied voice.

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