

The Philosophy of Virginia Woolf

by

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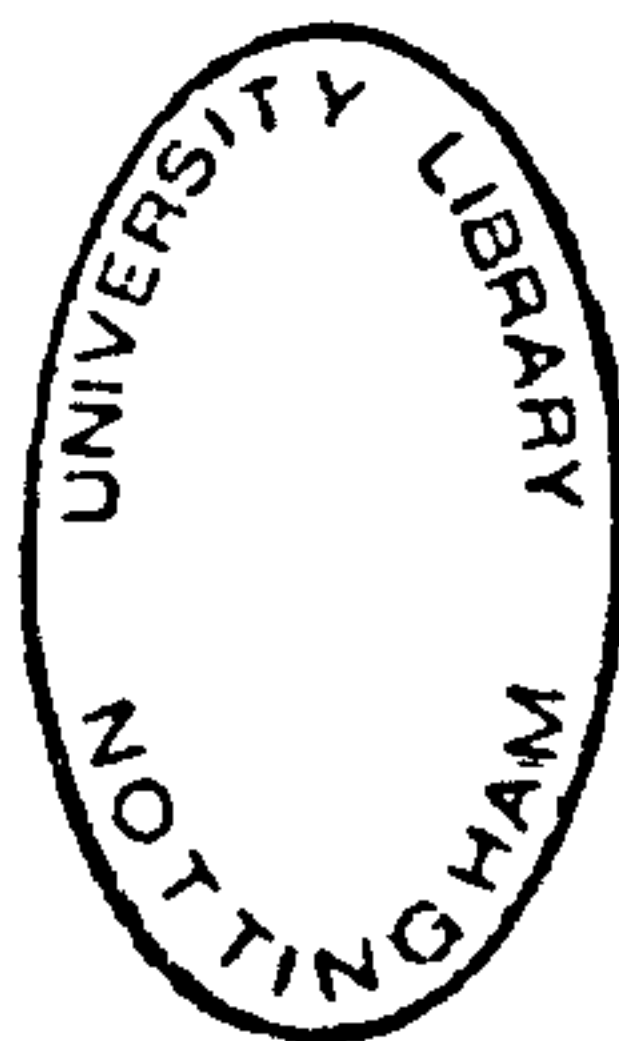
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ERRATA

- p. 9 In line 5 of the first quotation (TW, 179) 'jinny'
should read 'Jinny'
- p. 251 Lines 8-9 should read, 'Here I propose to trace
one, arbitrarily chosen, line of its development.'
- p. 279 Line 2 should read, 'to his model, and as has
already been noted, he '

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Abstract

Following an Introduction which explains how "philosophy" is intended, Chapter 1 describes a scale of characters' 'at-homeness' in the body. VW's awareness of the body's role is seen as preliminary to her concept of identity.

Chapter 2 elucidates the concept of identity that emerges from the novels. Identity and self are distinguished, and self shown to be analogous to 'soul'. Experiences recorded in VW's diary are shown to be significantly related to her fiction: her idea of 'reality' is related to her idea of soul, or self.

Chapter 3 examines the view of human relationships that is found in the novels. Again, passages from the diary are shown to be closely related to VW's fiction. Relationship points up a lack in human life, reflecting the concept of identity and self outlined above.

Chapter 4 intends to balance the pessimism of the earlier chapters. The development of VW's aesthetic is traced, and To the Lighthouse seen as a successful exemplification of her concept of art's potential for transcendence. The second part of the chapter examines The Waves, seeing it as a product of crisis, and a failure as a work of art.

Chapter 5 focuses on VW's sense of the numinous, the 'lack' that has been revealed in the world described by the first four chapters. The religious contours of VW's beliefs and questions emerge more clearly. Time is identified as the key issue.

Chapter 6 is a close reading of the 'Time Passes' section of To the Lighthouse which shows that it is intimately related not only to the rest of that novel, but to the

entire emergent "philosophy" of VW.

Chapter 7 examines temporality in the novels in general, especially as manifested by the fact of death. VW's concept of time is seen to be essentially Romantic.

Chapter 8: Between the Acts is seen as the most confident and direct embodiment of VW's faith in 'reality'. The autobiographical and other writings of the last few years of VW's life are seen as an illuminating context for her last novel. The modes of literary creation are ultimately seen to share the mode of being of 'soul' (or self) and 'reality'.

An appendix gives brief outlines of various concepts of the self from Socrates to R.D. Laing.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my mother and father for their support and interest, which has at all times been invaluable.

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*

Note on the text

The following abbreviations are used:

AHH	<u>A Haunted House</u>
AWD	<u>A Writer's Diary</u>
BP	<u>Books and Portraits</u>
BTA	<u>Between the Acts</u>
CE I-IV	<u>Collected Essays, Vols. I-IV</u>
CR I-II	<u>The Common Reader, First Series, Second Series</u>
CW	<u>Contemporary Writers</u>
D. I-III	<u>The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vols. I-III</u>
JR	<u>Jacob's Room</u>
L. I-VI	<u>The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vols. I-VI</u>
MD	<u>Mrs. Dalloway</u>
MOB	<u>Moments of Being</u>
ND	<u>Night and Day</u>
O	<u>Orlando</u>
RF	<u>Roger Fry</u>
TTL	<u>To the Lighthouse</u>
TVO	<u>The Voyage Out</u>
TW	<u>The Waves</u>
TY	<u>The Years</u>

The name of the editor is sometimes used to identify where a quotation is from (e.g. Graham, 695 designates p. 695 of The Waves, edited by J.W. Graham).

Virginia Woolf is referred to throughout as VW

As an aid to the reader all notes and the bibliography are on coloured paper. Each note is followed by the number of the page in the text to which the note refers.

*

Life and Art

All you read a novel for is to see what sort of a person the writer is, and, if you know him, which of his friends he's put in. As for the novel itself, the whole conception, the way one's seen the thing, felt about it, made it stand in relation to other things, not one in a million cares for that. And yet I sometimes wonder whether there's anything else in the whole world worth doing.

The Voyage Out, 262

Somewhere, everywhere, now hidden, now apparent in whatever is written down is the form of a human being.

'Reading' (1919?)

I wonder, parenthetically, whether I too, deal thus openly in autobiography & call it fiction ?

- Diary, 14.1.1920

Of course it [TTL] is largely known to me: but all my books have been that.

- Diary, 23.2.1926

In short, every secret of a writer's soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind is written large in his works, yet we require critics to explain the one and biographers to explain the other.

Orlando, 189-90

One must write from deep feeling, said Dostoevski. And do I ? Or do I fabricate with words, loving them as I do ? No I think not. ... I daresay it's true, however, that I haven't that 'reality' gift. I insubstantise, wilfully to some extent, distrusting reality - its cheapness. But to get further. Have I the power of conveying the true reality ? Or do I write essays about myself ?

- Diary, 19.6.1923

From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we - I mean all human beings - are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself.

A Sketch of the Past (1939/40)
- Moments of Being, 72

Introduction

On reading the manuscript of Jacob's Room, VW's husband, Leonard Woolf, remarked that she had "no philosophy of life" (D. II, 186; 26.7.1922). Certainly VW did not share Leonard's conviction of "the fresh air and pure light of plain common-sense" to be found in G.E. Moore's ethics. Furthermore, she found no philosophies from which she could derive satisfactory solutions to the existential questions with which she was constantly engaged. Some critics have traced a philosophy in VW's writings to sources in, for example, Bergson, Moore, and - bizarrely - McTaggart.¹ It is not my concern here to trace any such (real or imagined) debts.

The "philosophy" of my title is intended solely in the specific sense in which VW herself used the word in her late memoir A Sketch of the Past (1939/40). There (MOB, 72) she wrote of her "philosophy", or "constant idea", as a "conceptual rod" which she felt stood always behind her art. It is the "philosophy" of VW in this particular sense of what she felt was the background to her art that I wish to elucidate.

In an essay on 'Montaigne' (1924) VW wrote of the "soul" that no one knows

CR I how she works or what she is except that of all
96 things she is the most mysterious and one's self
 the greatest monster and miracle in the world.

In the dominant tradition of Western thought the self has constantly been the primary object of enquiry². Descartes, Locke, and Hume represent a tradition which held that the nature of man is, in Hume's words, the "capital or centre" of knowledge. This tradition - which is predominantly Cartesian - is marked, up to Freud, by an objectivity which leads the honest philosopher into inescapable dilemmas. We thus find Descartes caught out by his intuition of the relationship between body and mind, which he cannot explain. Hume must eventually dismiss questions of personal identity from philosophy, saying that they are "grammatical" difficulties. In Freud's psychoanalysis, his natural scientific bias leads to what Ludwig Binswanger has termed "a one-sided, i.e. irreversible, relationship between doctor and patient, and an even more impersonal relationship between researcher and object of research"³.

In contrast to this tradition stands the modern phenomenological movement, which sees man as "being-in-the-world". Practical application of phenomenological theory can be seen in the existential psychoanalysis of, for example, Binswanger and R.D. Laing. There, the divisions and subdivisions of the dominant tradition are resolved into the idea of man as being-in-the-world, an embodied being, in relation to others. As before, the question of the nature of self is seen as primary, the centre of all subsequent enquiry. A leading exponent of phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty, finds in the ambiguous self - as he believes

Montaigne did - "the place of all obscurities, the mystery of mysteries, and something like an ultimate truth"⁴.

*

VW's novels are concerned with knowledge: knowledge of others, and knowledge of the world. The question of the nature of self is at the heart of her thinking, and is the dynamic of her fiction. Her novels, I believe, uncover what Georges Poulet has called "the essentially religious nature of human centrality"⁵. Beginning with VW's ideas of self and identity, we are led eventually to realise that her concept of the essential nature of human being was religious in character. Although an ardent atheist, VW gradually came to hold what can best be described as a faith, the essential element of which was belief in a "soul". Her point of departure is always a simple, but radical, wonder in the face of being at all; a style of thought that places her in the company of such thinkers as Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger, tempered though it is by an English dryness⁶.

While the question of the nature of self is always at the heart of VW's thinking, it is rarely explicit. In the course of this study it will emerge that the problems of self are, indeed, as Hume said, "grammatical": the question of the nature of self reveals a fundamental inadequacy in language. As a writer, VW was profoundly concerned with

the scope of language, especially as her fictions explore what she quickly decided is beyond words - the self.

The conflict at the heart of VW's thinking and art is one between faith and despair: faith in the potential of human being to deny essential nothingness, and despair at the inadequacy of all human effort in the face of that nothingness. This conflict she felt was particularly acute for the artist, whose effort she sees as a continuous reaching after a certainty which the artist knows better than anyone is an illusion. Throughout her writing VW moves between the poles of faith and despair, sometimes extolling the power of art to overcome transience, at others denigrating its poverty. While this tension between faith and despair is not explicitly linked to the question of the nature of self, it should be understood that that question is the source of the tension.

*

The relationship between life and art is an important and constant concern of VW's that once more bears on the question of the nature of self. The tension in her work between faith in an autonomous self (or soul) that gives meaning to the world, and despair at the possibility that there is no such self anticipates an argument that is focused on in current critical thought. This argument is characterised by opposing views of the authenticity of

literary art; this can be demonstrated by the juxtaposition of two representative passages:

Lacan speaks of the ego as fictive. ... What our analysis of Proust adds to this is a description of various forms of "art" as exemplary fictions which the (imaginary) self tells itself in order to defend its (illusory) sense of autonomy.⁷

That object wholly object, that thing made of paper, as there are things made of metal or porcelaine, that object is no more, or at least it is as if it no longer existed, as long as I read the book. For the book is no longer a material reality. It has become a series of words, of images, of ideas which in their turn begin to exist. And where is this new existence? Surely not in the paper object. Nor, surely, in external space. There is only one place left for this new existence: my innermost self.⁸

In what follows I have confined the argument almost exclusively to the terms of VW's own writings, drawing out the many points of contact between her fiction and autobiographical writings. Current literary theory seems, as Wolfgang Iser remarks, to be "concerned primarily with approaches to literature and not with literature itself"⁹. This study does not, therefore, follow dogmatically a particular approach. It is hoped that whatever looseness is consequent on an eclectic rather than strictly selective method will be compensated for by the effort to read the works as they themselves suggest they should be read. This will allow, as VW suggested, "the sunken meanings to remain sunken, suggested, not stated"¹⁰. The argument does not need to be transposed to critics' terms; it is

implied in VW's work, which is above all a literature of rigorous honesty in its exploration of what it is to be.

The concept of identity that emerges from the novels allows for knowledge only of what VW termed (in Mrs. Dalloway) "apparitions". This concept has affinities with Hume's notion of imaginary identity in a constant flux. What also emerges, however, is that VW was more interested in the gaps in being that such a concept revealed. Hume turned away from the soul as being beyond our comprehension; to VW it became the most significant aspect of being. "Soul" and "self", I will suggest, were synonymous for VW. The self, or soul, is an 'essence' apart from all identities (apparitions) that cannot issue in the world but that may survive even death. By comparing passages and noting descriptive homologies it is seen that VW often wrote about the soul without actually stating it.

The main focus of this study is on VW's idea of a 'reality' that she apprehended in the actual world, but that transcends it. Her sense of the numinous and her idea of the soul are eventually seen to be intimately related. The inherent conflict between faith in 'reality' and the soul, and despair at the sense of futility in all human effort is manifest in the various thematic concerns of VW's art.

My study may be divided into two parts. The first part is primarily descriptive, seeking to provide an understanding of the actual context within which VW's

exploration of human being takes place. The picture which emerges is of a world characterised by a lack, by a sense of an abstract 'gap' in being which cannot be directly referred to in language, but which is certainly a potential of human experience. In the modes of art this tension is formalised, and in my fourth chapter art is seen to be VW's means of approaching fundamental existential questions. The second part of that chapter brings to the forefront of the discussion the problematic relationship between art and life, and the problem of a disjunction between language and reality, as it is seen in The Waves (1931). Usually regarded as her masterpiece, I find in The Waves a serious failure in the terms of VW's own aesthetic.

The sense of the numinous, VW's idea of 'reality', and its relation to art is the focus of the latter half of the study. Temporality, as particularly manifest by the fact of death, is isolated as the most important concern in VW's emergent 'religion'. Her ultimate resolution that literary art can embody the autonomous self, or soul, in the virtual space described by the act of reading is most confidently enshrined in her last novel, Between the Acts (1941). VW's suicide, and her belief that Between the Acts should not be published might be taken as controverting that novel's generally affirmative character, a final emblem of the polarity by which her life and art was riven.

Notes to Introduction

1. (p.i) See S.P. Rosenbaum, 'The Philosophical Realism of Virginia Woolf' in English Literature and British Philosophy, edited by S.P. Rosenbaum and Avrom Fleishman, 'Woolf and McTaggart', ELH, xxxvi, 1969, pp.719-738
2. (p.ii) The reader is directed to the Appendix (pp.251-300) which gives a brief history of 'The Self in Philosophical Thought'
3. (p.ii) Ludwig Binswanger, 'Freud's Conception of Man in the Light of Anthropology', in Being-in-the World, p. 170
4. (p.iii) 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence' in Phenomenology, Language and Sociology, p. 123
5. (p.iii) Georges Poulet, The Metamorphosés of the Circle, p. 95
6. (p.iii) Cf. Diary, 22.9.1928:
D. III We dont belong to any 'class'; we thinkers:
198 might as well be French or German. Yet I am
 English in some way -)
7. (p.v) Jeffrey Mehlman, A Structural Study of Auto-biography, p. 39
8. (p.v) Georges Poulet, 'Phenomenology of Reading', New Literary History, 1 (1969), p. 54
9. (p.v) Wolfgang Iser, 'The Current Situation of Literary Theory: Key Concepts and the Imaginary', NLH, XI, 1, Autumn, 1979. p.3

10. (p.v) 'Craftsmanship' (1937) CE II:

In reading we have to allow the sunken meanings to remain sunken, suggested, not stated; lapsing and flowing into each other like reeds on the bed of the river.

Chapter One

The Body

It seems proper to begin this study of VW's novels by examining briefly her awareness of the body's role in human being. The tradition of empirical and rational enquiry into the self has had to face (or ignore) the question of the relation of body and 'mind'. The dominant tradition of Western philosophy is still Cartesian, treating body and mind as separate substances, one extended, the other not. Dualistic theories must assume the possibility of disembodied existence, but whenever such an idea is brought into contact with the world in which we actually live its inadequacies are evident¹.

Merleau-Ponty - whose phenomenology of perception has been influential in breaking down the Cartesian theory of the "ghost in the machine" - starts from a position very different to that of Descartes. Any apprehension of the world, and of our place in it, is from the situation of a body: the body is our general medium for having a world. The body is both that through which we experience the world immediately, and that by which we are experienced (initially) in the world by others: the body is the "vehicle of being in the world" (Phenomenology of Perception, 82).

Exponents of phenomenological theory have gone so

far as to make the verb "to live" transitive, in so far as it implies a body. Thus, instead of the Cartesian formulation "I live in a body", Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and R.D. Laing after them, would say "I live my body." The idea that to live is at once to 'live' a body lies behind Laing's analyses of the embodied and unembodied self (see The Divided Self, ch. 4).

Laing's concepts can be used to identify the (phenomenological) way in which VW creates characters and conveys a sense of lived experience in her novels. Laing writes that "Everyone, even the most unembodied person, experiences himself as inextricably bound up with or in his body" (The Divided Self, 66). Embodiment and unembodiment are not fixed, passive states but active tendencies, the possibilities of the way the body is lived giving rise to what Laing terms "a basic difference in the self's position in life" (op. cit., 66).

The body, therefore, is the correct starting-point in an account of self. Every person must 'live' his or her body in some way, even if that way is to deny that it is 'his' or 'hers'. As Laing suggests, the basic difference in ways of being lies in an individual's feeling of existing commensurately with the body or not: of being, in Laing's terms, embodied or unembodied.

The novels enquire into human being, and take account throughout of the effect on perception and action that ways of living the body have. VW's early awareness of the lived body is well exemplified by her presentation

of Rachel Vinrace, the heroine of her first novel, The Voyage Out (1915). Rachel becomes increasingly involved with her body as an object of thought; the way she lives her body is focused on as the novel progresses. The Voyage Out concentrates on the problems of engagement and marriage, and, most significantly for our purpose here, the problems encountered by Rachel arise predominantly from her being forced to live her body in a way she is totally unprepared for.

A kiss roughly forced upon her by an older man early in the novel (84-5) drives her to see her body as an instrument of passion and temptation - one that she cannot live. Her engagement with a young man (Terence Hewet) compounds the problem. Her body, to her, eventually becomes "the source of all the life in the world" (315). Rachel's escape from the world she perceives as entirely threatening can be seen as an existential 'fading-out' which is conveyed in images of the physical:

423-4 Her body became a drift of melting snow, above which her knees rose in huge peaked mountains of bare bone. ... For long spaces of time she would merely lie conscious of her body floating on the top of the bed and her mind driven to some remote corner of her body, or escaped and gone flitting round the room.

The tendencies towards embodiment and unembodiment can be taken as the opposing extremes of a scale of ways in which the body is lived. In VW's novels the broad range of this scale is well exemplified in the variety

of ways characters are more or less 'at home' in their bodies. The Waves (1931) provides a microcosm of this scale in the six different existential 'settings' of the characters in one actual world.

In the following examples, two of the characters from that novel serve to demonstrate the opposing extremes of the scale of ways in which the body can be lived: Jinny stands as the most fully embodied of all VW's characters, whilst Rhoda lies at the extreme of unembodiment. The examples given do not follow the novels' chronology as they are intended to illustrate a spectrum against which all the characters of the novels may be measured.

* * *

(i) Embodiment

Of all the novels' characters it is Jinny in The Waves who is most 'at home' in her body, most completely embodied. Jinny is her body: she experiences no gap between consciousness and body, but lives entirely through her body. Her life as a child adumbrates the fierce sensuality of her adulthood: "I see a crimson tassel ... twisted with gold threads" (6). The words of her lessons - seen differently by each of the six children whose lives form the substance of the book - are bright and burning; they inspire in her a dream of the fiery, yellow, fulvous dress she will wear to parties, attracting attention

to herself, to her body.

The two other girls with whom Jinny grows up (Rhoda and Susan) are her immediate rivals; even Rhoda's face - bestowed on her by Jinny, because to herself she has "no face" - is a threat, for it is "completed", whereas Jinny complains of eyes too close together, lips too far apart. Jinny is complete to herself:

30 I see my body and head in one now; for even
in this serge frock they are one, my body and
my head.

The implication is that she feels no difference at all between body and mind: she 'lives' her body absolutely, with no mediation between thought and action. Jinny does not dream because her imagination is "the body's". Her mind is reduced to a mere breath in her body; her perceptions are vibrantly alive, but without mystery, without depth, for she sees only with her body:

30 Yet I cannot follow any word through its
changes. I cannot follow any thought
from present to past.

Memory can hardly exist for her, for the body does not remember: its experiences are all momentary.

That Jinny should try to banish night is understandable; it is the realm of dreams and solitude when, in sleep, the body falls away and the mental part of life dominates. At night Rhoda must stretch out to the hard

rail at the foot of her bed to preserve some sense of embodiment; Jinny, however, longs "that the week should be all one day without divisions" (39), and attempts to make it so by turning night into day with bright lights in brilliant rooms, by wearing a radiant white dress. Those experiences which terrify Rhoda delight Jinny:

73 The door is opening and shutting. People
 are arriving; they do not speak; they hasten
 in.

How strange it is, thinks Jinny, that people should go to sleep, putting out the light and losing consciousness of their bodies.

Her childhood aspirations are realised as she grows up to take her place in what she calls the "great society of bodies." In Jinny's lived experience, consequent on her fully incarnate being, there is no need of a mind with any degree of detachment from the body, for life is carried on by instinct. Under an admiring gaze her body "instantly of its own accord puts forth a frill" (45), communicating with others in a wordless society of bodies. Her body she describes as being 'open' or 'shut' at will (46), including or excluding another from that society, her world.

Jinny's life is a sexual adventure from beginning to end, and it is at parties, where she makes her conquests, that she is seen at her most 'at home' in the world:

73 Among the lustrous green, pink, pearly-grey
 women stand upright the bodies of men. They
 are black and white; they are grooved beneath
 their clothes with deep rills. I feel again
 the reflection in the window of the tunnel;
 it moves.

Dancing at a party is significantly described as a sea,
and as a body: Jinny and her partner are swept in and out,
round rocks, flowing but enclosed within a larger figure
(74). The image of the sea emphasises that Jinny's
actual world is that shared world of all the others,
existing in itself, over above the individual world she
experiences through the way she lives her body.

In the context of her full embodiment, the world
for Jinny is a glittering party of bodies where names
are unimportant. In this fulfilling of herself she is
supremely confident:

74 I look straight back at you, men and women.
 I am one of you. This is my world.

Only when the pact is firm between the bodies can she
feel herself "admitted to the warmth and privacy of
another soul" (75). The soul, though, has no interest
for her because she constantly seeks moments of physical
ecstasy; once passed, these moments give way to "slackness
and indifference" and the search for a new partner -
"beauty must be broken daily to remain beautiful" (124).

Jinny, I suggest, is at one extreme of that scale of
ways in which the body can be lived; she can imagine

nothing "beyond the circle cast by my body" (92). Her sense of unity projects itself through her body and affects others, as she is aware. Coming into the restaurant for Percival's farewell dinner, Jinny seems to Susan to centre everything, to pull everything to her. She makes others conscious of their bodies: the men straighten their ties (clothes, which Jinny always notices, being in a sense an extension of the body), and Susan hides her hands beneath the table (86-7). Jinny proclaims herself wholly through her actions, and she perhaps makes others uncomfortable because she reminds them that they too have bodies, which they would rather forget:

92 My body goes before me, like a lantern down
 a dark lane, bringing one thing after another
 out of darkness into a ring of light. I
 dazzle you; I make you believe that this is
 all.

There is nothing interesting to Jinny in the stories one may read in people's faces, for there is no certainty about them. Body and mind to her are one: "We who live in the body see with the body's imagination things in outline" (125).

Most of the firmly embodied characters in the novels are in some degree threatening to those who fight a constant battle with their bodies. Those who tend to unembodiment are outcasts, outsiders and visionaries. Jinny, though, is envied rather than feared, even if that envy is frequently manifested as a sort of fear. One of her

friends, Bernard, remembers her in his summing up, which concludes The Waves, as sterile, seeing only what was before her, on the surface; yet he admires her animal honesty. She relates to others solely through her body, as Bernard recalls:

179 It was a tree; there was the river; it was
 afternoon; here we were; I in my serge suit;
 she in green. There was no past, no future;
 merely the moment in its ring of light [cast
 by jinny's body ?], and our bodies; and then
 the inevitable climax, the ecstasy.

Jinny's embodiment is explicitly sexual. She cannot, like Neville, range in her memory back and forth in time, nor, like Susan, can she be a mother, for a relationship with children would not be physically sexual. When Jinny notices that she is ageing this, to her, is not merely a case of more wrinkles on her face and less spring in her walk, but a real depletion of her very being. Her world begins to disappear as her charms fade:

137 But look - there is my body in that looking-
 glass. How solitary, how shrunk, how aged!
 I am no longer young. I am no longer part of
 the procession. ... I still move. I still
 live. But who will come if I signal ?

To overcome this ontological depletion she rouses herself to prepare a face to meet the faces that she meets; a face created by colour, by the movement of the mechanical world running smoothly and noisily about her (138). Ultimately, Jinny is a machine; she thrives in the world of technology.

and manufacture, for it seems that 'they' are, as she is, engaged in prolonging the appearance of bodies, of erasing mind and emotion in favour of the mechanistic physical:

138

Look how they show off clothes here even underground in a perpetual radiance. They will not let the earth even lie wormy and sodden.

*

Susan lives her body almost as completely embodied as Jinny, but differs in that there is in her make-up a sense of distance between consciousness and body. She lives through her senses (which are acute), accepting her body as the natural home of her being, as she is at home in the larger world of nature. As a child she develops a hatred of anything foreign to her native soil: the smells and regulations of school are anathema to her, as are the firs and mountains of Switzerland, where she finishes her education; this radical autochthony characterizes her throughout her life.

Jinny's kissing Louis, in the garden where the book opens (9), is an event which affects all the children. The jealousy it arouses in Susan makes her perceive acutely that her body is "short and squat". This childhood trauma leads her to feel excluded from the sexual adventures of others; she feels low, near the ground and the insects.

This early body-image dictates the subsequent development of the way she lives her body.

Susan is uninterested in the artificial, the meretricious:

39 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, and solitude in which to unfold my possessions.

The idea of possession is central in Susan's character: by possessing all that is around her, and that her senses bring her evidence of, she can create her own world through her body. Her identification with sensory experience is so intense that she can believe herself to be what she experiences:

70 At this hour, this still early hour, I think I am the field, I am the barn, I am the trees; mine are the flocks of birds, and this young hare who leaps, at the last moment when I step almost on him.

In this can be seen the difference between the ways Susan and Jinny live their bodies. While Jinny is a sexual being, Susan is formed entirely from the experience of her senses and the feeling that her body is like the 'body' of the earth, warm in summer, cold and cracked in winter. At times, indeed, her identification with the earth tends towards a sort of unembodiment. This can be observed in a moment, the description of which makes it

sound strangely like Bernard's experience of the "world without a self":

71 I think sometimes (I am not twenty yet) I
am not a woman, but the light that falls on
this gate, on this ground. I am the seasons,
I think sometimes, January, May, November;
the mud, the mist, the dawn.

The moment is short-lived, as the weight of her body, leaning on the gate, recalls her from her reverie; it serves to illustrate the point that embodiment is not static, but a flux, conditioning the way an individual experiences the world. Susan's embodiment is more complex than Jinny's from the start.

Sometimes Susan envies Jinny and Rhoda living in London; it seems to her that they are able to control the inexorable pressures of life. To the others, Susan presents someone who "despises the futility of London" (85), but there is in her some longing for variation, for an escape from the unchanging routine of the seasons. At the farewell dinner-party where the six friends gather to say goodbye to their hero, Percival, who is leaving for India, Susan feels out of place; it is Jinny's territory. She gathers her "possessions", her fields and damp grasses, to protect her "soul" (87). In the way they live their bodies, Jinny and Susan oppose against each other the lives of city and country. While both are very fully embodied, they are so in different ways. Susan has accepted her body with what seems, compared to Jinny's

positiveness, almost resignation. Being embodied so completely, Susan is similar to Jinny in disliking words and taking everything at face value, but distinct from her in the discomfort she feels about her body in the setting of a town restaurant.

The position of nature as the source of the way Susan lives her body is usurped by her newborn child. It is of her body, as a tree is of the earth. She cradles it with her body:

122 ...all spun to a fine thread round the cradle,
wrapping in a cocoon made of my own blood
the delicate limbs of my baby ... making of
of my own body a hollow, a warm shelter for
my child to sleep in.

Her body, to her, assumes the contours of the land. This child is more than just another possession; it is an extension of her body:

122-3 'His eyes will see when mine are shut,' I
think. 'I shall go mixed with them beyond
my body ...'

Her idea here is of what could be called a 'physical transcendence' rather than a transcendence of the physical.

There is always in Susan a sense that to have to live a body is regrettable but inevitable. "I shall never have anything but natural happiness," she says, somewhat ambiguously, with her friends in London, quietly hinting that she feels she misses something: "It will almost

content me." From her early experience of herself as "squat and ugly" she has come to be embodied in a way that causes her none of the tension of the unembodied, but also prevents her from realising aspects of herself that she is made acutely aware of by her visits to London, particularly in Jinny's company.

This sense of unfulfillment weighs on her when her children are grown. She feels that she has reached the summit of her desires; she has planted and nurtured and brought to maturity part of her own body. With this completion, she begins to tire of her life:

136 Yet sometimes "I am sick of natural happiness,
and fruit growing, and children scattering
the house with oars, guns ... and other trophies.
I am sick of the body, I am sick of my own
craft, industry and cunning, ...

Susan has been constrained by her early experience of her body; she has lived in harmony with the nature she felt close to as a child, but has never overcome a sense of loss, of not being able to grasp the "air-ball's string" of words that Bernard and the other city-dwellers seem to grasp with such facility. She has resigned will to reaction, imagination to sensory experience, and as she grows old she thinks perhaps her life has not been 'real', for she has made no effort to oppose nature: "Life stands round me like glass round the imprisoned reed" (137). A more adventurous, more 'real' (to her) Susan looks out from her "rather squat, grey before my time" body, through "clear eyes,

pear-shaped eyes"², and it is this Susan who withdraws her square-tipped fingers from Jinny's sight in the restaurant. Susan begins to detach herself from her body as she grows older, filled with a sense of loss. For Jinny the world of bodies is enough, but Susan sees beyond it.

At the final reunion of the six friends, at Hampton Court, Neville's self-confidence, bolstered by his qualifications, withers before Susan. In an effort to make her identity "crouch" beneath his he tells her of the variety and vigour of his life, comparing it to Susan's seasonal routine. The difference in their lives is shown most clearly in the way they have lived their bodies. "I", says Neville,

150 took the print of life not outwardly, but inwardly upon the raw, the white, the unprotected fibre. I am clouded and bruised with the print of minds and faces and things so subtle that they have smell, colour, texture, substance, but no name. I am merely 'Neville' to you, who see the narrow limits of my life and the line [body] it cannot pass. But to myself I am immeasurable.

Susan's life is emblematised in her body, with which she now challenges Neville: her life has been solid, in huge blocks, not flickering and evanescent like his, because she has lived through her senses, through her body, and the body does not refine, does not chop things small with words:

152 My body has been used daily, nightly, like a
 tool by a good workman, all over.

With her body she demolishes the world of phrases:

153 I sit among you abrading your softness with
 my hardness, quenching the silver-grey flickering
 moth-wing quiver of words with the green spurt
 of my clear eyes.

However, Susan has perceived the restriction her embodiment
entails, and the last words she speaks in the book sum
up her sense of loss:

165 Still I gape ... like a young bird, unsatisfied,
 for something that has escaped me.

*

For those, like Jinny and Susan, whose way of living the
body tends very much to complete embodiment, the world
is not usually a threatening place. They are marked by
a sense of security, of 'belonging'. This is not to say
that embodied being is immune to doubt, but at least such
embodiment provides an initial firm foundation for being.
When the way the body is lived tends more towards
unembodiment, the self's position in the world is altogether
more precarious. Again, by description of two examples,
the other extreme of the scale of ways of living the body
is illustrated.

* * *

(ii) Unembodiment

MD
96 He had gone through the whole show, friendship.
 European War, death, had won promotion, was
 still under thirty and was bound to survive.
 He was right there. The last shells missed
 him. He watched them explode with indifference.

Septimus Warren Smith, in Mrs. Dalloway (1925), begins to tend towards unembodiment when he is urged by his employer, Mr. Brewer, to develop "manliness" (by playing football! [95]). When his friend Evans dies in battle, Septimus sees an opportunity to display his manliness to the world by showing no feelings. The Septimus that others experience is not at all identical with Septimus as he speaks to 'himself'. R.D. Laing, in The Divided Self, is instructive in understanding the nature of the dissociation in Septimus:

74 The individual is developing a microcosmos
 within himself; but, of course, this
 autistic, private, intra-individual 'world'
 is not a feasible substitute for the only
 world there really is, the shared world.

Septimus believes that the world, not he, has altered, and he must hold on to this belief for the security of his own being: "it might be possible," he thinks, "that the world itself is without meaning" (98).

Septimus is not protected from the world by the defining line of his own body. His unembodiment leads him to experience his own being as terrifying and

uncontrolled, for the medium by which the world can be kept at a distance seems not to be 'there'. He feels that his body has been soaked away, "macerated until only the nerve fibres were left" (76). From this way of living his body comes his sense of being freed from the earth, able to look down from "the back of the world" on all mankind (76).

Septimus's world initially depends, as each person's does, on how he lives his body. His unembodiment frees him from the constraints of a normal physical body in his own perception; this perception is in direct conflict with the world outside him, a world which makes no distinction between 'him' and his body. Most of the time Septimus regards his body as an 'other', as, for instance, when he melodramatically drops his head in his hands, making his wife, Rezia, send for help (100).

Throughout the novel, Septimus is largely unaware of his body as it appears to others in the actual world:

26 Happily Rezia put her hand with a tremendous weight on his knee so that he was weighted down, transfixed.

To him, his body is one more object in that world, bobbing up and down in the breeze along with the trees, feathers and birds. Septimus's unembodiment causes a serious disjunction between his perceptions and those of others around him. In order to stave off the madness which Septimus feels this disjunction threatens him with, he

translates his sensations into an inexpressible "religion" of which he is the prophet, and gives meaning to a world which he sees might well be meaningless.

If he was embodied he would have to feel, and thus have to face, primarily, Evans' death. Unembodied, he can create a solipsistic world in which "there is no death" (28). His body is in the world of death - "There was his hand; there the dead" (28) - and so he must abandon that body as far as he can. His sensations are given significance by his 'self' (in Laing's sense of a 'core' of being looking out of an alien body). Septimus must remain unembodied in order to live for himself; to live the body in this way, however, appears in the actual world as an aberration to be 'cured'.

In Septimus's world "there is no death", and so he reasons that he does not have to feel for Evans. The death of his friend and the demands on him to be "manly" have driven him to a state of extreme unembodiment. His omniscience ("He knew all their thoughts, he said; he knew everything. He knew the meaning of the world, he said." [74]) is necessary to him if he is to deny his body as a physical limit to himself. Again, the condition is described by Laing (op. cit.):

...the hidden shut-up self, in disowning participation ... in the quasi-autonomous activities of the false-self system, is living only 'mentally'. Moreover, this shut-up self, being isolated, is unable to be enriched by outer experience, and so the whole inner world comes to be more and more impoverished,

75 until the individual may feel he is merely a vacuum. The sense of being able to do anything and the feeling of possessing everything then exist side by side with a feeling of impotence and emptiness.

VW conveys the hopeless paradox of Septimus's position with telling psychological insight; he is trapped between the extremes of omnipotence and eternal suffering:

29 Look, the unseen bade him, the voice now communicated with him who was the greatest of mankind, Septimus, lately taken from life to death, the Lord who had come to renew society, who lay like a coverlet, a snow blanket, smitten only by the sun, for ever unwasted, suffering for ever, the scapegoat, the eternal sufferer, but he did not want it, he moaned, putting from him with a wave of his hand that eternal suffering, that eternal loneliness.

The world that Septimus tries to escape from is represented by the doctors, Holmes and Bradshaw, by Mr. Brewer, and even to some extent by his wife, Rezia. They try to make Septimus take notice of "real things". Such attention would necessitate embodiment for him, and thus feeling and recognising death. The insistence of the actual world drives Septimus further into unembodiment. Holmes and Bradshaw treat the body, but Septimus, as he lives his body, cannot be touched by them:

103 But even Holmes himself could not touch this last relic straying on the edge of the world, this outcast, who gazed back at the inhabited regions, who lay, like a drowned sailor, on the shore of the world.

Just before his suicide, Septimus is alone with Rezia; he is calmed by the shimmering patterns of sunlight on the wall, but the peaceful atmosphere is shot through with intimations of his imminent death (153-4). Carefully, Septimus, drawing calm and courage both from the sights and sounds of nature, and from Rezia's stability, begins to take stock of his surroundings:

156 But real things - real things were too exciting.
 He must be cautious. He would not go mad.

He begins to move away from unembodiment, to 're-embody' himself through vision (primarily). When he closes his eyes, however, the world he has been carefully approaching, one item at a time, disappears. Alone, he feels that his world (that is, the world of his unembodied self) has gone forever - he is stuck with the sideboard and the bananas, which undermine his vision by their mundaneness, deny what he considers the truth. With what must be understood as a supreme effort, Septimus resolves to face "the screen, the coal-scuttle, and the sideboard" (160). He has begun to come back to his body, but the sound of Holmes - "human nature" (155) - on the stair, forcing his way in, reminds Septimus of that world that drove him to unembodiment and torment. Holmes and Bradshaw "mixed the vision and the sideboard" (163), his unembodied being and his appearance in the actual world; such people see with a single vision only, and yet have power over others.

Septimus is now moving towards embodiment and sees vividly that he is subject to the doctors, and that what he thought was an omnipotent being has in fact no authority, no autonomy, in their world, the actual world.

Rationally, the only possibility for his embodied self is suicide, for it is the only way he can preserve his autonomy as embodied. Rezia understands why Septimus kills himself, having come to understand the way the world represented by Dr. Holmes tramples on those who do not fit in it. The union of Rezia and Septimus in opposing the single vision of Holmes (and thus Rezia's understanding of Septimus's act) is implied by an image both share. As Septimus begins to recover from his anguish, his torments are all "burnt out, for he had a sense, as he watched Rezia ... of a coverlet of flowers" (157). After his death, Rezia is calm, feeling like "flying flowers over some tomb" (165).

*

At the furthest extreme of unembodiment of all VW's characters is Rhoda, in The Waves. The gulf between what she calls "myself" and the body by which she is recognised in the world is wide and deep; her isolation is emphasised from the start of the book. She is more alone than her closest friend, Louis, who is also predominantly unembodied, but can at night "put off this unenviable body. ... and inhabit space" (38). Rhoda does not have the imagination that

partly rescues Louis from his uncomfortable relationship with his body; she suffers in every situation. It is only near the end of the book, at the reunion in Hampton Court, that she has taught her body to "do a certain trick" so that she will appear to have overcome her terror of the leaping tiger of society.

Rhoda is thrown into the world by a body she hates and tries to avoid:

30-31 "That is my face," said Rhoda, "in the looking-glass behind Susan's shoulder - that face is my face. But I will duck behind her to hide it, for I am not here. I have no face. Other people have faces; Susan and Jinny have faces; they are here. Their world is the real world.

What makes Rhoda's position in life impossible, more painful than that of Septimus, is her understanding that the world of the embodied is, as she puts it, the "real" world, the world in which actions have effects, objects weight. The reflection of her "real" face shows her the actual world which has her in its grip, rather than her private fantasy of the swallow and the pool, which she can control. Always, though, Rhoda is trapped by her need for others, the need to replenish her dreams with figures from that world populated by those who are at home in their bodies. Louis, her ally in unembodiment, understands her position:

We wake her. We torture her. She dreads us, she despises us, yet comes cringing to our sides because for all our cruelty there is always

86 some name, some face, which sheds a radiance,
 which lights up her pavements and makes it
 possible for her to replenish her dreams.

She longs for "lodgement" (94), that is, for a home in the world which her body does not provide. By copying others, she hopes to share some of their ease, to "light my fire at the general blaze of you who live wholly, indivisibly and without caring" (94).

Rhoda does not deny her body entirely as she knows that she must live it in some way as a living being:

31 Alone, I often fall down into nothingness. ...
 I have to bang my hand against some hard door
 to call myself back to the body.

Her feeling of being "committed" to life, in the sense of being committed to prison, springs from the tension inherent in the way she lives her body. She does not want to die, but cannot be at home in her body, and so lives in a twilight between life and death. As the book progresses, Rhoda slips further into unembodiment; her increasing dissociation from her body is a strand of the book's overall movement as definite as the passage of the sun through the sky, or Jinny's ageing:

32-33 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.

The ambivalence in Rhoda's way of living her body is seen in her attitude to night and sleep. Going to bed, she must stretch her toes to touch the rail to assure herself of the world and her being in it. The night invites sleep, and Rhoda fears that if she sleeps she will lose the already slight hold she has on her body and never come back to it; yet to relinquish her body and enter the world of dreams is a solace for her:

19-20 Out of me now my mind can pour. I can think
 of my Armadas sailing on the high waves. I
 am relieved of hard contacts and collisions.
 I sail on alone under white cliffs.

As she falls asleep, however, the panic of losing identity overcomes her; she feels waters closing over her and struggles to emerge from them by recognising the objects around her:

20 Oh, but I sink, I fall! That is the corner of
 the cupboard; that is the nursery looking-
 glass. But they stretch, they elongate. ...
 Oh, to awaken from dreaming! Look, there is
 the chest of drawers.

Rhoda does not want to give life up, and knows she must 'live' her body, but because she can never feel 'at home' in that body, her unembodiment is extreme and her tendency towards dissolution, against which she struggles less and less effectively, eventually overcomes her will to live. The "thin sheet" of her childhood bed can no longer save her. At the extreme pitch of her despair, Rhoda echoes Septimus Smith's fear of falling into the

sea or into flames (MD, 155), and his bitter observation that "once you fall ... human nature is upon you" (154):

TW
158-9

After all these callings hither and thither, these pluckings and searchings, I shall fall alone through this thin sheet into gulfs of fire. And you will not help me. More cruel than the old torturers, you will let me fall and will tear me to pieces when I am fallen.

Also like Septimus, Rhoda exhibits that feeling of omniscience and omnipotence that Laing notes as characteristic of the unembodied self in its retreat from the actual world, (see above, pp. 19-20):

159

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 the black of midnight and be cast off and escape from here and now.

A crucial moment in Rhoda's life demonstrates her realisation of the inevitability of living her body, a realisation which is the source of constant anguish to her:

Also, 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. We are nothing, I said, and fell. I was blown like a feather, I was wafted down tunnels. Then, very gingerly, I pushed my foot across. I laid my hand against a brick wall. I returned very painfully, drawing myself back into my body over the grey, cadaverous space of the puddle. This is

46 the life then to which I am committed.³

Recalling this experience (113) Rhoda states that "Unless I can stretch and touch something hard, I shall be blown down the eternal corridors for ever." Rhoda is, in Laing's words, "guilty at daring to be, and doubly guilty at not being, at being too terrified to be" (op.cit., 157). She is saved from "chaotic nonentity" (Laing) by the brief security her sense of being in a body provides. It is, however, the fact that she stretches unembodiment as far as possible that leads to her clutching at the experience of her bodily senses for a sense of being at all. Eventually - we must assume from Bernard's report - Rhoda no longer made the effort to draw herself "across the enormous gulf" into her body (113).

*

The four characters discussed - Jinny, Susan, Septimus and Rhoda - are at either extreme of a scale of what I have called 'at-homeness' in the body. All the other characters of the novels fall between these two extremes in terms of their embodiment or unembodiment, which is more or less emphasised. The question of the way the body is lived must precede any account of self precisely because human being lives a body as its foundation in the world. That VW saw the body as lived rather than merely as a given environment for a shadowy self is an indication of her intentions in the creation of character.

Having seen that the body is not taken for granted, the next step in describing the context of VW's enquiry into human being is to investigate what is meant by 'I', the mark of a particular identity; that perspective from which even the most unembodied character may speak.

Notes to Chapter One

1. (p.1) See Sydney Shoemaker, 'Embodiment and Behaviour', in A.O. Rorty, ed., The Identities of Persons

2. (p.15) To endorse Susan's view see the 2nd holograph draft of The Waves (Graham, p. 503) where she says: "It is my self. My self is in my eyes."

3. (p.27) This moment is drawn from an experience VW describes in her memoir A Sketch of the Past:

MOB
78

There was the moment of the puddle in the path; when for no reason I could discover, everything suddenly became unreal; I was suspended; I could not step across the puddle; I tried to touch something... the whole world became unreal.

For a full exposition of the implications of this and other correlations between the lived experience of the writer and her fiction see R. Poole, The Unknown Virginia Woolf. The question of embodiment is comprehensively discussed in this book; see especially Ch. 15, 'Virginia's embodiment', to which my chapter must owe a great deal.

Chapter Two

Identity and Self

'I' is, as Martin Buber put it, "the true shibboleth of humanity" (I and Thou, 115), but the word can be uttered in many different ways. VW's novels enquire into the status of 'I' as it is spoken by various characters in various contexts, and from this we may draw her concepts of identity and self, the distinction between which will emerge as we proceed.

Frequently, there is a moment in the novels when, with a feeling either of exhilaration or anxiety, a character is suddenly overcome by a sense of being unique, of being 'I'. In The Voyage Out, that the heroine, Rachel Vinrace, has little sense of individual identity is emphasised from the start: she would "believe anything she was told, invent reasons for anything she said" (31). Friendless, inexperienced and sheltered, Rachel's ordinariness is the most striking thing about her. She has had no social intercourse, and any impulse towards an individual attitude has been quickly suppressed by her father or aunts; she thus believes that

34 to feel anything strongly was to create an
abyss between herself and others who feel
strongly perhaps but differently.

This aspect of Rachel is so dwelt upon that the shattering effect on her of Dalloway's forced kiss is

unsurprising. The sudden sexual experience throws Rachel into a (sexual) world of bodies, making her regard her own body uncomfortably as an instrument of passion and temptation (84-5). That she could be an object of desire in a world she knows hardly anything about is profoundly shocking for her:

91 Helen's words hewed down great blocks which had stood there always, and the light which came in was cold.

For Rachel, what can be called the experience of self-discovery is fascinating; prompted by Helen Ambrose, she sees herself for the first time standing out against a background composed of all other people:

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

94-5 "I can be m-m-myself," she stammered, "in spite of you, in spite of the Dalloways, and Mr. Pepper, and Father, and my Aunts, in spite of these?" She swept her hand across a whole page of statesmen and soldiers.

Such moments of 'self-discovery' occur in all the novels, and provide what could be called a first signification of identity: the encountering of myself, called 'I', distinct from all others in the world, as continuous and unmergeable.

Immediately, however, a problem is raised for which the novels after Night and Day (1919) successively seek and offer solutions. Rachel's "vision of ... herself" raises the question of who has that vision. It is not enough to say simply that the individual divides into a reflected and reflecting part. 'I' is, for the most part, spoken as a received cipher for one being among others. The experience of self-discovery distinguishes the individual 'I' from the faceless crowd that moves through all the novels, obliterating 'I', sweeping people along en masse. This crowd is the background against which the experience of self-discovery stands out. To emerge from that background requires an effort, for it is easier to flow with the crowd, as Katharine Hilbery, the heroine of Night and Day, finds:

465-6 She stood fascinated at the corner. The deep roar filled her ears; the changing tumult had the inexpressible fascination of varied life pouring ceaselessly with a purpose which, as she looked, seemed to her, somehow, the normal purpose for which life was framed; its complete indifference to individuals, whom it swallowed up and rolled onwards, filled her with at least a temporary exaltation.

The problem I have referred to above is that of discovering what inspires the effort to rouse an individual's 'I' to emerge from the crowd. The question is put simply in 'An Unwritten Novel', a sketch written in 1920 as VW was planning Jacob's Room: "When the self speaks to the self, who is speaking?" (AHH, 21). There is a distinction between the voice of the "self speaking to the self" and

the 'I' that is uttered in the shared world of relationships between one identity and another. The status of 'I' as the defining word of identity is thus complex rather than simple. In what follows, the novels' enquiry into the nature and status of identity, and their enquiry into the possibility of a unitary, autonomous self will be described and any implicit conclusions elucidated.

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"There is," says the 'narrator' of Jacob's Room (1922), "something absolute in us that despises qualification" (143). In this novel, that

29. [it is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done -

becomes almost a refrain. The authorial stance in Jacob's Room is inquisitive, uncertain; in its hesitancy can be seen a determination to enquire honestly into the human situation, a refusal to assume control and dictate a system into which life will be made to fit. That "life is but a procession of shadows," that we cannot know others - except as what Clarissa Dalloway will call "apparitions" - that there is no way of defining an individual - all this is affirmed. Jacob's Room sketches out the frame within which VW's investigations into the strange nature of human being take place:

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.

70-71 Such is the manner of our seeing. Such the conditions of our love.

Such, it might be said, the conditions of her enquiry.

"Human reality cannot be finally defined by patterns of conduct" (Sartre, Being and Nothingness); cannot, Jacob's Room suggests, be finally defined by anything.

The novel undercuts its own purpose by trying to create a unique character while at the same time admitting the impossibility of the project:

71-72 But though all this may very well be true - so Jacob thought and spoke - so he crossed his legs - filled his pipe - sipped his whisky, and once looked at his pocket-book, rumpling his hair as he did so, there remains over 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. Then consider the effect of sex - ... But something is always impelling one to hum vibrating, like the hawk moth, at the mouth of the cavern of mystery, endowing Jacob Flanders with all sorts of qualities he had not at all - ...

The individual is enmeshed in the influences, relationships and possibilities of the world, caught up in the movement through time and space, and so cannot be realised as one absolute entity. If there is a unique self to be identified -

a 'summing up' of the person - it must be separated from its intervolvement with the world. However, such an operation may well lead to nothing.

*

At the beginning of Mrs. Dalloway (1925), Clarissa, recently recovered from an illness, delighting in a fresh day and the hustle and bustle of the West End, is undisturbed by the thought of her death. She will not say of herself "I am this, I am that" (11), preferring to see herself as a "mist" diffused among the familiar people and places of her life.

11 Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? but that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived,

In this mood Clarissa is particularly susceptible to the fading away of individual identity that engulfment by the crowd threatens. Content to be part of the "ebb and flow of things", her identity ("her life, herself", 12) begins thinning away, spreading out further and further, until eventually no sense of 'I' as an individual identity remains to her.

The crowd has absorbed Clarissa so completely that she can no longer say 'I' and feel that she utters her

own identity:

13 She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway.

'I' is Mrs. Richard Dalloway, just one more fashionable woman shopping in the West End. The importance of names should be noted here as they are significant in the question of identity. 'Dalloway' is, of course, not 'really' Clarissa's name but one imposed over her own by marriage; to be "not even Clarissa any more" means that the 'I' she utters does not have, to her, the distinction of a unique individuality.

An interesting comment on the significance of names is provided by the scene in which Clarissa's old lover, Peter Walsh, just returned from India, is seen following a pretty young woman. Having just left Clarissa's house, where their meeting again after a long separation has aroused many painful memories for Peter, he fantasizes about this 'ideal' girl he has glimpsed in the street:

59 Straightening himself and stealthily fingering his pocket-knife he started after her to follow this woman, this excitement, which seemed even with its back turned to shed on him a light which connected them, which singled him out, as if the random uproar of the traffic had whispered through hollowed hands his name, not Peter, but his private name which he called himself in his own thoughts.

(my italics)

This unnamed name seems suggestive of an essence transcending mere identity; but here we are anticipating what must be more clearly explained. As a comment on this passage I will cite the following, from Geoffrey Hartman, Saving the Text:

125 ... for those who have a name may also seek a more authentic and defining one. This other name is usually kept secret precisely because it is sacred to the individual, or numinous (nomen numen): as if the concentrated soul of the person lodged in it.

There will be more to say about names later, but for now it is enough to note their function of providing one of the bases for identity.

In Mrs. Dalloway, the simple 'I' with which Rachel Vinrace was seen to lay claim to an individual identity, gives way to more complex notions. Clarissa is engaged in what may be seen as a search for her ownmost identity: her recollections of childhood and an unresolved early love affair often prevent her from having a sense of continuity in her being. Memories dislocate her sense of a single identity by irrupting into her present life, so that she "would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that" (11).

When she returns home to discover that her husband, Richard, has been invited to lunch without her, Clarissa feels empty and lost: identity once more drains away, because she has not been included. To regain her sense of identity she detaches herself from the present, and dips

into the past, her memories. As the sense of a rich relationship (with Sally Seton) and a moment of vision returns to her, the emptiness occasioned by her exclusion fills. She abruptly returns to the present, and

41-2 plunged into the very heart of the moment, transfixed it there - the moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all the other June mornings.

This circling of the moment with all the other moments of life gives her identity point and continuity. Memory thus plays a double rôle, both disturbing and restoring the individual's sense of identity. From the sum of her life recalled, Clarissa is able to fill the moment and regain her sense of identity, of being someone in the world to whom things have happened, to whom people have spoken, someone who has caused both happiness and sadness. Her physical being also has a part to play in this gathering together of herself. To see her own body gives her some security; when she cannot see herself, the fading of identity that she experienced in Bond Street is quickened; she feels "invisible". On returning home, her image in a mirror joins with memory as she reassumes (what is here specifically called) her self:

That was her self - pointed; dart-like; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-

42 room and made a meeting-point, a radiancy no
 doubt in some dull lives, a refuge for the
 lonely to come to perhaps.

There is another "self", the "she" who "alone knew" that this assembly of elements is "composed so for the world only," and so "self" here is not unique, but a momentary resolution of scattered attributes that saves Clarissa from a moment of despair.

Identity, then, is not a "thing", as Rachel Vinrace put it, but a flux of sensations and attributes that can be drawn together by an effort based on such a security-ensuring stimulus (at least for the embodied) as the sight of one's own body in a mirror. Identity is made up of what Clarissa later in the novel calls "apparitions". In this instance it appears to be an accumulation of reflections unified by a name. When there are no acute stimuli, nor an available 'base' for identity, it can slip, as it does for Clarissa in the crowded street, and for Peter Walsh walking through London after his reunion with Clarissa, which arouses a welter of memories:

58 ...the strangeness of standing alone, alive,
 unknown, at half-past eleven in Trafalgar Square
 overcame him. What is it? Where am I? And
 why, after all, does one do it? he thought,

Thus far it is suggested that if identity is not to be the undifferentiated identity of the crowd, an effort must be made. Individual identity is, however, formed in a nexus of relationships and influences without which

it cannot emerge from the background of the crowd. What initially stimulates the necessary effort is not clear, but we may say that there is a tension between the desire for autonomy, and the necessity, in forming identity, of both interrelationships with others, and the boundaries of space and time.

The party is a foundation on which Clarissa can rely for identity, but, we know now, it is possible for identity to be "composed so for the world only". Because "anybody could do it" (187), and because she feels she must act a part as hostess, Clarissa once again feels that a "true" or "real" identity, her own 'I', eludes her:

Every time she gave a party she had this feeling of being something not herself, and that everyone was unreal in one way; much more real in another. It was, she thought, partly their clothes, partly being taken out of their ordinary ways, partly the background; it was possible to say things you couldn't say anyhow else, things that needed an effort; possible to go much deeper. But not for her; not yet anyhow.

187-8

Even this late in the novel the sense of incompleteness in Clarissa's identity is still very strong; the 'I' that she speaks in welcoming her guests does not satisfy her. She is still uncertain of what, or who, "herself" is; she still will not say of herself that she is one thing or another, a virgin in a narrow bed, or a smart London hostess.

Clarissa cannot feel herself as a single identity because she feels herself "everywhere; not 'here, here, here';... but everywhere" (168). Her "youthful theory" states what we have already seen to be the situation of identity:

to know anyone "one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places" (168). All that appears in the world are "apparitions", but there is another "unseen" part of us which can survive even death, by attaching to other people, haunting other places. The problem of identity is intricately bound up with that of knowing others, and because relationships form such a constantly shifting and widening web of interconnections there is no way of isolating one identity. What Clarissa suggests is an 'essence' which is somehow 'truer' than the "apparitions" of it which are identities in the shared world. The novel does not attempt to analyse what this essence might be, but clearly the fact of death is significant in the experience which allows for its perception.

The news of a young man's suicide disturbs that identity "composed so for the world only" that Clarissa has assumed for her party. Quickly, however, the specific death leads her to think simply about death itself; the finery of the party is stripped away: "one was alone" (202). For the first time in the novel there is a sense that Clarissa has reached some sort of plateau; the death seems to have led her to a transcendence of identities; she becomes simply "Clarissa". The final lines of the novel - "It is Clarissa, he said./ For there she was" (213) - endorse this sense (not stated) of completion, of unity. The rôle of death as the prime manifestation of the horizon of time in human being is important in VW's thinking (as will become increasingly clear); this account of the

novels' enquiry must eventually concern itself with her concept of temporality.

*

That identity depends to a great extent on relationship, and that relationships are inevitably flawed, as Clarissa Dalloway feels, is an idea that we find in To the Lighthouse (1927). The novel is pervaded by a bewilderment in the face of human relations and a longing for knowledge and intimacy. The question of how we can trust any of our feelings when each person presents to the world innumerable apparitions is still much in the writer's mind, particularly expressed in the character of the artist, Lily Briscoe:

42 How then did it work out, all this? How did one judge people, think of them? How did one add up this and that and conclude that it was liking one felt or disliking? And to those words, what meaning attached, after all?

The failed relationships of To the Lighthouse are testimony to that unsatisfactoriness of our knowledge of others that Clarissa Dalloway complained of.

Lily Briscoe's relationship with Mrs. Ramsay (presented only from Lily's point of view) makes explicit the implications of the characteristic yearning for intimacy: in effect, Lily wants to be Mrs. Ramsay, to know her in a way that would dissolve all difference between them:

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

82-3

Knowing that she cannot "know one thing or another about people, sealed as they were," Lily is a development from the hawk moth of Jacob's Room that hovered at the entrance to the cavern of mystery (JR, 72). Lily is a bee, haunting "the hives that were people" (83). This ghostly bee accepts the inevitability of ignorance, giving the novel its affirming character. Apparitions are all that we know, and they are endless:

One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with, she reflected. Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with, she thought. Among them, must be one that was stone blind to her beauty. ... What did the hedge mean to her, what did the garden mean to her, what did it mean to her when a wave broke?

303-4

Even seen from everywhere, every experience understood, there remains missing that elusive "something absolute in us that despises qualification" (JR, 143): what I suggest might be the unnameable self, 'the' Mrs. Ramsay, transcending all apparitions.

The "unseen part of us" that Clarissa Dalloway thought might survive death is given greater significance in To the Lighthouse. The "wedge-shaped core of darkness"

of Mrs. Ramsay's solitary reverie (99) is a development of what Clarissa called "the unseen part of us, which spreads wide" (MO, 168); a suggestion which is supported by a close similarity of description:

MO
168

...that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, ...

TTL
100

...our apparitions, the things you know us by, are simply childish. Beneath it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is unfathomably deep; but now and again we rise to the surface and that is what you see us by.

Just as in the previous novel, an invisible, spreading inner essence is posited which, it seems, is Mrs. Ramsay 'herself'.

This "wedge-shaped core of darkness" overcomes the boundaries of space and time ("Her horizons seemed to her limitless," 100) by not issuing in action. In the light of what has been said in Chapter One, it is significant that during this reverie it is emphasised that Mrs. Ramsay remains sitting upright in her chair, knitting. The being of this "core of darkness" is therefore put in question: to be is to live a body, subject to the passage of time and taking up so much space. If there is something that might be called self, which does not share the modes of being so far established for identity, it will perhaps be impossible to actually describe.

I have spoken already of the need, expressed in Mrs Dalloway, for a foundation for individual identity,

and of the yearning for unity that is felt in the character of Clarissa. In To the Lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay achieves a foundation and a unity by detaching herself from identity (as Clarissa seemed to when she withdrew from her party to the little room on hearing of Septimus Smith's suicide):

TTL
100 There was freedom, there was peace, there was,
 most welcome of all, a summoning together,
 a resting on a platform of stability. Not as
 oneself did one find rest ever, in her
 experience ... but as a wedge of darkness.
 Losing personality, one lost the fret, the hurry,
 the stir;

The question remains: what is left of an individual if she is abstracted from all involvements in the shared world of human relationships? Mrs. Ramsay's moment of solitude has about it an air of tending towards death; she seems to "triumph over life when things came together in this peace, this rest, this eternity" (100). However, VW was certainly no mystic escaping the world through contemplation; once again, her understanding of the fact of death is centrally important.

Mrs. Ramsay is not only looking inward; she looks at the beam of the lighthouse, concentrating on it until she "became the thing she looked at" (101). In this reverie, in which "personality" is lost, control is relinquished and the identity of the crowd can creep back in, as it does in the religious platitude that so annoys Mrs. Ramsay when she utters it:

It will come, it will come, when suddenly she added, We are in the hands of the Lord.

101 But instantly she was annoyed with herself for saying that. Who had said it? not she; she had been trapped into saying something she did not mean.

She is trying to reach some level of security that is not provided by the world in which she lives as mother, wife, and protector. A deity is no comfort in a world in which "there is no reason, order, justice; but suffering, death, the poor" (102). In what is, in effect, her search for faith, Mrs. Ramsay looks to a world of beauty, to be found in nature and "oneself":

101 It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone, one leant to things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they knew one, in a sense were one; felt an irrational tenderness thus (she looked at that long steady light) as for oneself.

To glance back at Clarissa Dalloway's moment of solitude (MD, 204), it may be that her looking out at the sky (which "held something of her own in it"), is an adumbration of Mrs. Ramsay's act of faith here. What emerges from these two novels is a deep distrust of human identity and relationships, and a yearning for something 'secure' which is not to be found by escaping from the world, but which inheres in it. It may be that the realisation of the self in the sense of the person purged of all apparitions (identities) is not a general human possibility, but the potential only of the adherents of what can best

be described as a particular religion. Before continuing with this examination of the question of identity and self, I wish to draw attention to the writer's experience over the years from the inception of To the Lighthouse to the beginning of The Waves. Later I will suggest that VW's early experience may have led to the deep distrust of human life alluded to above, and to her search for a "reality" apart from actual human being.

* * *

VW began to make up To the Lighthouse early in 1925 (see D.III, e.g. pp.3, 18-19). Towards the end of that year her relationship with Vita Sackville-West became closer and more intense, and was to continue so for at least three years. I wish in particular to draw attention to the experiences of two summers at Monk's House, where VW lived from 1919, in Rodmell, Sussex. Both were recorded in her diary.

The first, in 1926, echoes that experience of Mrs. Ramsay's just discussed:

These 9 weeks give one a plunge into deep waters which is a little alarming, but full of interest. All the rest of the year one's (I daresay rightly) curbing & controlling this odd immeasurable soul. When it expands, though one is frightened & bored & gloomy, it is as I say to myself, awfully

queer. There is an edge to it which I feel of great importance, once in a way. One goes down into the well & nothing protects one from the assault of truth. Down there I cant read or write; I exist however. I am. Then I ask myself what I am ? & get a closer though less flattering answer than I should get on the surface - where, to tell the truth, I get more praise than is right.

D. III
112

(28.9.1926)

The invisible, spreading something is given a name here: the soul. Two days later she comments on the experience, wishing to "add some remarks to this, on the mystical side of this solitude". It is interesting that she is no clearer in her diary (where she might perhaps be more direct) than in the novel (assuming - as I do - that the diary and novel passages concern similar experiences).

The 'soul' still "despises qualification":

...how it is not oneself but something in the universe that one's left with. It is this that is frightening & exciting in the midst of my profound gloom, depression, boredom, whatever it is: One sees a fin passing far out. What image can I reach to convey what I mean ? Really there is none I think. The interesting thing is that in all my feeling and thinking I have never come up against this before. Life is, soberly and accurately, the oddest affair; 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 ? &c. But by writing I dont reach anything. All I mean to make is a note of a curious state of mind. *Perhaps The Waves or moths (Oct. 1929)
I hazard the guess that it may be the impulse behind another book. At present my mind is totally blank & virgin of books.*

D. III
113

(30.9.1926)

The note she has written three years later encourages looking at the diary to help understand the novels' provenance. It seems strange to say that "life ... has in it the essence of reality." We might suppose "life" and "reality" to be synonymous, but evidently reality was something particular to VW¹, and what it was must be elucidated.

To the Lighthouse was published in May, 1927, but even before then VW conceived Orlando, a book she wrote at high speed while The Waves simmered in her mind. Indeed, the two books seem to have shared, in a sense, one creative impulse (see e.g. a note made in 1933 against the diary entry for 14.3.1927, D. III, 131). In June, 1927, VW travelled with Vita Sackville-West and others to observe the total eclipse of the sun (30.6.1927, D. III, 142-4: "We had seen the world dead. This was in the power of nature.") - an experience which provided elements of Bernard's "world seen without a self" in The Waves. Before continuing with a discussion of Orlando, I wish to remark on the second of those summer diary entries I referred to above.

Towards the end of the summer of 1928 VW wrote that she had had a busy time; it had been "a summer lived almost too much in public." She recalls previous summers spent at Monk's House in which she had had a "religious retreat". It seems very likely from what follows that she is remembering in particular the summer of 1926:

Often down here I have entered into a sanctuary; a nunnery; had a religious retreat; of great agony once; & always some terror: so afraid is one of loneliness: of seeing to the bottom of the vessel. That is one of the experiences I have had here in some Augusts; & got then to a consciousness of what I call 'reality': a thing I see before me; something abstract; but residing in the downs or sky; beside which nothing matters; in which I shall rest and continue to exist. Reality I call it. And I fancy sometimes this is the most necessary thing to me: that which I seek. But who knows - once one takes a pen and writes? How difficult not to go making 'reality' this and that, whereas it is one thing. Now perhaps this is my gift; this perhaps is what distinguishes me from other people; I think it may be rare to have so acute a sense of something like that - but again, who knows? I would like to express it too.

D. III
196

(10.9.1928)

With this entry, that abstract 'something' becomes clearer: it is "a thing I see before me" which resides in the downs or the sky. This at once recalls the experiences of Clarissa Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay. In this abstract 'reality' VW says she will rest - as Mrs. Ramsay wishes to rest (TTL, 100) - and continue to exist, as perhaps Clarissa means when she says of the "unseen part" that it "might survive" (MD, 168). (It is also worth noting that VW feels distinguished from other people by her acute consciousness of this 'reality'.)

The question as to whether there is an autonomous self apart from identity has led to the potential expressed in some of the characters of the novels and by VW herself in her diary, for apprehending a 'reality' which has no form or name in the world, and which can only be experienced in solitude; a 'reality' which overcomes the horizons of space and time. This 'reality' - in VW's own words, "that

which I seek" - must become the focus of this study as it is the object of her faith, gradually conceived and expressed in her novels.

* * *

John Graham, writing on 'The "Caricature Value" of Parody and Fantasy in Orlando'², puts well what I believe to be true of Orlando's development of VW's thoughts on self and identity:

345 Caricature can explore because it ignores the complexity of the total object and isolates only its relevant features, thereby allowing a sharper focus of attention than is possible in a full treatment. In many ways it can function for the artist as a refined sort of doodling, in which he "feels out" the forms and designs of his more serious work.

It is, nevertheless, generally agreed that Orlando (1928) gets increasingly "serious"; indeed, VW herself felt that what had begun as a "joke" did not end as one. The last chapter is greatly concerned with the heroine's identity, and begins by musing on the difficulty of saying what "life" is. (Incidentally, it mocks the masculine preoccupation with action, and its exclusion of thought and imagination in saying what life is [241].) VW's next work, The Waves, is prefigured at several points, e.g. p.257:

"Life ? Literature ? One to be made into the other ? But how monstrously difficult!" Followed through to the end; the final chapter of Orlando leads into areas as yet unprepared for; for now, I will simply refer to the analysis of identity that is found in those pages.

The tone of Orlando allows VW a directness which would be awkward in her other works. It should always be remembered in reading the book that it was an offering to Vita Sackville-West, and that it is "about" Knole and the Sackvilles in a much plainer sense than To the Lighthouse is about the Stephens. John Graham seems to have forgotten this when he complains that

op.cit. 362 By the time Orlando sits down in the long gallery of her home, she has become a distinctly credible aristocrat of the present age, down to the lavender bags, ropes, and name-cards which mark the passing of her private heritage into the public domain

Orlando has become Vita, a metamorphosis that led to what Vita herself called "a new form of Narcissism." "I confess," she wrote, "I am in love with Orlando - this is a complication I had not foreseen" (letter from V. S-W to VW, 11.10.1928, L. III, 574). That the "joke" was for Vita above all is demonstrated by the fact that it ends emphatically on the twelfth stroke of midnight, Thursday, October 11th, 1928 - the day Orlando was published and, as Vita's letter records, "the day I was to have it." This is perhaps a way of solving that problem of "Life ? Literature ? One to be made into the other ?" that a serious work (like The Waves)

could not achieve.

Having gone up to London to shop, Orlando is beset by memories which dislocate her sense of identity in the present. Getting into her car, Orlando, who, it is suggested, has "gone a little too far from the present moment" (274), is vulnerable to a loss of identity caused by her failure to synchronise the different times that beat within her. To have an identity, it is suggested, there must be a sense of being in a present; also identity appears to depend on coordinates of space. Motoring fast out of London these coordinates of time and space are fragmented, and a "chopping up small" of identity occurs which, it is said, is like that which "precedes unconsciousness and perhaps death itself" (276). As when Mrs. Ramsay slips into unconsciousness, there is a question as to the status of the person's existence: if identity is 'chopped up small' where is the person to be located? The passage suggests that such unconsciousness is a different mode of existence altogether from identity in the actual world; the approach to death might reveal that mode also.

Once in the country, the continuity of the visual impressions Orlando receives gives her a 'base' on which to re-establish identity. Identity is, as we have already learned, a series of apparitions, and it is apparitions that VW refers to by "selves" in this context. Orlando is composed of many different "selves", each having "attachments elsewhere, sympathies, little constitutions

and rights of their own" (277):

277. ...how many different people are there not -
Heaven help us - all having lodgment at one time
or another in the human spirit ?

There is nothing innovative about this view of human
identity and, as the narrator says,

277 everybody can multiply from his own experience
the different terms which his different selves
have made with him.

Orlando, however, seeks a particular identity, but
this will not "come"; as she drives, her identities
change. The problem of who it is that calls "Orlando ?"
and receives no answer is resolved by the introduction
of the "conscious self, which is uppermost, and has the
power to desire" (279). Orlando is calling her "true
self" which "some people" ("they") say is made up of "all
the selves we have it in us to be; commanded and locked
up by the Captain self, the Key self" (279). The "true
self" of Orlando, then, is an amalgam of all her identities
(according to "some people"). This at once introduces
the problem of how unity can be achieved while the person
lives through time; Orlando escapes the problem by being
a fantasy.

It is only when Orlando ceases to call for her
"true self" that she becomes it, and it is in this that
I believe the "joke's" serious underthought is glimpsed.

In the paragraph describing Orlando's coalescence into a "true self" can be detected tenuous similarities with those 'key' moments in both Clarissa Dalloway's and Mrs. Ramsay's life, that have been described above:

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

There is a similarity of mood between this moment and (particularly) Mrs. Ramsay's moment of sinking down to "being oneself". Probably the experiences are quite distinct, but it must be admitted that the moment of "being oneself" is characterised by solemnity, darkness, and peace.-

In Orlando the "true self" comes in silence, which suggests that it cannot be named. Communication (voices, naming) is the mark of apparitions; but in what sense can something exist without a name, an actual being in the shared world? From this point on Orlando loses all semblance of being a "joke" until the last few lines. I will return to it later, but now move on to The Waves (1931) in which the significance of silence in the matters under discussion may become clearer.

"Nothing should be named lest by doing so we change it," says Neville in The Waves (59). It is only by naming, however, that anything can be known. The problem of knowing what the "real self" 'is' in Orlando is explicitly founded in the problem of language. If the "real self" that Orlando sought comes only in silence, it is presumably outside language, outside naming. The idea of emptiness or silence at the heart of life is a recurring feature of the novels. It is connected with the idea of self so far established, for we have seen that if self does exist its mode of existence is not that of a named thing in the actual world; there is, perhaps, a zone of silence, a preverbal space from which identity arises³.

The questions raised by the novels, that as readers we must attempt to answer for ourselves, stand in opposition to such thought as that of the early Wittgenstein, for whom "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world" (Tractatus, 5.6). The Tractatus (1908) concludes: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (7). In her novels VW realises that while what is outside life is outside language, what is outside language is not necessarily outside life. There is a silence at the heart of life in her works, but it is not Wittgenstein's silence. The fundamental question addressed by the novels is whether there can be anything for us outside language; can the self be if its mode of discourse is silence ?

VW could not pass over in silence that whereof we cannot speak, but hovered over it incessantly. She may well have taken courage from a writer who, as Allen McLaurin has noted, "was so deeply implanted in her thought that his ideas seemed to be her own" (Virginia Woolf, 3). In his notebook, Samuel Butler wrote that,

The highest thought is ineffable; it must be felt from one person to another but cannot be articulated. All the most essential and thinking part of thought is done without words or consciousness. It is not till doubt and consciousness enter that words become possible.

The moment a thing is written, or even can be written, and reasoned about, it has changed its nature by becoming tangible, and hence finite, and hence it will have an end in disintegration. It has entered into death. And yet till it can be thought about and realised more or less definitely it has not entered into life. Both life and death are necessary factors of each other. But our profoundest and most important convictions are unspeakable.

Writing novels is, we might say, naming, however sophisticated, and this might go some way to explaining the sense of longing common in the fiction. In a way VW writes against herself all the time by adopting a position in which she says her task is hopeless, her goal impossible, but her effort inevitable. It should not be thought that this is a Beckettian⁵ pose: VW's work is, on the whole, strongly affirmative; yet it may be that she affirms through recognition of nothingness.

Having arrived at this somewhat Humean view of identity, we will do well to look briefly at some of the issues it raises, as the deeper concerns of the novels are beginning to emerge. To return to The Waves, Bernard is a sort of spokesman for this view of human being, feeling that his life is a series of acts (apparitions):

55 They do not understand that I have to effect different transitions; have to cover the entrances and exits of several different men who alternately act their parts as Bernard.

When he invites "poor Simes" to dinner, he thinks he will have attributed to him "an admiration which is not mine" (55). Bernard says that the admiration inferred is not really his, and yet by inviting Simes to dinner one apparition makes contact with another. Bernard knows only apparitions of Simes; life indeed seems to be a mere procession of shadows, as was suggested in Jacob's Room.

Bernard is fascinated by the different apparitions he presents to the world, forever turning them around in his mind. The private Bernard - when 'he' speaks to 'himself' - is in a sense an internal apparition: "Underneath, and, at the moment when I am most disparate, I am also integrated" (55). 'Bernard' to Bernard is merely the voice that speaks in him when he talks (as we all do) to himself. To conceive of oneself in this way is immediately to suggest duality - a 'self' regarding a 'self'. We can say, then, that this (Bernard to himself) is not the

"real self" because once communication is established language has always already taken 'self' into its system of apparitions. If named, the "true self" would become an element of the novel, given a status, a being amongst others. It seems that there can be no such self in the light of what has already been said, because if it is to be absolute it escapes the limitations of time and space on anything in the world. Only nothing (no-thing) escapes those limitations (horizons).

Yet again and again the novels enshrine privileged moments in which a self (or, to be now direct, a soul) is posited. What VW only very rarely called 'soul' (e.g. in her diary, as referred to above, p. 47), and what I (and sometimes she) call 'self' are both terms for that invisible "something" that is apart from all apparitions that can transcend the horizons of space and time, and that has its 'being' in silence. Also, it has appeared so far, the self or soul has a special and uncommunicable relationship with an abstract 'reality' residing in the actual world.

The self cannot be constructed from identities; to Neville's (paradigmatic) question "Who am I ?" (60), there can be no (single) answer:

60 As he approaches I become not myself but Neville
 mixed ... with Bernard.

Likewise, Bernard is "mixed" with Neville:

60 Now that we look at the tree together, it has a combed look, each branch distinct, and I will tell you what I feel, under the compulsion of your clarity.

Others cannot tell us who we are because they see themselves in us, who see us in them, and so on; there is such a mingling together of different identities that another can only give a version of us. Bernard knew this as a child:

11 "But when we sit together, close, ... we melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory.

We can only think about ourselves through the medium of language; if there is a "real self" it cannot, as Orlando stated, be thought about.

As Bernard grows up, and the novel progresses, more and more fragments that have 'Bernard' as their signature emerge: he is most himself to himself composed of many different parts, and so there is no one Bernard, (no "what is called, rightly or wrongly" in Orlando "real self"). Bringing together his "shabby inmates", Bernard feels whole, but this wholeness is merely aggregation, not a divisionless synthesis. In Bernard is found an attitude to identity unlike any that has so far been described, because he welcomes his diversity; unity seems to repel him because he sees that wholes are illusions:

- what am I ? There is no stability in this world. Who is to say what meaning there is in anything ? Who is to foretell the flight of a word ? It is a balloon that sails over tree-tops. To speak of knowledge is futile. All is experiment and adventure.

84

Bernard, the writer, sees through the "veil of words," but rejoices in their capacity for giving at least a sense of wholeness to a world in which only apparitions can act:

I feel at once, as I sit down at a table, the delicious jostle of confusion, of uncertainty, of possibility, of speculation. Images breed instantly. I am embarrassed by my own fertility. I could describe every chair, table, luncheon here copiously, freely. My mind hums hither and thither with its veil of words for everything.

84

Words fix as immutable a reality that is constantly changing, giving us a foundation for identity.

In the character of Bernard it is realised that identity cannot be fixed by the 'I'; he does not know his identity as a unity, but never tires of describing its perpetual changes:

For there is nothing to lay hold of. I am made and remade continually. Different people draw different words from me.

96

As life continues Bernard becomes increasingly aware of how identity depends almost entirely upon circumstances. There are moments when a single identity dominates, under the influence of a particular event, such as when he has

his proposal of marriage accepted:

80 I, who have been since Monday, charged in every nerve with a sense of identity.

In the street, in the crowd, he tries to shake off this enclosing singularity and let identity sink down, to become "like everybody else", but this is impossible for one who so persistently reflects on his own identity:

82 One cannot extinguish that persistent smell. It steals in through some crack in the structure - one's identity. I am not part of the street - no, I observe the street. One splits off, therefore.

Identity closes off things as they are, for everything is experienced by a particular identity. Thus the world appears as an enormously complicated assembly of reflections, in which 'I' exist only as the result of influences coloured by other 'I's, which in their turn are formed by reflection. Identity as a single, firmly grasped unity called 'I' no longer exists:

83 To be myself (I note) I need the illumination of other people's eyes, and therefore cannot be entirely sure what is myself.

From this fascinating doubt Bernard becomes yet another 'I', the 'I' of his soliloquies, observing all the others. The world for Bernard becomes so familiar that eventually he no longer questions it, seeming to accept that 'I' is

never fixed:

153 We are all swept on by the torrent of things
 grown so familiar that they cast no shade; we
 make no comparisons; think scarcely ever of I
 or you.

To "explain to you the meaning of my life" (168), Bernard can only continue to tell stories, but "none of them are true" (169). Talking of his friends, Bernard tells his guest (who must listen for all of us) how they have contributed to him, made him what he is (196, 199). As he tells his story, he emphasises that he is merely fabricating (as already noted, VW often seems to write against herself):

178 Let us again pretend that life is a solid
 substance, shaped like a globe, which we turn
 about in our fingers. Let us pretend that we
 can make out a plain and logical story, so that
 when one matter is despatched - love for
 instance - we go on, in an orderly manner,
 to the next.

To do anything but merely exist (like a tree) we must make up stories; as soon as we dip into the great bran-pie we alter it for ever, but we pretend we have left it just as it was. Again the nothingness of an absolute self is implied. Bernard echoes the others' soliloquies in the smallest details, showing that what is Bernard himself is indistinguishable from what is Louis, Jinny, Susan, Neville, or Rhoda, those others whose lives The Waves traces. Nevertheless, "if there are no stories,

what end can there be, or what beginning?" (189). Bernard incessantly spins out words, because

191 It is the effort and the struggle, it is the perpetual warfare, it is the shattering and piecing together - this is the daily battle, defeat or victory, the absorbing pursuit.

Even as he says this he sees through his "veil of words":
"The true order of things - this is our perpetual illusion - is now apparent" (193).

Bernard's experience of the "world seen without a self" is an attempt to be in the world without any apparitions: to experience a moment of being from the position of the nothing that it has been implied 'is' the self:

204 "But how describe the world seen without a self ? There are no words. Blue, red - even they distract, even they hide with thickness instead of letting the light through.

Again, it is language that comes between knowledge and experience: only an apparition can speak to us, and only words can tell the story of the "world seen without a self", which puts it among apparitions and so denies as it affirms.

*

The Waves exposes a gulf between language and reality

that is rarely faced in fiction. This, and the wider question it implies of the relationship between life and art, will be returned to in a later discussion of The Waves (see below, Ch. 4:ii). Before that consideration, however, I wish to describe further the context of VW's enquiry.

Notes to Chapter Two

1. (p.49) An interesting comment on VW's idea of "reality" is found in A Room of One's Own (1929), written straight after Orlando:

What is meant by "reality" ? It would seem to be something very erratic, very undependable - now to be found in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now a daffodil in the sun. It lights up a group in a room and stamps some casual saying. It overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars and makes the silent world more real than the world of speech - and then there it is again in an omnibus in the uproar of Piccadilly. Sometimes, too, it seems to dwell in shapes too far away for us to discern what their nature is. But whatever it touches, it fixes and makes permanent. That is what remains over when the skin of the day has been cast into the hedge; that is what is left of past time and of our loves and hates. Now the writer, as I think, has the chance to live more than other people in the presence of this reality. It is his business to find it and collect it and communicate to the rest of us.

165-6

(my italics)

2. (p.51) University of Toronto Quarterly, xxx, 4, July, 1961: pp. 345-365

3. (p.56) cf. 'Walter Sickert' (1934):

CE II Yet it may be, they went on, that there is a
236 zone of silence in the middle of every art.
 The artists themselves live in it.

4. (57) Samuel Butler, The Note-Books of Samuel Butler, selections arranged and edited by H.F. Jones (1912; Cape, 1921), p.93; quoted by A. McLaurin, Virginia Woolf, p. 8

5. (p.57) In conversation with Georges Dethuit, Samuel Beckett said he felt

that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, together with the obligation to express.

Chapter Three

Relationship and Communication

To be is to be with others, just as it is to be in time, and to 'live' a body. It is in relationships with others that the possibilities and limitations of human being are realised, and it is against the background of others that individual identity stands out. The most typical relationships of VW's novels are between two people only; there is, of course, interest in the 'party consciousness', but the most frequent relationship is between two: husband and wife, parent and child, lovers, friends, meeting with a stranger, an old and a young person, male and female - these are the most common foci. All VW's work is concerned with knowledge, or the impossibility of knowledge; in relationships, knowledge can only be gained from communication, and it is this aspect of relating to others that is featured most prominently. "Communication is health; communication is happiness," (MD, 104) but it is also deeply unsatisfactory.

The Voyage Out, VW's first novel, - written in the period of her courtship by various suitors, including Leonard Woolf, and her eventual marriage to him - treats largely of engagement and marriage, as does her second book, Night and Day. This relationship, as presented in these novels, is fundamentally joyless. The characters involved display atrophied feelings and existential unsuitability for one another. Although this perspective

varies throughout the novels; the idea that conventional love between men and women leads to isolation is prevalent in all of them. In The Voyage Out and Night and Day the conventions within which such love is forced to operate are explored and shown to constrain individual inclinations.

In The Voyage Out VW shows up, by contrast with the vital new language of her perceptions, the fragmented, empty noises people make merely to cover over silence. Often in the novel, silence between people is shown as uneasy, and yet speech too is an "awkwardness" (36). When two old acquaintances meet on a ship they do not really converse. Ridley Ambrose and Mr. Pepper repeat a formula perfected in a Cambridge common-room - "Jenkinson of Peterhouse ? ... Jenkinson of Cats ? ..." - an exchange that leaves them disgruntled, conscious of their hollowness. The hopeless distance between people is felt when, over six or seven pages, The Times is the centre of an aimless group who clutch at it to save themselves from having to speak to each other. The newspaper ends on the floor, surrounded by ladies, reduced to a Babel of voices. The 'conversation' over these pages is a fragmentary cacophony of newspaper clippings:

"It's not gone well ?" asked his wife solicitously. Hewet picked up one sheet and read, "A lady was walking yesterday in the streets of Westminster when she perceived a famished cat in the window of a deserted house. The famished animal -"
"I shall be out of it anyway," Mr. Thornbury interrupted peevishly.

"Cats are often forgotten," Miss Allan remarked.

"Remember, William, the Prime Minister has reserved his answer," said Mrs. Thornbury.

132

"At the age of eighty, Mr. Joshua Harris

Words have become merely shapes to fill a lack in people's lives, devoid of any meaningful relations.

Many of the characters who populate the hotel on the island of Santa Marina, where most of the novel is set, are concerned with engagement and marriage. Susan Warrington, having just become engaged, repeats over and over to herself, "I'm happy," as if by chanting the words she can enforce the actuality they should represent: now that she is to be married she must be happy, for there is no other hope of happiness offered to her by the prevailing conventions. Marriage is seen as putting a stop to an individual's ambitions, worse for women than for men, in Terence Hewet's view (though he does say of Susan and her fiancé, Arthur, "Well, we may take it for granted that they're engaged. O'you think he'll ever fly, or will she put a stop to that?" [163]).

Marriage as a convention inextricably ingrained in the life of the crowd is introduced early in the novel. Helen and Rachel's first conversation is immediately suggestive of a world in which the whole tendency of a young girl's life must be towards marriage:

"She is afraid you will spoil your forearms if you insist upon so much practising."

"The muscles of the forearm - and then one won't marry?"

"She didn't put it quite like that," replied Mrs. Ambrose

13

It is a significant mark of how deeply ingrained the conventions are that this acceptance of rôles is displayed in conversation between women; it is expressed again further on:

But how you will enjoy it - someday!

"I shall enjoy walking with a man - is that what you mean?" said Rachel. ...

"I wasn't thinking of a man particularly," said Clarissa. "But you will."

"No. I shall never marry," Rachel determined.

64 "I shouldn't be so sure of that," said Clarissa.

Rachel is unconvinced by these assurances that she will some day join the hallowed company of married women.

The "prosperous matrons" (60) make her indignant, feel excluded and "motherless" (an indication, perhaps, of how Rachel's own mother's death has made her feel apart from the world at large).

Dalloway's violent forced kiss deepens her confusion, leading her to feel she lives with (or in) a constant invitation to men to ravish her - a feeling that first becomes clear in the nightmare that follows.

Physical expressions of love (or lust) are usually associated with pain and fear in The Voyage Out. Evelyn

M. relates to Rachel a kiss that is a faint copy of Dalloway's:

301 And then he caught me and kissed me - the disgusting brute - I can still feel his nasty hairy face just there -

When Arthur proposes to Susan his speech is "positively

painful" to her; Susan

163 lay back upon the ground, with her eyes shut and an absorbed look upon her face, as though she were not altogether conscious. Nor could you tell from her expression whether she was happy, or had suffered something.

When Rachel and Terence declare their love, this pain is intense:

332 "Terrible - terrible," she murmured after another pause, but in saying this she was thinking as much of the persistent churning of the water as of her own feeling. On and on it went in the distance, the senseless and cruel churning of the water. She observed that the tears were running down Terence's cheeks.

When Rachel and Terence become more intimate it is unsurprising that Rachel's sensations at the start "had no name". Her experience is so totally new to her that she cannot fit it into any of the conventions she knows. When they eventually declare their love for one another there is a sense of overwhelming struggle, of a great labour to bring to birth some new feeling; their words are heavy with the effort of attempting to charge language deadened by convention with their own vitality. The setting is suitably prehistoric - a jungle - "Silence seemed to have fallen upon the world" :

332 "We love each other," said Terence.
"We love each other," she replied.

Resignation dominates here; they have seen how "love" is depersonalising, leading to sacrifice and complacency, and above all they must overcome the great weight of convention that is rooted in the very language with which they express their feelings. It is noteworthy that this exchange appears not so much as an expression of love (as 'I love you' would be), as a report of a state of affairs that must be accepted for better or worse. The world of convention, represented by such as Arthur and Susan, exerts a strong pressure, on Rachel in particular: "Terrible - terrible," she murmurs, thinking perhaps of the awful world of aimlessness and cruelty she found at the hotel.

A telling support for Rachel's fears is that Terence begins, with the prospect of a wife, to speak in a language which has been shown earlier in the novel to be essentially male, and which we could earlier have expected him to abhor:

361 "But you'll never see it!" he exclaimed; "because with all your virtues you don't, and you never will, care with every fibre of your being for the pursuit of truth! You've no respect for facts, Rachel; you're essentially feminine."

The masculine domination of the female in VW's novels is a common feature. From the start, the female world-view is smothered and undermined by the sterile arrogance of men. In every one of the novels this antithesis and conflict is prominent, and as the fiction progresses it becomes

clear that this is not merely a 'feminist' position (although the novels certainly propound the idea that the only truly radical politics is sexual politics), but suggests a basic difference in the way men and women perceive and experience the world. In The Voyage Out the gulf between Rachel's perceptions and the prevailing conventions is extremely deep.

*

Night and Day is also about love and marriage. It is concerned with the question of how we can know feelings for others are 'real'. In a letter to Janet Case, VW wrote of her intentions in the book:

L. II
400 ...and then there's the whole question, which interested me, again too much for the book's sake, I daresay, of the things one doesn't say; what effect does that have? and how far do our feelings take their colour from the dive underground, I mean, what is the reality of any feeling?
(19.11.1919)

The novel's heroine, Katharine Hilbery, inherits Terence Hewet's view of marriage as a prison in which the couple is walled-up in a warm firelit room. Katharine's deeply pessimistic conclusion is that "after all ... what is 'love' if not the mute acceptance of convention:

But waking, she was able to contemplate a perfectly loveless marriage as the thing one did actually in real life, for possibly the

108 people who dream thus are those who do the most prosaic things.

Ironically, even as she condemns the "undeniable prose" of life Katharine surrenders to it, continuing a relationship - even reviving it after having once escaped - with someone whom she finds herself almost totally out of sympathy with: William Rodney. Katharine's view that marriage can only be a sham is corroborated by her mother, who tells her the story of how a harsh Hilbery ancestor forced a young girl to marry:

119 But that old tyrant never repented. She used to say that she had given them three perfect months, and no one had the right to more; and - I sometimes think, Katharine, that's true, you know. It's more than most of us have, only we have to pretend, ...

As was seen in The Voyage Out, convention also dictates to men. Ralph Denham, who is involved in a triangular relationship with Katharine and Mary Datchet, would like to believe in there being 'something more' to life, but his experience insists that he think otherwise, even though this strongly opposes a feeling within him:

129 ...with the pessimism which his lot forced upon him, Ralph had made up his mind that there was no use for what, contemptuously enough, he called dreams, in the world which we inhabit.

It is his experience of the conventional, the actual world of the crowd, that makes Ralph the mixture he is, confused

and belligerent. Again as in the preceding work, the fault does not lie with the individual, insofar as he or she is conditioned by the prevailing world-view that comes into being through complacency, insecurity, and the failure to make the effort required to achieve individual identity. St. John Hirst, in the earlier work, is as much a victim of a single-visioned, narrow system as Rachel Vinrace.

Ralph Denham's rigid device of dividing his mind into compartments makes him unpopular at his office, and inept in relations outside it: his dreams are a bitter reaction to the constraints of everyday life, and he remains always conscious of the antagonism between the two. Acceptance of life 'as it is' leads to empty silence and the perpetuation of that state of things because communication is thereby denied. Mary Datchet and Ralph each believe there is no point in talking to the other of their affections, and so those affections peter out (134); Katharine believes Ralph and Mary to have an uncomplicated relationship which prevents them from seeing the difficulties she undergoes living with her parents. An overall sense of the inadequacy of human relations pervades VW's first two novels; there seems no possibility of intimacy or knowledge between people.

To get away from the pressure of what she sees as her inevitable union with William Rodney, Katharine falls into "a dream state, in which she became another person, and the whole world seemed changed" (144). This mauvaise foi

is observed in many characters in situations they feel threatened by. Katharine's dreamworld has no contact with the actual; Ralph, on the other hand, must always be in control, always be careful to "prevent too painful a collision between what he dreamt of her and what she was" (150). Ralph's dreams are clearly delusions, as Katharine bluntly tells him:

404 Being yourself very inexperienced and very emotional, you go home and invent a story about me, and now you can't separate me from the person you've imagined me to be. You call that, I suppose, being in love; as a matter of fact it's being in delusion.

Deeper than this, it is implied that love can only be this sort of delusion because we can only tell stories about others; if there is no absolute identity, but only apparitions, how can it be said that we know another?

At the moment when Katharine tries to overcome illusions and compromise, and tells William that she cannot marry him, her security is assaulted by the powerful conventions she seeks to escape. William immediately demands an 'explanation' for her preposterous statement, and there comes a familiar sense of frustration at not being able to communicate to another the feeling that there is 'something more! to life than these dull processes:

Why indeed? A moment of pessimism, a sudden conviction of the undeniable prose of life, a lapse of the illusion which sustains youth midway between heaven and earth, a desperate

attempt to reconcile herself with facts -
she could only recall a moment, as of
waking from a dream, which now seemed to her
a moment of surrender. But who could give
reasons such as these for doing what she had
244-5 done ? She shook her head very sadly.

Faced with the view that she "couldn't" have said she would
marry him if she had not loved him, Katharine begins to
give in:

What were his faults in comparison with the-
fact that he cared for her ? What were her
virtues in comparison with the fact that she did
not care for him ? In a flash the conviction
that not to care is the uttermost sin of all
stamped itself upon her inmost thoughts; and she
255 felt herself branded forever.

This is the constraint that convention puts upon relation-
ship, and upon communication: not to love within the
structure imposed on life by the crowd is to be an outcast.

Katharine agrees to marry William because she is
overcome with guilt at not caring for him and upsetting
he who cares for her so much (she believes). Almost
as a parallel to this, Ralph asks Mary to marry him,
firstly because he has lost Katharine; and then
because he feels so ashamed of his behaviour towards
Mary. The links between the two proposals are reinforced
by a verbal similarity in the description of Katharine and
Ralph's attitude to love: Katharine feels that

to marry someone with whom you are not in love
is an inevitable step in a world where the existence

of passion is only a traveller's story brought
from the heart of deep forests and told so
rarely that wise people doubt whether the
226 story can be true.

Of love Ralph says:

265 It's only a story one makes up in one's mind
about another person, and one knows all the
time it isn't true.

A remark of Ralph's - "...it seems to me that the risk
of marrying a person you're in love with is something
colossal" - seems to focus on the profound sense of the
futility of relationships in Night and Day. Ralph, who
divides his mind into compartments, who lives by the light
of reason, comes up against a world that does not fit into
his plan, and his reaction is a confused and impotent
anger. The man of reason has no means to cope with an
unreasonable world: "He was trapped by the illogicality
of human life." His sister Joan's vision of him as "the
victim of one of those terrible theories of right and wrong
which were current at the time" (128) seems accurate. In
drawing such distinctions between men and women it can
be understood that VW is making a 'philosophical' point:
the rational male view excludes much of the experience
of human being available to the intuitive, non-discursive
female view, and yet it asserts itself as the more compre-
hensive understanding of the world.

Language is important in the matter of the conventions
that dictate the form of relationships, for it is in words

that convention is enshrined. For the most part, the characters of VW's second novel are very careful in what they say to each other: Ralph's division between what can and can not be discussed with Mary Datchet typifies this caution. Discussion of great English poets seems frequently to be the nearest possible approach to intimacy (e.g. 190). The question of what 'love' is vexes several characters, and the difficulties that the attempt to define love causes (and, indeed, the attempt itself) are symptomatic of the rigid convention. The "love that results in engagement and marriage" is viewed rather cynically, and this cynicism often dominates in the question of the nature of love:

136-7 If love is a devastating fire which melts the whole being into one mountain torrent, Mary was no more in love with Denham than she was in love with her poker or her tongs. But probably these extremes of passion are very rare; and the state of mind thus depicted belongs to the very last stages of love, when the power to resist has been eaten away, week by week or day by day.

For Mary, the word 'love' seems to matter very little, its force having been dissipated through being so long applied to illusions:

230 It seemed a mere toss-up whether she said "I love you," or whether she said "I love the beech-trees," or only "Ilove - I love."

It is, though, between Katharine and William that the language of affection looms largest as a problem, and that it is a serious problem is demonstrated in the crucial eighteenth chapter:

"And if I say that I care for you, don't you believe me?"

"Say it, Katharine! Say it as if you meant it! Make me feel that you care for me."

253

She could not force herself to speak a word.

Language will not come to William's rescue, nor to Katharine's, for, as will be seen below, her idea of love is not cloaked in language. 'Love' imposes a painful confinement on Katharine and William:

As to the psychological problem," he continued, as if the question interested him in a detached way, "there's no doubt, I think, that either of us is capable of feeling what, for reasons of simplicity, I call romance for a third person - at least, I've little doubt in my own case

302

The state of their love and the question of the lease on a new house are approached by William on a single level, appallingly ignorant of the woman he professes to care so much for. This scene continues with a feeble discussion about the nature of this "romance for a third person," contrasting sharply with Katharine's struggling instinct that there is something more:

Ah, but her romance wasn't that romance. It was a desire, an echo, a sound; she could drape it in colour, hear it in music, but not in words; no,

303 never in words. She sighed, teased by desires
so incoherent, so incommunicable

Ralph stumbles on the word 'love' to encapsulate his feelings almost by accident, the idea of asking Mary to marry him seeming to emerge from a background of "disconnected ramblings" at the inn where they are lunching. When he labels his feelings for Katharine with the conventional term his confusion is dispelled:

409 It was the first time he had used the word "love" to describe his feeling; madness, romance, hallucination - he had called it by these names before; but having, apparently by accident, stumbled upon the word "love" he repeated it again and again with a sense of revelation.... His feelings were justified and needed no further explanation.

However, when he tells Mary of his discovery the word is already losing its revelatory magic:

413 He spoke the word, but as he spoke it, it seemed robbed of substance.

He now begins to think his feelings do not fit the word after all; 'love' has been sent out into the actual world as soon as Ralph utters it, and as such it immediately enters the system of ineluctable convention enshrined in language. His suspicions are confirmed when he actually tells Katharine that he loves her:

448 Some roundness or warmth essential to that
 statement was absent from his voice.

As with Katharine and William, the definition of love proves impossible, exposing their futility: but "what other word describes the state we're in?"

Relationship, it appears, is bound by language, unable to be realised except through the conventional modes language dictates. In her rôle as Fool Mrs. Hilbery has a telling comment:

508 Names aren't everything; it's what we feel that's
 everything.

Feelings have become unreal to Ralph, however; like Katharine early in the novel, he seems resigned to a life in which illusion is the only "reality":

316 You can force me to talk as if this feeling
 for you were an hallucination, but all our
 feelings are that. The best of them are
 half illusions.

As he asks elsewhere, if others do not believe in the feelings we hold closest to us, "What reality is left us?" The world that emerges from the first two novels is one in which any relationship that is not an illusion seems quite impossible:

"In what can one trust? Not in men and women.
Not in one's dreams about them. There's

163 nothing - nothing, nothing left at all.

*

There is not a broad spectrum or variety of types of relationship in VW's novels. The inward-looking tendency of most of the characters precludes any view of society at large, but to write of that would, in any case, be to write of the crowd. Relationships presented in the novels are often deeply flawed, marked by a strong sense of the inadequacy of communication and the hopelessness of love. Against this, as we might expect, is a counter-movement: life is endlessly exciting, offering fresh possibilities at every moment:

JR Every time the door opened and fresh people
109 came in, those already in the room shifted
 slightly; those who were standing looked over
 their shoulders; those who were sitting stopped
 in the middle of sentences. What with the light,
 the wine, the strumming of a guitar, something
 exciting happened each time the door opened.
 Who was coming in ?

The characters of Jacob's Room, as Leonard Woolf noticed, are all ghosts; their contacts form "spiritual shapes" that shift and splinter, never enduring. A mood VW recorded in her diary seems to dominate the novel: "Why is life so tragic; so like a little strip of pavement over an abyss" (D.II, 72; 25.10.1920). The diary mood is

directly reflected in the novel:

80 What does one fear ? - the human eye. At once
 the pavement narrows, the chasm deepens.

I have said above that apparitions are all that can be known in the actual world. In this novel, the effect of this on human relations is pervasive:

28-9 Nobody sees anyone as he is ... They see a whole -
 they see all sorts of things - they see themselves...

Life surrounds us as a network of "wires and tubes"; letters pass, telephones ring, visits are made - as they are throughout all the novels - but all this communication serves to cover the emptiness of being unable to know others as 'I'. Language contaminates: for example, Jacob must not say that he loves Clara Durrant: "No, no, no ... don't break - don't spoil' - what ? Something infinitely wonderful" (70); and, we may add, unnameable.

Jacob's Room reflects the "blowing this way and that" of life; relationships are fleeting, observed obliquely by the shifting narrator. Relationship is marked by a longing for unspoken intimacy, not that silent understanding that grows up between a husband and wife from habit, that VW alluded to as early as The Voyage Out, but a more perfect knowledge of others. Jacob's encounter in Greece with Sandra Wentworth Williams is an image of the nature of relationships:

158 For she could not stop until she had told him -
or heard him say - or was it some action on
his part that she required? Far away on the
horizon she discerned it and could not rest.

The horizon moves perpetually as one moves towards it,
and so it is in relationships: they are characterised
by a yearning for an impossible consummation. This part
of Jacob's Room - his trip to Greece - is heavy with the
sense of life's transience and a thought felt throughout
VW's works that nothing remains of relationships. The
'metaphysical' desire to escape the bounds of physical
life is implied in Jacob's gift to Sandra of the poems
of Donne:

They had vanished. There was the Acropolis;
but had they reached it? The columns and the
Temple remain; the emotion of the living
breaks fresh on them year after year; and of
that what remains?
As for reaching the Acropolis who shall say
that we ever do it, or that when Jacob woke
next morning he found anything hard and durable
to keep forever?

160

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The failure of relationships, specifically of love, to
"make of the moment something permanent" continues to be
an important theme in Mrs. Dalloway. One of Clarissa's
most vivid memories is of her youthful passion for her

friend Sally Seton, and an occasion on which Sally kissed her. This special moment is significantly imaged by Clarissa as the receiving of something tangible:

40 And she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it - a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down, up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling! -

This "religious feeling" is a momentary experience of that perfection of relationship that is longed-for in the novels. It cannot persist in the actual world, but passes as all moments do. The feeling does, however, remain in Clarissa's memory, a mode of being that overcomes spatio-temporal horizons. The diamond is a symbol of unity (not just in this novel); it is recalled when Clarissa 'points' herself at her mirror (42). The moment with Sally is destroyed when Peter Walsh intrudes. It is, though, the source of Clarissa's longing for a perfect union. Possessed by that wonder at simply being at all that is a feature of all the novels, Clarissa wishes to combine people, in an effort to create a whole she can only imagine:

Here was So-and-so in South Kensington; some one up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair. And she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she

... did it. And it was an offering; to combine,
134-5 to create; but to whom?

Her judgements remain "superficial ... fragmentary", yet if she can put the fragments together she feels a gestalt may be formed.

The desire to combine with others is not confined to Clarissa; the provincial diners at Peter Walsh's hotel have a "desire, pulsing in them, tugging at them subterraneously, somehow to establish connections" (175). Peter Walsh, taken into the little world of the Morris family for a moment, feels contentment in the seeming wholeness of their relationships. The family is a system that sustains life over the "abyss". Similar to it is "that network of visiting, leaving cards, being kind to people" (86) that is Clarissa's way of sustaining life, of creating a complex over the emptiness she feels lies at the heart of things. Such complexes form, break and reform perpetually: strangers glance at one another, or are united by perceptions (as in the episodes of the mysterious car and the skywriting aeroplane), but only momentarily. The horizon of time prevents wholes from forming, prevents the perfection of relationship because identity is always in a state of flux¹.

To Rezia Warren Smith love "makes one solitary" (27), and to Clarissa love is a "monster"; and yet love combines, and in the first flush of passion seems to transcend the reflecting apparitions of everyday life. Clarissa scoffs

at Peter being "sucked under in his little bow-tie", but "in her heart she felt, all the same; he is in love. He has that, she felt; he is in love" (50). Whatever its status, love has the power of widening the pavement over the abyss, but only for a moment. Marriage weaves a cocoon round Clarissa in which she can "crouch like a bird and gradually revive" (203). She understands that Richard wishes to tell her that he loves her without his speaking (although his bunch of roses operates in the same way as words [130]), but in their silence Richard and Clarissa are closed to each other.

Whether we feel that we know nothing about others (as Sally Seton feels), or that we know everything (as Peter), relationships are characterised by a lack, by a pointing-up of our ultimate aloneness. Mrs. Dalloway is greatly concerned with communication and with relationships through time; memory affects present relationships and alters those of the past. As in Jacob's Room, there inheres in the book a longing to make a definite statement about a life that seems so amorphous.

Clarissa has an inherent desire to combine, in the hope of somehow discovering a revelatory order to the world. As this hope is perpetually defeated, the combinative instinct doubles on itself: her parties become "An offering for the sake of offering, perhaps." Peter wonders why he does as he does (58); there are no answers for him, only a drive to combine. Left too long in solitude, one's sense of individual identity begins to slip. The

urge to combine, then, is in order to see one's 'own' reflection, basing one's own identity on the fact that one is with others. At the close of the novel Clarissa cannot bear solitude in the little room for long: "But she must go back. She must assemble." (205, my italics).

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As a theme, relationship in To the Lighthouse is complex, although a sharply delineated pattern, with Mrs. Ramsay at the centre, is discernible. The relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay is largely unarticulated, and yet it is in a way the source of the moods and rhythms of the novel. Mrs. Ramsay is the prime exemplar of the female's combining powers and influence; more, even, than Clarissa, she has "that woman's gift, of making a world of her own wherever she happened to be" (MD, 84-5).

In the Ramsay's marriage is seen once more the impossibility of reaching another's solitude: Mr. Ramsay wants to protect his wife, but "he could not reach her, he could do nothing to help her" (104). Men standing in a mysterious accord with "the laws of the universe", Mrs. Ramsay accepts that her husband's "great mind" must feed on hers, shadowing it as if his mind were a giant hand blotting out the sun:

So boasting of her capacity to surround and

63 protect, there was scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by.

The seventh section of 'The Window' is almost entirely concerned with Mrs. Ramsay's sense of "the inadequacy of human relationships, that the most perfect was flawed." Her solitude is broken into by the effort of combining, leaving her depleted and dejected, uncertain of her own being. Aware of this, she must still create, combine and offer, making matches because she sees potential in the union of two people for something whole and lasting.

Marriage still is an unsatisfactory compromise in which one person - invariably the woman - must sacrifice her own wishes to serve her partners shortcomings. The remoteness of Mrs. Ramsay's reverie "pains" her husband because he feels that she does not need him. He is mistaken, however, for she wishes upon herself his draining demands: "That was what she wanted - the asperity in his voice, reproving her." For anyone to see that he needed her would upset Mrs. Ramsay's idea of how the world is, a concept against which her children quietly rebel.

That love cannot overcome human separateness is emphasised by Lily's desire to "make her and Mrs. Ramsay one." Lily Briscoe unifies the Ramsays with a label:

114 So that is marriage, Lily thought, a man and a woman looking at a girl throwing a ball.

Near the end of the book Lily thinks back on her previous

visit (305) and realises that there can be no way of simplifying their relationship. It is in her memory of Mrs. Ramsay's silence that Lily comes to understand the imperfection of human relationships. Silence is not passive in VW's work; it questions language; silence 'communicates' in its own mode.

264-5 Mrs. Ramsay sat silent. She was glad, Lily thought, to rest in silence, uncommunicative; to rest in the extreme obscurity of human relationships. Who knows what we are, what we feel? Who knows even at the moment of intimacy, This is knowledge? Aren't things spoilt then, Mrs. Ramsay may have asked (it seemed to have happened so often, this silence by her side) by saying them? Aren't we more expressive thus?

Families, as is seen in the earlier novels, produce tensions of loyalty in their members. Ralph Denham, in Night and Day, has to wrest every moment of his privacy from the grasp of the family system; a desire to be alone is regarded with suspicion. Mr. Ramsay arouses extremes of passion in his children; their loyalties are divided not only between their mother and father but between each other and their parents. While Cam, sailing to the lighthouse with James and their father, loves him for all his eccentricity, she also hates his tyranny, which "poisoned her childhood." Her affection finds no voice because her detestation of his insouciance always rises up to counter it. Cam is in a position similar to that Lily experienced with regard to William Bankes: how can

one ever say it is liking or disliking one feels if opinions about a single person so conflict ? James, too, hates "the twang and twitter of his father's emotion" for it "disturbs the perfect simplicity and good sense of his relations with his mother" (61).

Despite this, Mr. Ramsay is a heroic figure, even for James. On the journey to the lighthouse James sees him as a personification of "that loneliness, which was for both of them the truth about things" (311). The ultimate solitude of individual being is once again realised in silence. There is a constant yearning for communication - when James is praised by his father, Cam sees immediately that his indifference is only feigned - but when contact is made, nothing endures; the moment passes to reassert essential loneliness:

318 What do you want ? they both wanted to ask.
 They both wanted to say, Ask us anything and
 we will give it you. But he did not ask them
 anything.

Lily's opinion of marriage is familiar from the preceding novels:

159 ...she need not marry, thank Heaven: she need
 not undergo that degradation. She was saved
 from that dilution.

And yet, despite this feeling that "there is nothing more tedious, puerile and inhumane than love," and that women

are worse off for it than men, most people, especially, thinks Lily, most women, see love as "beautiful and necessary". This tension characterises the attitude to love in the novels. Without love "life will run upon the rocks," but with it "She would never know him. He would never know her." Combination and creation wreath an illusion around the emptiness at the heart of people, but without that there would be no life. Only the mind speaking the novel sees the emptiness within:

146 All of them bending themselves to listen thought, "Pray heaven that the inside of my mind may not be exposed," for each thought, "The others are feeling this. They are outraged and indignant with the government about the fishermen. Whereas, I feel nothing at all."

* * *

It would be surprising if VW had not written about human relationships in her diary, and indeed those books are filled with speculations on people's characters and their interactions with her. There are two passages that I wish to examine, both of which can be related convincingly to the mood of Mrs. Dalloway, although they were written some years later. That sense of something tangible

that Clarissa felt she received in Sally Seton's kiss is yearned for throughout the fiction. Lily Briscoe, in To the Lighthouse, longs for Mrs. Ramsay after her death, feeling that perhaps if she could demand it with enough force,

277 beauty would roll itself up; the space would fill; those empty flourishes would form into shape:

As I have said, human relationships are characterised by a lack, a sense that the longed-for knowledge of another can never be achieved. VW records this feeling in her diary:

D. III
188 Eddy has just gone, leaving me the usual feeling: why is not human intercourse more definite, more tangible: why aren't I left holding a small round substance, say of the size of a pea, in my hand; something I can put in a box and look at? There is so little left.
(8.8.1928)

The sense of life's transience so prevalent in the fiction evidently stems from VW's own experience. This long reflection in her diary, for example, expounds thoughts that are familiar from as early as The Voyage Out (where Rachel Vinrace feels people may be patches of light crossing the surface of the world, TVO, 358), and which become more and more central from Jacob's Room onwards.

Yet these people one sees are fabric only made once in the world; these contacts we have are unique; & if Eddy were, say killed tonight; nothing definite would happen to me; yet his substance is never again to be repeated. ... it recurs with sadness to my mind: how little our relationships matter; and yet they are so important: in him, in me, something to him, to me, infinitely sentient, of the highest vividness, reality. But if I died tonight, he too would continue. Something illusory then enters into all that part of life. I am so important to myself: yet of no importance to other people: like the shadow passing over the downs.
(8.8.1928)

D. III
188

The vision of human relationships as a series of apparitions, each reflecting others, is familiar in the fiction. It is the fact of living through time, being thrown into a life that tends only towards death, that gives VW her sense that other people are ephemeral and unknown, and yet that they are the only hope of covering over the emptiness at the heart of life. To survive through time, a relationship must live in the memory, but there it will be altered, given a shape other than that which it has in the actual world because the modes of being in memory cannot be bound by time in the same way as those of life in the 'present'. This, too, VW records:

And what remains of Eddy is now in some ways more vivid, though more transparent, all of him composing itself in my mind, all I could get of him, and making a landscape appropriate to it; making a work of art for itself.
(8.8.1928)

D. III
189

A work of art - especially a novel - is the creation of a world within the actual world, a revelation of the possibility of a mode of existence not bound by the spatio-temporal horizons of actual life.

Almost a year later, VW again writes in her diary of life's empty centre, seen in moments when the illusion of relationship fails. There is an exact homology between the entry in the diary and a passage in Mrs. Dalloway where Peter Walsh suddenly feels that his life is unreal. Standing alone in London (54 f.) he is overcome by a sense that because Clarissa refused him his life has been meaningless, merely a habit forced on him by the flow of time.

MD
55

As a cloud crosses the sun, silence falls on London; and falls on the mind. Effort ceases. Time flaps on the mast. There we stop; there we stand. Rigid, the skeleton of habit alone upholds the human frame. Where there is nothing, Peter Walsh said to himself; feeling hollowed out, utterly empty within. Clarissa refused me, he thought. He stood there thinking, Clarissa refused me.

Peter's "looking rather drearily into the glassy depths" (55) is exactly recalled in VW's diary in an entry made on returning from a trip to France in 1929:

And a sense of nothingness rolls about the house; what I call the sense of "Where there is nothing." This is due to the fact that we came back from France last night & are not going round in the mill yet. Time flaps on the mast - my own phrase I think². ... Time flaps on the mast. And then I see through everything. Perhaps the image ought to have been one that gives an

D. III idea of a stream becoming thin: of seeing to
233 the bottom.

(15.6.1929)

To live (in a positive, transitive sense) is a matter of effort in VW's eyes. Identity is formed in relating with others, and thereby a sense of purpose is bestowed on life; relationship widens the strip of pavement over the abyss. However, the shadows that we grasp at are known to be illusory, in the sense that they are impermanent and cannot share in the individual 'I' of each human being:

Now time must not flap on the mast any more.
Now I must brew another decoction of illusion.
Well, if the human interest flags - if its that
that worries me, I must not sit thinking about
it here. I must make human illusion - ask
someone in tomorrow after dinner; and begin that
astonishing adventure with the souls of others
again - about which I know so little. Is it
affection that prompts ?

D. III
234

(15.6.1929)

If identity in solitude fails so abruptly, something must be found to 'anchor' oneself in the world. It is from the ambivalence of her attitude to human relationships that arises the need in VW to find a faith in something apart from those apparitions. This faith, though, is not always available, and at such times despair at the ultimate nothingness of existence, unrelieved by philosophical or religious comforts, takes over.

As in all the novels, in The Years (1937) the door keeps opening and people keep coming in. If we stop to wonder why we bother to combine and create, to talk and smile with strangers or loved ones, to feel jealousy or hatred, it seems it is to deny the loneliness and intensity of solitude, to diminish the forces of life:

TY
379

But one wants somebody to laugh with, she thought. Pleasure is increased by sharing it. Does the same hold good of pain? she mused. Is that the reason why we all talk so much of ill-health - because sharing things lessens things? Give pain, give pleasure an outer body, and by increasing the surface diminish them. ...

Such sharing, though, is "a bit of a farce", as Peggy Pargiter realises when she talks with a young stranger at the family party that concludes the novel:

389

She had heard it all before, I,I,I - he went on. ... But why let him? she thought, as he went on talking. For what do I care about his "I,I,I"? Or his poetry? Let me shake him off then, she said to herself, ... She paused. He noted her lack of sympathy. He thought her stupid, she supposed.

"I'm tired," she apologised. "I've been up all night," she explained. "I'm a doctor -"

The fire went out of his face when she said "I". That's done it - now he'll go, she thought. He can't be "you" - he must be "I". She smiled. For up he got and off he went.

The fault of the failure does not lie entirely with the young man, nor with Peggy, but with the structures of convention within which their contact is made; these structures are enshrined in language. Silence is forbidden

by convention, but as has been seen earlier, silence can not become the covering over that language is. When silence gapes - "the immense vacancy of the primeval maw" - we must rush to fill the gap: "somebody has to say something or human society would cease" (408). Communication is used not to reveal but to conceal the abyss, dispelling silence but preserving the illusion of relationships:

447 It's no go, North thought. He can't say what he wants to say; he's afraid. They're all afraid; afraid of being laughed at; afraid of giving themselves away. ... We're all afraid of each other, he thought; afraid of what? Of criticism; of laughter; of people who think differently. ... That's what separates us; fear, he thought.

(my italics)

Relationships with others reveal the horizons within which life must inevitably go forward: the limitations of embodiment, of living in time. From the deep dissatisfaction with relationship that is so evident in the novels comes a drive to find meaning in solitude. Solitude, however, as is repeatedly seen, reveals the nothingness of the possibility of non-being. To find meaning in life in the novels is, then, an insoluble problem, at least in the context of the actual world of time and death. If there is any possibility of transcendence it will be realised in a mode of being totally other than that of the actual world. The movement towards such transcendence, however, begins in a radical questioning

of actual life:

360 She was alone with Eleanor in the cab. And they were passing houses. Where does she begin, and where do I end? she thought. ... On they drove. They were two living people, driving across London; two sparks of life enclosed in two separate bodies; and those sparks of life enclosed in two separate bodies are at this moment, she thought, driving past a picture palace. But what is this moment; and what are we? The puzzle was too difficult for her to solve it. She sighed.

Despite this apparently profound pessimism, it is true to say that VW's work is generally affirmative in character. For a counterbalance to that inadequacy of human relationships felt in the fiction, we must look to VW's view of the positive creative potential of art.

Notes to Chapter Three

1. (p.88) Cf. W. Iser, The Implied Reader, where he writes the following in his chapter on 'Self-reduction':

...past and present can never be completely synthesised. Every incipient systematization is refuted by time, which as a new present exposes the ephemeral nature of any such synthesis. But it is only through subjectivity itself that time takes on its form of past, present, and future; the self is not the passive object of this process, but actually conditions it. With which of its states, then, is the self to be identified? Is it that which existed in the circumstances of the past, is it that which it is at this moment in the present, or is it simply that force which constantly creates new connections and time relations but which, at the same time, constantly plunges every one of its visible manifestations into the maelstrom of change? The self is essentially incapable of completion, and this fact accounts both for its inadequacy and its richness. The knowledge that it can never be completely in possession of itself is the hallmark of its consciousness.

144-5

2. (p.97) See also D. II, 72: 25.10.1920: "I dont like time to flap round me."

Chapter Four

Art

(i) Success

VW wrote no lengthy manifesto of her artistic principles, nor would she have claimed to be a theoretician, but she lived at a time of great upheaval in art, and was herself influenced by and a major force in the shift in the way we perceive the world that became apparent from the 1880's onwards. Even had she not been born a writer she could not have avoided thinking about the nature and purpose of art, surrounded as she was by the "great men" of the nineteenth and many iconoclasts of the twentieth centuries. Ideas have a way of influencing even those who have no direct contact with them; new thoughts seep into language, spreading far beyond those who experience their first formulations. In VW's work, for example, can be seen a concern with the relations between different arts, and with the possibilities of synaesthesia.

Although England was perhaps rather isolated, cut off from the modernist movements of France and Germany by its relatively poor tradition of visual art, these movements did have some effect. One point of origin for the general shift in vision might be found in Richard Wagner's dream of a Gessamkunstwerke, an idea which finds expression in varying forms amongst artists from the late nineteenth century onwards. The widespread experimentation with colour and shape, to express sensations

and perceptions, was a movement towards a synaesthetic art. In the early part of the twentieth century, Wassily Kandinsky and other artists of the Blaue Reiter group in Munich were engaged in the search for a common spiritual basis in the arts. Kandinsky, in Concerning the Spiritual in Art (1911), wrote of the psychological effect of colour:

Generally speaking, colour directly influences the soul. Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another purposively, to cause vibrations in the soul.

It is evident therefore that colour harmony must rest ultimately on purposive playing upon the human soul: this is one of the guiding principles of internal necessity.

Nearly thirty years later, Kandinsky was still thinking of a unity of all the arts:

All the arts derive from the same and unique root.

Consequently, all the arts are identical. But the mysterious and precious fact is that the 'fruits' produced by the same trunk are different².

Even had VW never heard the names of, say, Cézanne, Kandinsky, Matisse, Debussy, Scriabin, Mallarmé, their influence would have touched her deeply. In fact she was in an excellent position to view the sweeping changes wrought by the European modernist movement. There were many routes by which she could receive the traffic of ideas from Europe. In 1904 Clive Bell was in touch with

the Nabis, Post-Impressionists, Gauguin and Cézanne in Paris; in 1919 he met Derain, Braque, Cocteau et al.. Although hampered by a rather formal, classical training and the general English reaction against German symbolist painting and music, Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell were much in sympathy with their European counterparts; the influence of Fauvism and Cubism on the Omega Workshop is evident, and the former can be discerned in the tropical setting of The Voyage Out. Scriabin was well-publicised when he visited London before the war; Duncan Grant was partly inspired by the announcement of a concert of his music (to be accompanied by changing coloured lights) to paint a roll,

nearly fifteen feet in length, eleven inches high and composed of seventeen sections of pasted paper shapes with paint sometimes overlapping the papers, sometimes simply surrounding them. It was intended to be seen through the aperture of a box as the roll passed through slots at the back at a pace dictated by a slow movement from a work by Bach. There was also to be lighting inside the box.³

Saxon Sydney-Turner, an early influence on VW's musical tastes, praised Prometheus, Scriabin's 1910 'Poem of Fire' in which he used a colour organ⁴. The current of ideas flowed widely and freely: Gertrude Stein's Composition as Explanation, for example, accepted for publication by VW's Hogarth Press in 1926, is comparable to the work of Cézanne, Matisse or Picasso in terms of its attempt to maintain a "continuous present". To close what could be

a very long list, I add a comment of Max Beckmann's
On My Painting (1938) which seems pertinent to VW's work:

My aim is always to get hold of the magic of reality and to transfer this reality into painting - to make the invisible visible through reality. It may sound paradoxical, but it is, in fact, reality which forms the mystery of our existence.

*

VW had a Coleridgean ability to see her mind as a thinking instrument and frequently pondered on the creative process, and the artistic realignments of her lifetime, as well as her relation to her contemporaries and to tradition. She seems to me, however, to stand a little apart from the vehemence and passionate concern with the actual world which is frequently the characteristic of the work of her contemporaries in England, and, more markedly, Europe. While she was concerned with political issues - most famously, feminism - there is a definite absence of the sensual, tactile world that is so much a part of, say, Joyce or Lawrence, and the technological world that inspired Marinetti and the Futurists, the Dynamists, and to some extent the Expressionists. The actual world, of course, takes a large part in her work, but she seems always to be seeking to express a perception

of the numinous. There exists throughout her work a tension between Kantian 'transcendental' knowledge, which shapes the world, and the sense of something beneath or beyond the shapes.

In her essays and fiction, VW's concern with art is primarily with the writing of novels, but she has much to say of music and painting also, and draws careful analogies between different artistic modes. As her writing career progresses her deep and perpetual concern shifts from art to the artist (To the Lighthouse marking a definite change of perspective).

VW, as we will see, believed writing to be her life. In an essay, 'Reading' (1919?), she wrote that "Somewhere, everywhere, now hidden, now apparent in whatever is written down is the form of a human being." The human being in VW's writing is elusive, but never more apparent than when she writes about creating. I should say here that I am concerned not with VW's 'art as a novelist', but with the thinking on art and its relation to life found in her novels.

Having had the advantage of no formal education⁶ and a wide-ranging literary experience in her youth, VW was acutely aware of tradition. Her novels are laced throughout with quotations and allusions which are never merely decorative, but always apposite and enriching, often applying one more light touch, one more angle of vision, to the picture she is composing. Sometimes such a reference will be used as a motif, gathering associations to itself

as the novel progresses, recognition of which induces many links and memories. An example is the 'Fear no more the heat o' the sun' of Mrs. Dalloway, that gently beats in Clarissa's mind from the time she actually reads the line in Hatchard's window, to its absorption by her towards the end of the book; that the same words come to Septimus is a mirroring effect that should not go unnoticed.

Apart from forming one bridge between Septimus and Clarissa, the lines from Cymbeline broaden that Shelleyan idea in the novel of death as a gentle release from the awful difficulties of life; the dirge is calming, an image of death not unlike Terence Hewet's representation in The Voyage Out of death as being just like sleep (TVO, 170). Such careful choice of allusion has been noted operating very subtly:

At the height of one of Mr. Ramsay's panics ... Mrs. Ramsay is disclosed reading a fairy story to her son James. It is the Grimms' tale of 'The Fisherman and His Wife', and through twenty-odd pages of the novel Virginia Woolf marvellously counterpoints their story with hers: the coastline setting, the clash of temperaments, the lessons of acceptance, and the ominous undertow of insatiable demands.⁷

Music, for the tyro, seems best suited of all the arts to exemplify thoughts on the way art 'works'. It does not confine, does not dictate, and because it does not directly refer to anything it is perhaps the least demanding of the arts for the uninformed perceiver. It is tempting to see music as the 'substance' of art in

its least altered state, bringing to mind Pater's dictum that "All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music". Because it is non-representational it comes closest to a "direct contemplation in thought and feeling, which could dispense with all symbolism and mediation"⁸.

The nature of the structure of music was described "with remarkable foresight" by Rousseau in his Essai sur l'origine des langues:

...for us each sound is a relative entity. No sound by itself possesses absolute attributes that allow us to identify it: it is high or low, loud or soft with respect to another sound only. By itself it has none of these properties. In a harmonic system, a given sound is nothing by natural right. It is neither tonic, nor dominant, harmonic or fundamental. All these properties exist as relationships only and since the entire system can vary from bass to treble, each sound changes in rank and place as the system changes in degree.⁹

The young VW was excited by music:

L. I
41-2

The only thing in the world is music; music and books and one or two pictures. I am going to found a colony where there shall be no marrying - unless you happen to fall in love with a symphony of Beethoven - no human element at all, except what comes through Art - nothing but ideal peace and endless meditation.
(to Emma Vaughan, 23.4.1901)

Happily, she soon moved away from this youthful Byzantium, but music continued to be an important factor in the development of her thoughts on art:

L.I
263-4

I have been having a debauch of music and hearing certain notes to which I could be wed - pure, simple notes - smooth from all passion and frailty, and flawless as gems. That means so much to me and so little to you! Now do you know that sound has shape and colour and texture as well?

(to Violet Dickinson,
16.12.1906)

In Art (1914) Clive Bell wrote of his appreciation of music as 'pure form'; VW having met Bell six years prior to writing the letter quoted above, it is not far-fetched to presume that such ideas were current in conversations amongst her friends. The hint of an idea of synaesthesia will turn up again and again in her writing.

Strains of these thoughts are heard in 1909 when (probably under the influence of Saxon Sydney-Turner¹⁰) VW attended the great Wagner festival at Bayreuth. In an article written for The Times¹¹ she attempts some sort of music criticism, admitting that she is only giving the impressions of an amateur. As with all her writing the article is lively and interesting (despite its strained, almost euphuistic style), and her perceptions are noteworthy. She sees that music can express non-verbal feeling, and that it has a power over people which seems to stem from its lending form to people's emotions:

BP
19

It may be that these exalted emotions, which belong to the essence of our being, and are rarely expressed, are those that are best translated by music; so that a satisfaction, or whatever one may call that sense of answer which the finest art supplies to its own question, is constantly conveyed here.

This article anticipates her lifelong concern with the attempt at wording "those exalted emotions, which belong to the essence of our being." She was aware of the dangers of the literary judgment of music, but she trusted her ear, and with good reason as the following shows:

Apart from the difficulty of changing a musical impression into a literary one, and the tendency to appeal to the literary sense because of the associations of words, there is the further difficulty in the case of music that its scope is much less clearly defined than the scope of the other arts. The more beautiful a phrase of music the richer its burden of suggestion, and if we understand the form but slightly, we are little restrained in our interpretation. We are led on to connect the beautiful sound with some experience of our own, or make it symbolize some conception of a general nature. Perhaps music owes something of its astonishing power over us to this lack of definite articulation; its statements have all the majesty of a generalisation, and yet contain our private emotions.

BP
21

In her sensuous, impressionistic article VW comes at once to a conclusion similar to that reached methodically by Susanne K. Langer in her theory of music: "Music is a tonal analogue of emotive life"¹². At the end of the article, VW again makes reference - in vague, romantic expression - to an idea of synaesthesia:

...here at Bayreuth, where the music fades into the open air ... and sound melts into colour, and colour calls out for words, where, in short, we are lifted out of the ordinary world and allowed merely to breathe and see - it is here that we realise how thin are the walls between one emotion and another; and how fused our impressions are with the elements which we may not attempt to separate.

BP
22

When she wrote the Times article VW had been working at 'Melymbrosia' for about two years; it was another six before this was published as The Voyage Out. In her first novel the question of the value and nature of art is often raised, and music - a preoccupation of the book's main character - is the mode most frequently used in VW's explorations of this question. It is interesting to turn again to Langer, who writes:

A great many considerations and puzzles that one meets sooner or later in all the arts find their clearest expression and therefore their most tangible form, in connection with music.¹³

The atmosphere of discussion, of Thursday 'evenings' and Cambridge friends, finds its way into The Voyage Out, where Rachel is often seen perplexed by the relation between her music and the life she experiences. Early in the novel she frets over the great difficulty of adequate communication, and comes to the conclusion that "It was far better to play the piano and forget all the rest" (35). Music is seen here as an easy escape from the difficulties of relations with others and with the world, a view which finds repeated expression in the novel. Susan Warrington - not a character noted for her intelligence - says to Rachel that music "just seems to say all the things one can't say oneself" (197); she is perhaps the sort of person Mrs. Dalloway has earlier criticised for going "into attitudes" over Wagner (49), (although she confesses to having been

moved to tears the first time she saw Parsifal). This passive, thoughtless attitude is disparaged throughout The Voyage Out, for although a work of fiction, VW's first novel does offer critical concepts; again, we could turn to Langer for a formal articulation of the sort of idea that is felt in VW's writing: "the function of music is not stimulation of feeling, but expression of it"¹⁴.

Another early question that receives attention in The Voyage Out is that of the nature of the structure of music, and its power to express non-verbal states of mind. VW evidently believed in the possibility of such states from the very start of her career in fiction; in the novels of her maturity this idea comes to be more and more important. The non-verbal imagination must be felt in the reader's mind; the books must be read actively to half-create from intimations their non-verbal origins. Rachel, thinking of the purpose of music, and depressed by her inability to communicate, thinks of music in terms which suggest a system similar to that described by Rousseau:

35

It appeared that nobody ever said a thing they meant, or ever talked of a feeling they felt, but that was what music was for. Reality dwelling in what one saw and felt, but did not talk about, one could accept a system in which things went round and round quite satisfactorily to other people, without often troubling to think about it, except as something superficially strange.

An art which expresses meaning and feeling about reality without having to use signs which refer directly to

something substantial would obviously appeal to a writer wishing to convey her sense of the numinous.¹⁵

Having thought about this system, Rachel falls asleep, and as the chapter ends, VW lightly reinforces the point just made when Helen Ambrose quietly withdraws from Rachel's room "lest the sleeper should waken and there should be the awkwardness of speech between them" (36, my italics). These lines indicate an early deep concern with communication and relationships. Musical composition gives the "illusion of an indivisible whole"¹⁶ and it is this wholeness of music that appeals to Rachel: music "goes straight for things. It says all there is to say at once" (251). What Rachel does not go on to expound, but what implicitly underlies her thoughts, is that conception of music as a "system in which things went round and round quite satisfactorily," a system unhampered by external relations. VW's interest in music in The Voyage Out is clearly from the point of view of a writer; she has already begun her search for a suitable form through which to communicate her perception of the world, and in her first explorations she was concerned with music, for reasons already noted.

Against music as the art of expressing the verbally inexpressible we should perhaps place Terence Hewet's projected novel "about Silence." While VW conceived of a fundamental unity in the various modes of art, she was much concerned with ineffable areas of experience, and realised early in her career that words, for instance, could not have an effect always commensurable with that of music.

Towards the end of the novel, Terence reads to Rachel from Comus, and seems to wish Milton's poetry to act like music. He suggests that the words can be listened to for their sound alone, but of course the meaning obtrudes because words must relate to something other. The point is doubly made as the lines Terence reads (pp.398, 399) have a special significance for Rachel, who is just beginning to experience the physical symptoms of the illness that culminates in her death. Music, then, does not have 'meaning' but it can express feelings that are beyond words. In The Voyage Out VW, through Rachel, acknowledges the great difficulty of creating music, and criticises the passive attentiveness of those listeners who "go into attitudes". Music is seen in terms of its structure, usually by architectural analogy.

By the end of the book music is established as an individual art, dealing with aspects of experience that are not within the reach of words. Langer's formal articulations are useful in encapsulating the ideas which can be drawn from VW's first novel, and the basic concept of music that emerges is very similar to that expressed in her special theory of music as an

articulate but non-discursive form having import without conventional reference ... presenting itself ... as a 'significant form', in which the factor of significance is not logically discriminated but is felt as a quality rather than recognised as a function.¹⁷

It is the logical discrimination of symbols which prevents language from sharing this quality with music. VW recognises this and I think her idea of the novel "about Silence" probably underwent a change as a result of her understanding. To have continued with the idea of language being able somehow to achieve the non-verbal communication of music would have resulted in actual silence. The novels are about silence, an empty space at the heart of life, but they can only point to it, imply it, shape round it. The space is ineffable and impossible to construct, for construction or words would mean filling the space; the space must come to be felt in the reader's mind.

*

In Night and Day the emphasis of artistic interest shifts from music to literature: architectural metaphors now apply to structures composed of words rather than notes; criticism of those who attitudinized over Wagner is now directed at those who do the same over Shakespeare. VW even feels confident enough for comment on her friends' aesthetic theories: Mary Datchet, looking at the Elgin Marbles, is "borne upon some wave of exaltation and emotion," but perhaps her emotions were "not purely aesthetic" (80), for she finds herself thinking of her love for Ralph. Mary is here guilty of that sentimentalism VW condemned in her previous novel. There is, perhaps, implicit questioning of the 'aesthetic emotion' Clive Bell

wrote of in Art, for this state of pure contemplation is an unrealistic aspiration: the personality of the perceiver cannot be evaded. In Night and Day VW sets out a view of the established forms of literature which, in Jacob's Room, she says must be done away with.

Literature is shown as the opiate of an intellectual élite who consider it their birthright, to guard and interpret. In The Voyage Out, and throughout her essays, VW emphasises that life must be the source of art and art must be life-enhancing; in Night and Day she shows the result of ignoring this dictum.

Katharine Hilbery tries to get her parents interested in modern novels, but even their appearance disturbs them; they prefer their reading to look as it is, portly and solid. Literature is viewed by the older generation as a vessel for private emotions which has enough generality to raise them to a plane above the individual. The works of literature do their thinking for them; they transfer their joys and sorrows to those of the heroes and heroines. This generation has made a religion of literature: their responses are dogma, the editor of an "esteemed review" is a "minister of literature" (369); they have a certain idea of what literature is and what it should not be. It was this dogmatism that VW saw as deadening and restrictive. Even Mrs. Hilbery, who is so passionate about "my William", seems to have things the wrong way around: the wonder is not that life continues as it does despite Shakespeare, but that Shakespeare continues despite life (an idea found in

Jacob's Room, 108-9). Mr. Hilbery, in using the work of Scott as a pacifying homily to his daughter, typifies the smug attitude against which VW rebelled; at the end of the book is a telling description of this attitude:

528-9 The power of literature, which had temporarily deserted Mr. Hilbery, now came back to him, pouring over the raw ugliness of human affairs its soothing balm, and providing a form into which such passions as he had felt so painfully the night before could be moulded so that they fell roundly from the tongue in shapely phrases, hurting nobody.

This intellectual élite has stifled the spirit of literature, and lost the ability to read creatively. The children of this coterie do not escape its influence: Cassandra mocks William with cliquish complacency for not having read Dostoevski (368), and Katharine assures her mother that clerks do not read poetry "as we read it" (99).

*

Jacob's Room exhorts us to break the repressions of Night and Day, but it seems that Jacob himself will not prove to be a liberating influence, for he is sometimes as didactic as Katharine's Aunt Eleanor:

121 For the moderns were futile; painting the least respectable of the arts; and why read anything but Marlowe and Shakespeare, Jacob said, and Fielding if you must read novels.

Jacob is caught at a period of transition, at the moment after the breaking of the old moulds and before the formation of the new, and thus is full of youthful self-assertiveness but fundamentally confused. This is a feeling VW herself sometimes exhibits:

L. III
209

For my own part I wish we could skip a generation - skip Edith and Gertrude and Tom and Joyce and Virginia and come out into the open again, when everything has been restarted, and runs full tilt, instead of trickling and teasing in this irritating way.
(to Roger Fry, 16.9.1925)

Whether or not Jacob is successful, the message remains: "there will be no form in the world," for Jacob (or anybody) unless he "makes one for himself" (34).

In this novel, VW begins to turn her attention to the creative artist, but her main concern is still with form. Jacob (106) seems to consider himself one of the six young men upon whom "the flesh and blood of the future depends;" the cry "Detest your own age. Build a better one" is taken to heart by him, but the savagery and pedantry of youth obscures from him the fact that he becomes as stuffy and as narrow as "Shaw and Wells and the serious sixpenny weeklies!" (33). The existing forms, once broken, must be wholly superseded, not just refashioned with new materials.

Two months after the publication of Jacob's Room, VW wrote to Gerald Brenan of that sense of breaking and renewing, of being stuck in a period of transition that characterises the novel as very much her own feeling about herself as a writer. She feels, on Christmas Day, 1922, that the "human soul" is undergoing one of its periodic reorientations. For those artists unfortunate enough to live at such a time, nothing is whole:

L. II nothing is going to be achieved by us. Fragments -
598 paragraphs - a page perhaps: but no more.
 Joyce seems to me strewn with disaster.

She and her contemporaries are denied a sight of whole human soul, but she feels the glimpses they can catch are more valuable than

L. II to sit down with Hugh Walpole, Wells, etc.,
598 etc. and make large oil paintings of fabulous
 fleshy monsters complete from top to toe.

Having just published the first novel which speaks with her distinctive voice VW is engrossed with her own creation; indeed, she says to Brenan, "I am only scribbling, more to amuse myself than you, who may never read, or understand." She feels herself a microcosm of the world, suffering "every ten years" a reorientation of her own soul to match the larger one she sees occurring in the human race; and these reorientations are agonies, explicitly connected in this letter, and in many other places, with her attempts at suicide and the deep imbalance of her mind:

life must be broken in order to be renewed.

Looking back, she says when she first tried to write, she found that she could not, for what she had to write about (life) was "too near, too vast." This is certainly borne out by the impression of being overwhelmed, and the synaesthetic perception already noted in the young VW, and in Rachel Vinrace. With Jacob's Room she begins to give form to the incoherent experience of being; to do this she must first recede from the object. The letter ends with a postscript in which she returns to the original matter, raised by Brennan, of renunciation. VW here fixes on a central paradox of her art when she says that beauty is achieved in the failure to achieve it, in other words, in the effort. This recalls the idea of non-verbal thought, formed somewhere between reader and writer: by "grinding all the flints together" the whole that cannot be communicated directly is formed in the intersubjective relationship between the book and the reader.

L. II
599-600

Are we not always hoping? and though we fail every time, surely we do not fail so completely as we should have failed if we were not in the beginning, prepared to attack the whole. One must renounce, when the book is finished; but not before it is begun.

By the time she came to write To the Lighthouse VW was an experienced writer with proven consummate control of the form she had worked out for herself. In this novel is seen a consideration of the artist at work, which adheres closely to the problems posed by Lily Briscoe's picture. The novel is not an exploration of whether painting and literature are commensurable, as The Voyage Out explored that question with regard to music and language. VW uses pictorial art to shed a light on literary creation, significantly, to see her specific problems as a novelist in a fresh way. She knows well where the line comes between the two modes, and uses painting to distance herself from literature so that she may not be too close to her own difficulties to see them clearly.

Lily finds William Bankes's scrutiny of her canvas an "awful trial", for her work is not just representation, but contains the

84 residue of her thirty-three years, the deposit of each day's living, mixed with something more secret than she had ever spoken or shown in the course of all those days.

Three years after the publication of To the Lighthouse, VW wrote in the introduction to a catalogue of an exhibition of Vanessa Bell's paintings,

that they yield their full meaning only to those who can tunnel their way behind the canvas into masses and passages and relations

and values of which we know nothing -¹⁸

It seems to me that in these two instances - one fictional, one (f)actual - VW is making a definite statement to the effect that an artist's life must be inextricably mingled with his or her created work. She sees a novelist as even less able to conceal actual experience in a work of art: "One defies a novelist to keep his life through twenty-seven volumes of fiction safe from our scrutiny"¹⁸. Here - and on many other occasions - she explicitly says that the writer's life is unavoidably interwoven with his or her fiction (see epigraphs to this study, headed Life and Art).

Lily's struggle for unity, her attempt to realise her vision wholly, is an articulation of the basic problem for any artist. The passage from conception to realisation imposes a change, for all visions must be mediated:

34 She could see it all so clearly, so commandingly,
 when she looked; it was when she took her brush
 in her hand that the whole thing changed.

At the beginning of To the Lighthouse Lily understands that her problem has to do mainly with relation:

85 if there, in that corner, it was bright, here,
 in this, she felt the need of darkness.

She cannot explain what she wishes to make of the scene before her; she only feels it within her, and here we have

the problem: how to bring one's personal world into the shared world in such a way that others can understand it.

This was VW's problem as it is Lily's:

D. III
102

...I shall here write the first pages of the greatest book in the world. That is what the book would be that was made entirely solely and with integrity of one's thoughts. Suppose one could catch them before they became 'works of art' ? Catch them hot and sudden as they rise in the mind -

(1926)

This, again, is a reference to the non-verbal source of VW's art.

The problem remains with Lily; ten years pass, ten years of experience, of perceiving, of having visions; and she returns to the house.

229

The question was of the relation between those masses. She had borne it in her mind all these years.

And it would seem that a decade has brought Lily new understanding: "It seemed as if the solution had come to her: she knew now what she wanted to do" (229). However, the gap still exists between conception and realisation, and although the struggle to create may now be more equal it is no less fierce¹⁹, as Lily discovers when she again approaches her easel:

But there was all the difference in the world between this planning airily away from the

243 canvas, and actually taking her brush and making the first mark.

Section 3 of 'The Lighthouse' marks the beginning of a concentration on Lily's picture (concurrent with the voyage out to the lighthouse) which is, at this point, a framed space against the landscape, which must be filled:

242 She saw her canvas as if it had floated up and placed itself white and uncompromising directly before her.

If we glance back at the last diary entry referred to above, the correlation between the problems of Lily and VW is again made clear: "Then, there is the form of the sentence, soliciting one to fill it" (D. III, 102). Other writings of the period of Lighthouse's composition are also concerned with the problems in verbal art that Lily has with painting. Writing in the Times Literary Supplement on De Quincey ('Impassioned Prose', 16.9.1926), VW expresses those ideas that Lily found she could not put across to William Bankes (see TTL, 84-7):

CE I
172 Then it is not the actual sight or sound itself that matters, but the reverberations that it makes as it travels through our minds. These are often to be found far away, strangely transformed; but it is only by gathering up and putting together these echoes and fragments that we arrive at the true nature of our experience.

Again, as in the letter to Brennan, VW says that the only hope for wholeness is to put together the fragments

of our experience, not to go directly for it. In 1925 she wrote in her diary that she had

D. III
34 an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant 'novel'. A new - by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?
(27.6.1925)

In 1927, in 'The Narrow Bridge of Art', she described some aspects of this new form:

In the first place, one may guess that it will differ from the novel as we know it now chiefly in that it will stand back from life. It will give, as poetry does, the outline rather than the detail. ...

CEII
224, 228 So, then, this unnamed variety of the novel be written standing back from life, because in that way a larger view is to be obtained of some important features of it.

In the novel, this form can be seen applied to relationships:

299 But this was one way of knowing people, she thought; to know the outline, not the detail, to sit in one's garden and look at the slopes of a hill running purple down into the distant heather.

The same conditions can be seen to apply to Lily's picture: before beginning she must draw back from life, and subdue the

293 impertinences and irrelevances that plucked her attention and made her remember how she she was such and such a person, and had such and such relations to people.

This is why she cannot communicate her vision directly to William Bankes:

She could not show him what she wished to make of it [the scene in front of her] , could not see it even herself, without a brush in her hand. She took up once more her old painting position with the dim eyes and the absent-minded manner, subduing all her impressions as a woman to something much more general; becoming once more under the power of that vision which she had seen clearly once and must now grope for among hedges and houses and mothers and children - her picture.

86

Overcoming the difficulty of beginning, Lily falls into a rhythm of marking the canvas and pausing ("The most characteristic principle of vital activity is rhythm," Langer, Feeling and Form, 126). A letter to Vita Sackville-West, written early in 1926, indicates VW's belief in this principle of rhythm, providing a further detail of the analogy between Lily's painting and the novel:

L. III
247 Style is a very simple matter; it is all rhythm.... Now this is very profound, what rhythm is, and goes far deeper than words. A sight, an emotion, creates this wave in the mind, long before it makes words to fit it; (16.3.1926)

The work of art begins with a preverbal rhythm; again and again VW comes back to this aspect of creation. Lily's rhythmic dabbing at the canvas presents a new problem, however, for her marks define a new space; "what could be more formidable than that space?" (244). In the light of what VW has already said about creation, Lily's

experience as she begins her picture can be taken confidently as the author's in writing her novel:

244-5 Here she was again, she thought, stepping back to look at it, drawn out of gossip, out of living, out of community with people 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 her attention.

The arresting phrase "ancient enemy" emphasises VW's conception of creation as a struggle. In a holograph manuscript of the novel²⁰ the stress of this moment for Lily, and the sense of artistic creation being beyond mere "human relations", is emphasised in a long monologue in which she speaks of art reaching "some more acute reality where it can rest." This description recalls what I have suggested was VW's idea of the soul or self: it was as a "wedge-shaped core of darkness" that Mrs. Ramsay found rest (see above, p.45) and a communion with a 'reality' apart from the actual. In writing of 'reality' in her diary, we have noted that VW felt it was that in which she would "rest and continue to exist" (see above, p.50). There is also a remarkable similarity (the significance of which will be fully realised in discussing Between the Acts) between the states in which Mrs. Ramsay becomes a "wedge of darkness" and in which Lily paints to achieve her "vision"; the most salient feature common to both states is the loss of personality (cf. TTL, 100 & 246). It may also be noteworthy, as further evidence of a connection

between the mode of being of self, or soul, and the creation of art, that Mrs. Ramsay's "wedge" shape is endorsed by the purple triangle as which she is represented in Lily's painting.

In the published version of the novel, VW seems to have realised that Lily's doctrine is unconvincing because it comes at the problem so directly; the hyperbole obstructs the active reader's imagination, and it is therefore excised. The draft is significant, nevertheless, because it explicitly connects artistic creation with transcendence of the actual and revelation of the soul. Lily, in the draft, is seen as "extended and freed" while painting:

she enjoyed that intensity and freedom of life which for a few seconds after the death of the body, one imagines the souls of the dead to enjoy.

Jane Novak quotes a passage (The Razor Edge of Balance, 60-61) in which Lily experiences a transcendence of time and death through art:

It was attended, too, with an emotion which could be compared only with the gratification of bodily love, so unhesitatingly, without fear or reserve, at some point of culmination, when all separation is over, except that delight of separation which is that it has consciousness of mixing - the bodies unite, human love has its gratification. But that even was less complete than this, for who can deny it? Even when the arms are locked, or the sentence married in the air with complete understanding, a cloud moves across the sky and each lover knows but cannot confess his knowledge of the transience

of love; the mutability of love; how tomorrow comes, how words and their kisses are only tossed together and nothing survives. But here, since the lover was the horrible formidable enemy - their union, could it be achieved, was immortal, no Death came between them. It was an awful marriage, forever.

The space which Lily has created is more awful than the original space of the canvas for it is "truth ... reality ..."; it is the space at the heart of life so often felt in the novels; the emptiness that can only be felt and never directly communicated: nothingness. The overwhelming difficulty that this space presents is that it demands to be filled, but can never be filled for then it would no longer be space:

245 but this form, were it only the shape of a white lamp-shade looming on a wicker table, roused one to perpetual combat, challenged one to a fight in which one was bound to be worsted.

The space in the painting corresponds to one side of that tension between meaning and nothingness that is felt throughout all VW's writing. The artist, in her mind, is closest to 'reality'²¹, and is constantly torn between the antinomies of emptiness at the centre and the possibility of creation. This division in human being is acute for the artist because she perceives it more clearly than others. Art can "make of the moment something permanent" (249); perhaps it can even fill the space, but only for an instant, and not in the shared world of

common reality. In her essays and diaries VW often refers to the unconscious reverie in which artistic creation takes place, and on p. 246 of To the Lighthouse we find a definite statement of the basis in the unconscious of art; Lily feels part of

some rhythm which was dictated to her (she kept looking at the hedge, at the canvas) by what she saw, so that while her hand quivered with life, this rhythm was strong enough to bear her along with it on its current. Certainly she was losing consciousness of outer things, her name and her personality and her appearance, ... her mind kept throwing up from its depths, scenes, and names, and sayings, and memories and ideas, like a fountain spurting over that glaring, hideously difficult white space, while she modelled at it with greens and blues.

As Lily comes to grips with the difficulties of her painting, she solves problems of shape and mass by use of colour. A painter's use of colour is active, vital, VW knew; colours are alive in a painting, elements determined by their environment. Allen McLaurin devotes a chapter of his Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved to colour, and I do not wish to repeat his excellent analysis and minute observation of VW's use of colour. The essay 'Walter Sickert' (1933) to which McLaurin refers is extremely interesting with regard to VW's view of a basic unity in the arts, and again of the areas of experience which are beyond words: the "silent kingdom" of paint holds many lessons for the writer, but their ways must eventually part.

When we consider the atmosphere of discursive rationalism that VW lived in, it is surprising to see the consistency with which her work shapes non-discursive, intuitive perceptions. Her essay on Sickert is typical in its intimate awareness of tradition; she sees that great writers are "great colourists, just as they are musicians into the bargain." McLaurin's attention to her use of colour in The Waves makes clear that VW learnt all she could from the painters; the expressiveness of colour and line, seized upon as of paramount importance by the Symbolist painters of the early twentieth century, is reflected in words by VW²².

The limitations of language in the psychological use of colour, enunciated by McLaurin, were completely understood by VW by the time she had finished To the Lighthouse. She uses colours in relational sequences, solving Lily's problems of relation, modelling into the hollows of experience by causing words to suggest shapes beyond themselves. Lily, having mastered the skillful employment of colour to establish "psychological volumes" (cf. Charles Mauron, Roger Fry) comes to have a surer grasp of the form her work must take, and this conception we can take, again with confidence, as analogous to VW's literary work, noting especially its paradoxical nature:

Beautiful and bright it should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent, one colour melting into another like colours on a butterfly's wing; but beneath the fabric must

264 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.

Early in the novel it was made clear that the
artist's life had an integral influence on her work.
As the book and Lily's picture draw near completion, it
is increasingly emphasised that Lily mixes memory and
desire with her vision; the past and her wish to regain
her experience of Mrs. Ramsay's influence becomes worked
into her painting as a definite shaping element:

265 And as she dipped into the blue paint, she
 dipped too into the past there.

Still something is lacking, for Lily's problem of balance,
of relation, persists; and, as she shows in her diary,
VW shares the difficulty of getting hold of "the thing
itself before it has been made anything" (TTL, 297). In
view of this, that the novel ends with Lily triumphant
("I have had my vision"; the tense is significant) may
at first be confusing. If Lily has realised her vision
on her canvas, it is not a static realisation, but a
moment of creation which must be recreated by each
perceiver. Lily's 'vision' takes place within her: the
moment at which she completes her picture is the closing
of the circle of the journey to the lighthouse, and thus
the vision is VW's too. For a moment she (Lily) holds
her vision, her past and her present in synthesis. It

is such a 'moment of being' that VW strove to give the opportunity for in her novels; the moment should be recreated by each reader. To the Lighthouse constitutes her most extensive statement on her understanding of art; that she manages to expound and exemplify her insights simultaneously is an adequate mark of her genius.

(ii) Failure

That question of the complex nature of the relationship between life and literature that Orlando flirts with is the focus of The Waves. The Waves is often regarded as a 'classic text' of modernism; and indeed the work is useful as a storehouse of typical ideas, but not much more than this. It is a kind of warehouse in which are found the materials from which novels such as To the Lighthouse or Between the Acts may be constructed. Early on in the work's construction VW herself felt that "I am only accumulating notes for a book" (D. III, 268; 30.11.1929). The Waves never gets beyond this state, and yet there are many who would disagree. Critics have found The Waves a work in which form and content are "so closely bound together to form one substance" (Fleishman, Virginia Woolf, 157), a work in which is displayed "the artist's ability to create unity" (van Buren Kelley, The Novels of Virginia Woolf, 198). The book's reputation as a classic text of modernism owes much to its abstruseness; its hostility to "common reading" seems to qualify it for a special prominence among notoriously 'difficult' works of modern art.

The Waves is an anti-novel which yields very little to the processes of assimilation, memory and comparison which constitute reading; it is not strong enough to forge its own conventions, in the way that, say, To the Lighthouse is (see above, 122-134). It is particularly significant

that in its conception and development, VW was far more concerned with the shape of the book than anything else. In the process of writing other novels she had been interested in the characters, their movements and relations, but a reading of the entries which refer to The Waves in A Writer's Diary shows very different prevalent concerns:

Why not invent a new kind of play (21.2.1927)...
All the time I shall attack this angular shape in my mind (28.3.1929)... Altogether the shape of the book wants considering (10.9.1929)...
Also, never in my life did I attack such a vague yet elaborate design; (11.10.1929)... anyhow no other form of fiction suggests itself except as repetition at the moment (26.1.1930)...
felt the pressure of the form - the splendour, the greatness - as, perhaps, I have never felt them (28.3.1930)... The abandonment of Orlando and To the Lighthouse is much checked by the extreme difficulty of the form (9.4.1930)...
this hideous shaping and moulding (23.4.1930)...
I suspect the structure is wrong (29.4.1930)

Abstraction is the dominant note in entries about the new work.

As so often, the genesis and development of a new work of fiction are recorded in the diary. The first stirrings of what would become The Waves are interesting in that VW is concerned with her own "process" of creation ("I want to watch and see how the idea at first occurs. I want to trace my own process." D. III, 113; 30.9.1926). A month later she was still watching carefully:

At intervals, I begin to think (I note this, as I am going to watch for the advent of a book) of a solitary woman musing [?] a book of ideas about

life. This has intruded only once or twice,
and very vaguely: it is a dramatisation of my mood
at Rodmell. It is to be an endeavour at something
D. III mystical, spiritual; the thing that exists when
114 we aren't there.
(30.10.1926)

This was written during the revision of To the Lighthouse,
and brings to mind the sense of "something that exists
when we aren't there" that 'Time Passes' achieves (see
below, Ch. 6). It will be seen in discussing that
central section of To the Lighthouse that mysticism is
firmly rejected by the earlier novel. Bearing this in
mind, and also that basic tenet of VW's aesthetic -
that the way to achieve beauty or wholeness was not to
come at the thing directly, but to communicate indirectly -
it is strange that in The Waves she seems to abandon
the lessons of earlier works and to approach directly
that empty centre of acute 'reality' which is apparently
the soul's domain.

The "mood at Rodmell" (to which some attention has
already been given; see above, pp. 47-51) is given central
importance by the writer (J.W. Graham notes that she
refers to it, "in a ritual gesture," at the end of each
draft over four and a half years), and so, intensely
private though it is, I repeat its description here as
it might throw some light on the intentions of The Waves.
The vision is described in two diary entries written just
after VW had finished To the Lighthouse:

Intense depression: I have to confess that this has overcome me several times since September 6th ... It is so strange to me that I cannot get it right - the depression, I mean, which does not come from something definite, but from nothing. "Where there is nothing" the phrase came ~~back~~ to me, as I sat at the table in the drawing room. ... All the rest of the year one's (I daresay rightly) curbing and controlling this odd immeasurable soul. When it expands, though one is frightened & bored & gloomy, it is as I say to myself, awfully queer. There is an edge to it which I feel of great importance, once in a way. One goes down into the well & nothing protects one from the assault of truth. Down there I can't write or read; I exist however. I am.

D. III
112

(28.9.1926)

I wished to add some remarks to this, on the mystical side of solitude; how it is not oneself but something in the universe that one's left with. It is this that is frightening & exciting in the midst of my profound gloom, depression, boredom, whatever it is: One sees a fin passing far out. What image can I reach to convey what I mean? Really there is none I think. The interesting thing is that in all my feeling and thinking I have never come up against this before. Life is, soberly and accurately, the oddest affair; 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? &c. But by writing I don't reach anything. All I mean to make is a note of a curious state of mind. I hazard the guess that it may be the impulse behind another book.

D. III
113

(30.9.1926)

It is revealing that VW treats this as a new experience, for it bears the characteristics of a fundamental experience of several characters in the preceding novels. Clarissa Dalloway, for example, is seen to undergo precisely this sense of wonder at simply being at all, and to feel the 'presence' of nothing, which at once fascinates and depresses

a virtual form of actual life, and is enabled to enact experience (to re-create it) on the terms of the novel²⁴.

The Waves is anti-reading in this respect: it does not allow for the participation of the reader, but continually dictates through a highly self-conscious structure.

Wolfgang Iser refers to a comment VW made on the novels of Jane Austen (The Act of Reading, 168) in which she speaks of Austen stimulating the reader "to supply what is not there" (CR I, 174). Iser writes:

168 The 'enduring form of life' which Virginia Woolf speaks of is not manifested on the printed page; it is a product arising out of the interaction between text and reader.

What I contend is the prime reason for The Waves' failure is the avoidance of what Iser calls "the structured blanks of the text", which "stimulate the process of ideation to be performed by the reader on terms set by the text" (Act, 169). Turning again to the diary, it is clear that VW herself was aware of the dangers which the form she was developing was open to:

Who thinks it ? And am I outside the thinker ?
One wants some device which is not a trick.
(25.9.1929)... In particular is there some
radical fault in my scheme ? (11.10.1929)...
Is there some falsity of method, somewhere ?
Something tricky ? (2.11.1929)... But how to
pull it together, how to comport it - press
it into one - I do not know; (26.1.1930)...
it may miss fire somewhere (9.4.1930)...
I think this is the greatest opportunity I
have yet been able to give myself; therefore
I suppose the most complete failure. Yet I

respect myself for writing this book - yes - even though it exhibits my congenital faults. (20.8.1930)... I imagine that the hookedness may be so great that it will be a failure from a reader's point of view. (2.2.1931)

When published the reviews were favourable, which of course pleased the author. Nevertheless, she writes in her diary that the book has not been understood: The Times praised her characters "when I meant to have none"; the book was "an adventure which I go on alone" (AWD, 175; 5.10.1931). The Waves is hostile to reading, and yet has nearly always been read as a complete, harmonious work of art. It is, though, a product of crisis and reflects this in its form.

In two insightful articles²⁵, J.W. Graham documents VW's growing distaste for 'psychology' and her search for voiceless, characterless expression. In the introduction to his edition of the two holograph drafts of the book, Graham explores the background to its conception as seen in the diary and essays written between 1927 and 1930. In contemporary modes of fiction VW saw an excessive concern with psychology. In 'The Narrow Bridge of Art' (1927) she says that writers have been too much taken up with personal relations:

We have come to forget that a large and important part of life consists in our emotions towards such things as roses and nightingales, the dawn, the sunset, life, death, and fate; we forget that we spend much time sleeping, dreaming, thinking,

CE II reading, alone; we are not entirely occupied in
225 personal relations; all our energies are not
 absorbed in making our livings.

In 'Phases of Fiction', two years later, she wrote of
just that aesthetic she had achieved in novels like To
the Lighthouse, but which is largely abandoned in The Waves:

 As the pages are turned, something is built up
 which is not the story itself. And this power,
 if it accentuates and concentrates and gives
 the fluidity of the novel endurance and strength,
 so that no novel can survive even a few years
 without it, is also a danger. For the most
 characteristic qualities of the novel - that
 it registers the slow growth and development
 of feeling, that it follows many lives and
 traces their unions and fortunes over a long
CE II stretch of time - are the very qualities that
101 are most incompatible with design and order.

Here she has stated exactly the danger to which The Waves
falls prey. The passage continues by saying that the two
forces must be balanced; the "most complete novelist" is
the one who can achieve a balance of the powers, so that
"the one enhances the other".

 It is evident that The Waves was intended to give
a sense of "life itself going on" (D. III, 229; 28.5.1929);
among early working titles were "the life of anybody" and
"life in general". This universal scope is not new in
the fiction: Rachel Vinrace wished to be told "everything"
and Lily Briscoe is overwhelmed by no less a question
than "What is the meaning of life?" The Waves -
explicitly in the final episode - attempts to answer this

question directly, attempts to map life completely with art.

At this point we might make a useful excursus to examine a sketch of 1920 which adumbrates Bernard's project of summing up life in a story - 'An Unwritten Novel'. The narrator is on a train, sitting opposite a woman whom the narrator 'reads', believing that she is trying to tell her something simply by the way she sits, moves, looks:

AHH I read her message, deciphered her secret,
14 reading it beneath her gaze.

The unreliability of such 'reading' is demonstrated when the unknown woman gets off at her destination and shows that her life has nothing in common with the narrator's interpretation; the narrator is bewildered:

AHH Well, my world's done for! What do I stand on?
23 What do I know? That's not Minnie. There
 never was Moggridge. Who am I? Life's bare
 as bone.

That life is impoverished because it does not tally with a reading is a characteristic feeling of Bernard's: he makes up scenes (stories) and expects life to fit them. For example, he goes to visit Louis and Rhoda, imagining Rhoda murmuring poetry, Louis filling a saucer with milk for a cat, but neither of them are even there: he feels at once that life is poor affair (TW, 195). In the sketch, the similar sense of loss gives way almost immediately

to a euphoric celebration of life's richness and variety:

AHH
23

Oh, how it whirls and surges - floats me afresh!
I start after them. People drive this way and
that. The white light splutters and pours. ...
Wherever I go, mysterious figures, I see you,
turning the corner, mothers and sons; you, you,
you. ... If I fall on my knees, if I go through
the ritual, the ancient antics, it's you, unknown
figures, you I adore; if I open my arms, it's
you I embrace, you I draw to me - adorable
world!

The Waves was intended to express "life itself",
to "give the moment", and yet it is more about art than
life. It is an intensely self-regarding work, and its
failure is partly due to this inwardness. In Beyond
Ecotism, Robert Kiely remarks that Neville's comment that
"our friends are not able to finish their stories"

173-4

is not merely an idle criticism of Bernard's
inability to hold an audience but a deeply
serious and universally applicable expression
of life's refusal to conform to narrative
convention. Friends cannot finish their stories
because their audiences and their subjects are
forever dispersing.

Life will not conform to stories, a recalcitrance that
prevents Bernard from ever realising the integrated
"selfhood" that some critics (e.g. Harvena Richter, Alice
van Buren Kelley) claim for him, and reduces his own
experience to mere phrases.

In The Act of Reading Iser writes that

68 Events are a paradigm of reality in that they designate a process, and are not merely a 'discrete entity'

He continues this theme with a theoretical formulation which could be taken as parallel in a way to that important image in The Waves (which also appears in VW's diary) of a fin turning in a waste of water:

68 Each event represents the intersecting point of a variety of circumstances, but circumstances also change the event as soon as it has taken on a shape. As a shape, it marks off certain borderlines, so that these may then be transcended in the continuous process of realisation that constitutes reality. In literature, where the reader is constantly feeding back reactions as he obtains new information, there is just such a continual process of realisation, and so reading itself 'happens' like an event, in the sense that what we read takes on the character of an open-ended situation, at one and the same time concrete and yet fluid.

We may say, then, that literature complements reality in that it provides a perspective on the world, through symbols, which is not available to the world of actual experience²⁶. Fiction is described by Iser as "the pragmatically conditioned gestalt of the imaginary"²⁷.

He writes that

it appears to be a halfway house between the imaginary and the real. It shares with the real the determinateness of its form, and with the imaginary its nature of an "as if"²⁸.

Crucial in the failure of The Waves as a work of literature

that can be successfully and fruitfully read is Bernard's failure to distinguish between story-telling and life, and VW's failure to harmonise design and content. In the summing-up - Bernard's ultimate story - the reasons for the book's failure are focused on.

The summing-up is distinguished from the eight preceding episodes in a number of ways, most significantly by its narrative voice. The predominant tense (like that of the interludes) is not the pure present of the other episodes - a tense which, J.W. Graham notes, necessitates repetition of 'I', as there is no helpful copula like the 'am' of the progressive present. The "phantom dinner party" mirrors the situation of text and reader. It is not a normal social situation: the silent, unnamed guest is a 'reader' of Bernard's story (see Iser, Act, 166 f.).

In the second holograph draft (1930) the final episode begins:

Graham
656 "There are times," said Bernard, "which seem to be no time: & places which are no particular place, just as you, if you will pardon me, are not any ~~particular~~ person. in particular

This is the situation of a literary work as regards the reader. The impression of timelessness is also indicated by the possibility that the summing-up is largely a dream, something that is only very slightly hinted at in the published text. At the end of episode eight Bernard is sleeping on a train:

167 But what is odd is that I still clasp the return half of my ticket to Waterloo firmly between the fingers of my right hand, even now, even sleeping.

The draft - as we might by now expect - is more explicit about the dream state: a note written as a reminder of what has still to be composed reads:

Graham 360 (he goes in to be shaved, & sees the wind in looking glasses - regularity of the man's hand like the gardeners broom - & the dream)

(April 12th)
1930

Another plan for the section reads:

Graham 766 The walk (after arriving at Waterloo)
hairdresser [sc?]
Then the loss of identity.
Then the return
The wave falls.
He wakes.
Death
O Solitude.

While the status of draft material cannot be taken for granted in reading the published text, it is of particular help in reading The Waves as revisions are nearly always contractions or deletions. One further plan reads:

Graham 757 Then the phantom dinner party when ~~they~~^{the} others are not present; but only Bernard, & he sums up all their lives; & becomes part of them.
Then the general death.

The conception jotted down in drafts and notebooks, of Bernard summing up "all their lives", is not realised in the book itself, and indeed could not be realised. Bernard's summing-up is not a uniting of the characters; it does not create that single human being he says they saw laid out before them on the restaurant table at their reunion dinner (196). The conclusion is merely one more story in the repertoire of The Waves. The book is not an "ars poetica for fiction" (Fleishman, op.cit., 152), but a sketchpad for an unwritten novel.

* * *

97

The wish to put ourselves in an unmediated relation to whatever "really" is, to know something absolutely, means a desire to be defined totally: marked or named once and for all, fixed in or by a word, and so - paradoxically - made indifferent.

(Geoffrey Hartman, Saving the Text)

Bernard's intention to "explain to you the meaning of my life" (TW, 168) can be read as VW's intention to explain the 'meaning' of The Waves. The summing-up is not just the conclusion to Bernard's life, it is the author's way - as she states in her notebooks and diaries - of drawing together the various elements of the book, rounding it off and making some "final statement" about

all the characters. Bernard himself alternates between extolling the power of art to express life in this way, and denigrating its poverty. The real problem, however, lies in his inability to distinguish between life and art, and, as we shall see, in his refusal of the distinctions of identity and difference.

The first difficulty he encounters is the politics of experience: "the globe full of figures" as which Bernard images his life, his companion can not see. "You see me... opposite you," says Bernard, but whose, or which, "me" is this? The problem of voice, that is never solved in The Waves, is most particularly Bernard's, a confusion that leads to inextricably complicated identifications. In evidence of this we might take Bernard's recollection of his reaction to Percival's death:

187 I said 'Give him (myself) another moment's
 respite' as I went downstairs.

The three pronouns exemplify the confusion of voices in the work, a confusion that stems from the attempt to fix what is impossible to fix. A further note of Samuel Butler's is apposite here:

Besides what is the self of which we say that we are self-conscious? No one can say what it is that we are conscious of. This is one of the things which lie altogether outside the sphere of words. 29

Bernard attempts to discover a grammar of life, to reduce experience absolutely to language, but there is a disjunction between the two, felt even in the discrepancy experienced by Bernard between himself and his name.

This discrepancy is explained by J. Hillis Miller:

All proper names, as linguists and ethnologists have recognised, are metaphors. They alienate the person named from his unspeakable individuality and assimilate him into a system of language. They label him in terms of something other than himself, in one form of the stepping aside which is the essence of language. To name someone is to alienate him from himself by making him part of a family.³⁰

As already noted (see above, p. 59) the self cannot be named; what Hartman calls the "nomen numen" is extralinguistic. Bernard's assertions of identity (e.g. "I rose and walked away - I, I, I; ... I, Bernard") are repeatedly undercut by his uncertainty as to how much others have contributed to that identity. Ultimately, Bernard is trying to verbally reduce the 'I' that is his identity, to "sum up" his life and speak his self (or soul) into being in the actual world. "In a sense that cuts much deeper than semantics," writes George Steiner, "our identity is a first-person pronoun"³¹. Bernard wishes to go beyond this semantically, verbally. His desire (and VW's) to reduce life to art, to fix the movement of identity by speaking into the world his secret name, leads eventually to the strange concept of "A man without a self."

One day, Bernard tells his guest, he did not answer the call of 'I'; he experienced a world drained of all colour, devoid of all features. However, while he can still say "I am dead" (202), he is still living, voicing his identity, still in the world he says he has transcended. If Bernard is "A dead man", who speaks? As Bernard says that he has dissolved all difference, resolved all identities into one, the biblical allusions of his 'Last Supper' take on a greater import. "Take it. This is my life." says Bernard at the beginning of the last episode, echoing Corinthians 1, 11:24. He believes he has "summed up" all the others in this communion, forming one body, one being:

205 And now I ask, 'Who am I?' I have been talking of Bernard, Neville, Jinny, Susan, Rhoda and Louis. Am I all of them? Am I one and distinct? I do not know. We sat here together. But now Percival is dead, and Rhoda is dead; we are divided; we are not here. Yet I cannot find any obstacle separating us. There is no division between me and them. As I talked I felt 'I am you.' This difference we make so much of, this identity we so feverishly cherish, was overcome.

This dislocation of identity reflects the crisis the book generates. Throughout, Bernard has questioned the nature of his own being in an empirical fashion quite unlike any other of VW's characters. The limits of subjectivity (what James Naremore, who also believes the book to be a failure - "though a highly interesting one" - calls the "ultimate refinement") are reached as Bernard

tries to undo the tautological knot of identity, enshrined, as Steiner says, in monotheistic religion's "I am that I am" (Extraterritorial, 64). Distinction between one and other is dissolved in this quasi-religious self-glorification of Bernard's. He is claiming universal knowledge (which denies death) by what he imagines is a summing-up in an instant of his entire being; he claims access to "the mystery of things" (207), to being one of God's spies.

The illusion that Bernard expresses was shattered (as we will see below, Ch. 6) in the 'Time Passes' section of To the Lighthouse, and it is perhaps a mark of the rigour of the writer's mind that Bernard is returned to consciousness of his actual identity by the (Sartrian) look of his dinner companion:

208 You look, eat, smile, are bored, pleased, annoyed - that is all I know. Yet this shadow which has sat by me for an hour or two, this mask from which peep two eyes, has power to drive me back, to pinion me down among all those other faces, to shut me in a hot room; to send me dashing like a moth from candle to candle.

From his self-apotheosis Bernard is returned to simple identity - 'I'. Perhaps an echo of that tautological irreducibility is heard in his wish to be left alone, "myself being myself" (210). The failure of Bernard, and consequently of The Waves, to make the promised "final statement" is perhaps admitted a few pages earlier:

The 'I' here contains the triumph and humiliation of human being, what Buber termed "the sublime melancholy of our lot" (I and Thou, 68). Severely flawed though it is, The Waves must not be rejected; it continues to develop and expound the perennial themes of VW's fiction. It is also important as evidence of a conflict which points towards the last and most difficult novel, Between the Acts (1941). In that work's fusion of design and substance, in its dazzling play of voices, is conveyed that sense of something there when we are not that The Waves attempted. Before approaching that novel, however, we must explore VW's sense of the numinous; a sense that at once disturbed and enthralled her.

Notes to Chapter Four

1. (p.104) H. Chipp, ed., Theories of Modern Art, 154-5
2. (p.104) *ibid.*, 346-7 (Concrete Art, 1938)
3. (p.105) R. Shone, Bloomsbury Portraits, 142
4. (p.105)
In 1908 Scriabin began to compose what he believed to be part of the Mystery to which he had been making more than a passing reference for a number of years, a large work which would unite the senses as Wagner had attempted to unite the arts. He spoke of 'tactile symphonies', and of involving not just sound but sight, smell, feel, dance, décor, orchestra, piano, singers, light, sculpture, and colours. In the event light and colour were the only non-musical elements to be incorporated in this work.
55-6
- H. MacDonald, Skryabin
5. (p.106) Chipp, *op.cit.*, 187-8
6. (p.107) Note The Voyage Out:
But this system of education had one great advantage. It did not teach anything, but it put no obstacle in the way of any real talent that the pupil might chance to have.
31
7. (p.108) 'Boy-stew and red-hot slippers', Brian Alderson, The Times, 6.5.1978
8. (p.109) Ernst Cassirer, The Logic of the Humanities, 112

9. (p.109) quoted by Paul de Man, Blindness and Insight, 128-9
10. (p.110) In view of what Q. Bell says (Vol.I, 149), and the following remarks in a letter to Ka Cox:
- ... the bawling sentimentality [of the Ring]
L. II which used once to carry me away, and now leaves
26 me sitting perfectly still.
(16.5.1913)
11. (p.110) 'Impressions at Bayreuth', The Times, 21.8.1909
12. (p.111) Feeling and Form, 27
13. (p.112) *ibid.*, 133
14. (p.113) *ibid.*, 28
15. (p.114) Compare Marcel Proust, The Captive, II
- For instance, this music seemed to me to be something truer than all the books that I knew. Sometimes I thought that this was due to the fact that what we feel in life, not being felt in the form of ideas, its literary (that is to say an intellectual) translation in giving an account of it, explains it, analyses it, but does not recompose it as does music, in which the sounds seem to assume the inflection of the thing itself, to reproduce that interior and extreme point of our sensation which is the part that gives us that peculiar exhilaration which we recapture from time to time ...
- 232
16. (p.114) Feeling and Form, 126

17. (p.115) Feeling and Form, 32.
18. (p.123) Recent Paintings by Vanessa Bell, with a foreword by Virginia Woolf, 1930, in S.P. Rosenbaum, ed., The Bloomsbury Group, 172
19. (p.124) The house is full of "unrelated passions", and it seems that Lily must bring order to this chaos. Her first attempts fail because she is too close to her object: her relationship with Mrs. Ramsay is the core of this object, and it is only ten years later, when Lily can hold the object at a distance, that she achieves a form for it.
20. (p.128) I am indebted here to Jane Novak, The Razor Edge of Balance, where this draft is quoted and discussed, pp.60-61
21. (p.130) See, e.g., A Room of One's Own:
- 166 Now the writer, as I think, has the chance to live more than other people in the presence of this reality. It his business to find it and collect it and communicate it to the rest of us. So at least I infer from reading Lear or Emma or La Recherche du Temps Perdu.
22. (p. 132) Indeed, she used colour in a 'psychological' way in her first novel: as the intimacy between Rachel and Terence deepens (and Helen's sense of danger grows) Rachel looks out to sea:
- TV0 It was still very blue, ... but the light on
261 it was yellower, and the clouds were turning flamingo red.
23. (p.139) The hopelessness of Bernard's endeavour is prefigured in Orlando's last chapter, where the narrator repeatedly admits that life cannot be summed-up, e.g.:

244 Having asked then of man and bird and the insects, for fish, men tell us, who have lived in green caves, solitary for years to hear them speak, never, never say, and so perhaps know what life is - having asked them all and grown no wiser, but only older and colder (for did we not pray once in a way to wrap up in a book something so hard, so rare, one could swear it was life's meaning?) back we must go and say straight out to the reader who waits a-tiptoe to hear what life is - alas, we don't know.

24. (p.140) Cf. W. Iser, The Act of Reading:

132 Reading has the same structure as experience, to the extent that our entanglement has the effect of pushing our various criteria of orientation back into the past, thus suspending their validity for the new present. This does not mean, however, that these criteria or our previous experiences disappear altogether. On the contrary, our past still remains our experience, but what happens now is that it begins to interact with the as yet unfamiliar presence of the text. This remains unfamiliar so long as our previous experiences are precisely as they had been before we began our reading. But in the course of the reading, these experiences will also change, for the acquisition of experience is not a matter of adding on - it is a restructuring of what we already possess.

See also pp. 66-68 where Iser writes of reading as "basically a kind of dyadic interaction".

25. (p.141) 'The "Caricature Value" of Parody and Fantasy in Orlando'
'Point of View in The Waves: Some Services of the Style'

26. (p.145) Cf. Iser, Act of Reading:

64 Symbols enable us to perceive the given world because they do not embody any of the qualities or properties of the existing reality; in Cassirer's terms, it is their very difference that makes the empirical world accessible.

27. (p.145) W. Iser, 'The Current Situation of Literary Theory: Key Concepts and the Imaginary', p.17
28. (p.145) *ibid.*, p.18
29. (p.149) Quoted by A. McLaurin, *op.cit.*, 7
30. (p.150) Introduction to Charles Dickens, Bleak House, 22
31. (p.150) 'The Language Animal', Extraterritorial, 64

Chapter Five

'Reality'

Thus far I have been concerned rather with the actual context within which VW's sense of a special 'reality' is felt than with the nature of that 'reality' itself. The apprehension of a numinous 'reality' has usually manifested itself as a yearning for transcendence of the world of time and death on the part of a particular character, or a suggestion in the narrative structure of an abstract 'gap' in actual life that cannot be directly referred to in language, but is certainly a potential experience of human being. 'Reality' was something particular to VW that she felt she (and other writers) could better apprehend than most people. Her solitary experiences in Sussex were religious in character ("The country is like a convent. The soul swims to the top." D. II, 308; 2.8.1924). In this, and the following two chapters, the nature of VW's sense of 'something more' to life will be elucidated.

In the fiction, and in numerous essays and sketches VW vacillates between faith in a meaningful world and a sense of life's absurdity, of a world in which human beings are blown aimlessly about. This tension in the work has been noted already several times; it is mapped in great variety in all her writing, in imagery, thought, form, theme and conception. There is a desire to be 'lyrical',

to find and interpret meaning (in the sense of finding some 'base' on which life can stand), to answer the questions repeated by many characters with an affirmation of purpose; against this works a profound pessimism that believes human effort to be a sham, a pretence that saves us from an abyss of nothingness, bottomlessness. Another of those summer diary entries, made at Rodmell, illuminates the two sides of the conflict in VW's thinking:

And so I pitched into my great lake of melancholy. Lord how deep it is! What a born melancholiac I am! The only way I keep afloat is by working. ... Directly I stop working I feel that I am sinking down, down. And as usual, I feel that if I sink further I shall reach the truth. That is the only mitigation; a kind of nobility. Solemnity. I shall make myself face the fact that there is nothing - nothing for any of us. Work, reading, writing are all disguises; & relations with people. Yes, even having children would be useless. ...

D. III
235-6

Well all this [work] is of course the 'real' life; and nothingness only comes in the absence of this.

(23.6.1929)

The struggle between faith and despair is the heart of VW's thought, the impulse behind her fiction: it arises from the question of the nature of "human centrality" which, Georges Poulet writes, is "essentially religious".

"By conviction an atheist perhaps, he is taken by surprise with moments of extraordinary exaltation" (MD, 63). There is the sense in VW's work (the work of an avowed atheist, scornful of Christianity) of an immanent beyond. Pressing on the world of the novels is a mystery, glimpsed

only in fleeting moments, in solitude. Although she describes the endless modalities of human being, it seems to me that VW's effort is at the same time to express her perception of a 'reality' that at once transcends all modalities and gives them their being. This abstract 'reality' - as I have already said - is not bound by the spatio-temporal horizons of actual human life. What distinguishes VW's conception from mysticism is its rootedness in actual experience. As James Hafley has written,

What Virginia Woolf did was dramatize the truth of the relative and mutable with the authority of the absolute unquestionable. There is only one consciousness defining itself by inventing order out of the chaotic suggestiveness of a maze of facts; but that one consciousness seems to be consciousness itself.¹

Her ideas of 'reality' and the soul can, though, readily be construed as theological; indeed, it is difficult to speak of the import of the novels if words such as 'spirit', 'visionary' and 'mystery' are not secularised (which requires a considerable mental effort). In those extracts from her diary kept at Rodmell that have already been quoted, a religious tone that is unavoidable when she writes of 'reality' and the soul is very evident (see above, e.g. p. 50).

There is an opposition in VW's thinking between the symbolical, inclusive, intuitive, and non-discursive mode of thought that is particularly female, and the masculine

style of rationality and logic, which tends to exclude. It is this counterbalancing that prevents her thought from being merely mystical, rooting it firmly in actual experience. The roots of this fundamental opposition may be found in her early life. Leslie Stephen, who married into the heart of the Clapham Sect, was one of the leading agnostic thinkers of his time - a time when agnosticism was a widely-held position, supported by Darwin's theories. VW later wrote of her frustration at the lack of "imagination" in her father and his agnostic friends. This dryness was inherited by the young men of her own circle of friends; "the fourth generation of the Clapham Sect", as Noël Annan calls them, did, though, reject the moral code of their forebears.

In 'Old Bloomsbury' (c.1922) VW wrote that "Moore's book had set us all discussing philosophy, art, religion" (Moments of Being, 168). In The Voyage Out, Helen Ambrose takes Principia Ethica on the Euphrosyne, reading as she embroiders "a sentence about the Reality of Matter or the Nature of Good." Despite the mockery of Apostolic fervour in her first novel, VW's Cambridge friends were an important early influence on her. The significance of G.E. Moore to those who surrounded VW in the years following her father's death can be assessed from the following remarks:

The tremendous influence of Moore and his book upon us came from the fact that they suddenly removed from our eyes an obscuring accumulation of scales, cobwebs and curtains, revealing for

93 the first time to us, so it seemed, the nature of truth and reality, of good and evil and character and conduct, substituting for the religions and philosophical nightmares, delusions and hallucinations in which Jehovah, Christ, and St. Paul, Plato, Kant, and Hegel had entangled us, the fresh air and pure light of plain common-sense.

Leonard Woolf, An Autobiography, Vol. 1

Rosen-
baum, 52 ...it was exciting, exhilarating, the beginning of a renaissance, the opening of a new heaven on a new earth, we were the forerunners of a new dispensation, we were not afraid of anything.
(J. Maynard Keynes, My Early Beliefs)

Keynes also provides a clue as to why VW may have been repelled by Moore's ethics:

Rosen-
baum
54,56 Like any other branch of science, it was nothing more than the application of logic and rational analysis to the material presented as sense-data. Our apprehension of good was exactly the same as our apprehension of green. ...
...If it appeared under cross-examination that you did not mean exactly anything, you lay under a strong suspicion of meaning nothing whatever.

Bishop Butler provides Moore's epigraph to Principia Ethica: "Everything is what it is, and not another thing."
As an epigraph to what I understand as VW's "philosophy", and against Moore's, we might set this:

TTL
286 So that was the Lighthouse was it ?
No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing. The other was the Lighthouse too.

The Moorean universe, endorsed by such as Russell and Keynes, is continually questioned by the novels. The actual world is the context in which apprehension of the numinous occurs, suggesting that reality - the nature of which was plain enough to Leonard Woolf - is to be questioned deeply. Moore's system, to VW, was one more attempt to cover over the emptiness at the heart of life. Philosophies and religions for the most part attempt to order life; they do not explore it as her art does, with recognition of the nothingness that human being opposes and yet ultimately succumbs to. From her perspective on human experience, VW quickly arrives at the paradoxical character of human being that inspires the invention of unifying systems. From The Voyage Out onwards she sees religion as a deadening restriction that cuts people off from the very "invisible presences" (MO, 138) it pretends to reach. In an early essay she lamented the enclosure of thought by faith in an external deity:

What, one asks, as considerations accumulate, is ever to stop the course of such a mind, unroofed and open to the sky? Unfortunately, there was the Deity. His faith shut in his horizon. Sir Thomas himself resolutely drew that blind. His desire for knowledge, his eager ingenuity, his anticipations of truth, must submit, shut their eyes, and go to sleep. Doubts he calls them. "More of these no man hath known than myself; which I confess I conquered not in a martial posture, but on my knees." So lively a curiosity deserved a better fate.

CE II
29

('Reading', 1919?)

A God makes the world one and indivisible, but denies the curious antinomies of the actual experience of human being, falsely reconciling them, and providing a means of escape from the ultimate horizon of death through the consolation of eternal life.

Pascal wrote of the human situation as being like that of a man who wakes on a desert island, not knowing where or when he is (Pensées, 88). This man, Georges Poulet remarks, is "not without a tragic resemblance to the Heideggerian or Sartrean being," and the moment is mirrored also at the beginning of Proust's A La Recherche du Temps Perdu (Metamorphoses of the Circle, 33). The fading away of the sense of individual identity is a familiar experience in the novels (see above, Ch. 2, e.g. pp. 35-6). Wonder at simply being at all is the starting point of VW's exploration of the human situation:

TVO
145

She was next overcome by the unspeakable queerness of the fact that she should be sitting in an arm-chair, in the morning, in the middle of the world. Who were the people moving in the house - moving things from one place to another? And life, what was that? ... She was overcome with awe that things should exist at all.

Thrown into the world like dice (MD, 15) each individual must somehow come to terms with the fact of being:

MD
203

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

The radical astonishment at simply being that many of VW's characters display is also recorded in the author's diary at several points. It is in Mrs. Dalloway that the apprehension of an abstract 'reality' is first strongly felt. The entire day of the novel is circumscribed by an aura of mystery that promises a revelation that will console Clarissa (in particular) in her perception of the "emptiness about the heart of life (35)². The "inner meaning" is only almost expressed³, but it is enough to sustain Clarissa's faith in life and renew her efforts to find a solid purpose in it. VW, as I have suggested (p. 161), is in the position of the "solitary traveller" of Peter Walsh's dream. Despite our inability to know anything absolutely or to reach any resting-place in our actual lives, we continue to hover at the entrance to the cavern of mystery, making up the stories that become religions and philosophies.

There is an entry in the diary - made early in the composition of To the Lighthouse - in which VW records her own wonder at being, and also writes very directly about her special sense of 'reality'. It is particularly interesting in the light of what was said in Chapter 2 about Clarissa and Mrs. Ramsay's experiences of the soul, to note that 'reality' is apparently synonymous with "beauty":

As for the soul: why did I say I would leave it out? I forget. And the truth is, one can't write directly about the soul. Looked at, it vanishes: but look at the ceiling, at Grizzle,

at the cheaper beasts in the Zoo which are exposed to walkers in Regents Park, & the soul slips in. It slipped in this afternoon. I will write that I said, staring at the bison: answering L. absentmindedly; but what was I going to write ?

... I enjoy almost everything. Yet I have some restless searcher in me. Why is there not a discovery in life ? Something one can lay hands on & say "This is it?" My depression is a harrassed feeling - I'm looking; but that's not it - that's not it. What is it ? And shall I die before I find it ? Then (as I was walking through Russell Sqre last night) I see mountains in the sky: the great clouds; & the moon which is risen over Persia; I have a great & astonishing sense of something there, which is 'it' - It is not exactly beauty that I mean. It is that the thing is in itself enough: satisfactory; achieved. A sense of my own strangeness, walking on the earth is there too: of the infinite oddity of the human position; trotting along Russell Sqre with the moon up there, & those mountain clouds. Who am I, what am I, & so on: these questions are always floating about in me; and then I bump against some exact fact - a letter, a person, & come to them again with a great sense of freshness. And so it goes on. But, on this showing which is true, I think, I do fairly frequently come upon this 'it'; & then feel quite at rest.

D. III
62-3

(27.2.1926)

This entry brings to mind both Clarissa's tending to the sky above her house (MD, 204) and Mrs. Ramsay's seeking a world of beauty in nature (TTL, 101).

There is also an echo here of an essay on 'Montaigne' which was written during the composition of Mrs. Dalloway (in 1924). The mystery of life seems intimately bound up with the mystery of self as an absolute, conclusive centre. In the essay VW writes of the soul, saying it is "all laced about with nerves and sympathies which affect her every action;" none, however, know

CR I
96

how she works or what she is except that of all things she is the most mysterious, and one's self the greatest monster and miracle in the world.

Behind this rather playful essayist's tone can be detected the overriding concern of the novels, which surfaces at the essay's conclusion:

CR I
97

But, as we watch with absorbed interest the enthralling spectacle of a soul living openly beneath our eyes, the question frames itself, Is pleasure the end of all? Whence this overwhelming interest in the nature of the soul? Why this overmastering desire to communicate with others? Is the beauty of the world enough, or is there, elsewhere, some explanation of the mystery? To this what answer can there be? There is none. There is only one more question: "Que scais-je?"

"Movement and change are the essence of our being" she wrote in the same essay (CR I, 90); the circular movement of the conclusion is typical also of the novels. The circle, as Poulet amply demonstrates, is the form under which thinking about self (as absolute) or God inevitably takes place (see Appendix, where self frequently appears as a 'centre').

*

An unobtrusive moment in To the Lighthouse reveals the scope of VW's thought and exemplifies most of what has been discussed so far; it can be taken as a paradigm of the movement between centre and circumference as which

the tension between faith and despair can be imaged.

One of Mrs. Ramsay's children, Nancy, broods alone over a rock-pool, then raises her eyes to look across the sea to the horizon (118-9). Her sense of vastness and littleness recalls an important fragment of Pascal's entitled Disproportion of Man. The contrast between man and nature has been given significance from The Voyage Out onwards (especially noticeable in that first novel are the shifts of horizon and perspective occasioned by the setting). In that contrast Pascal finds the medium by which one can, in the words of his chapter's title, make the "transition from knowledge of man to knowledge of God" (*Pensées*, 87). To understand the human situation, says Pascal, is to despair; to escape from this despair we must pass to knowledge of God.

Pensées 89 Nature is an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere. In short it is the greatest perceptible mark of God's omnipotence that our imagination should lose itself in that thought.

VW does not roof in Nancy's thought with a similar recourse to a deity, but faces the conception of all human being reduced to nothingness when set against infinity. Nancy is "bound hand and foot" between the two extremes, and, as Pascal writes, trembles at being suspended between "these two abysses of infinity and nothingness" (90). Still following Pascal, Nancy contemplates these marvels in silence: "So listening to the waves, crouched over the pool, she brooded."

For, after all, what is man in nature? A nothing compared to the infinite, a whole compared to the nothing, a middle point between all and nothing, infinitely remote from an understanding of the extremes; the end of things and their principles are unattainably hidden from him in impenetrable secrecy.

Pensées 90 Equally incapable of seeing the nothingness from which he emerges and the infinity in which he is engulfed.

The ineffable meeting-point of the two extremes, of centre and circumference, is for Pascal God: God, then, is a sign for the unattainable. VW cannot reconcile the opposites to a unity in this way; she acknowledges the tension, but does not seek the easy resting-place of a deity. "God", to her, is a convenient way of leaping over the limits of language and thought, an imagined transcendence that does away with the anguish and rapture of the search for 'reality'. She is at once close to and far away from a thinker like Pascal: the movement is identical but at the crucial moment she refuses to place her trust in a mystery, to leap out of human being into mystical faith; her thought explodes in tension, does not rest in faith in a supernatural agency. Pascal, again, voices the fundamental concerns of VW's art:

Such is our true state. That is what makes us incapable of certain knowledge or absolute ignorance. We are floating in a medium of vast extent, always drifting uncertainly, blown to and fro; whenever we think we have a fixed point to which we can cling and make fast, it shifts and leaves us behind; if we follow it, it eludes our grasp, slips away, and flees eternally before us. Nothing stands still

for us. This is our natural state and yet the state most contrary to our inclinations. We burn with desire to find a firm footing, an ultimate, lasting base on which to build a tower rising up to infinity, but our whole foundation cracks and the earth opens up into the depths of the abyss.

Pensées
92

Pascalian anguish is countered in the novels by the thought that it is this very hopelessness that makes human being so exhilarating and unique; it is the journey over the abyss that gives life purpose, the restless seeking after 'reality'. While Pascal stays on the human plane, his thought and that of the novels exactly correspond; he is, as most are, lured away from the human by the "essentially religious" character of human centrality. The mind that speaks the novels allows itself no resting-place from which to view human being, and thus the basic question is restated by the very form of the art. The free-spinning mind can never conclude, can never create a whole because wholeness can arise only from a fixed point: there can be no centre to infinity or nothingness and so all wholes are illusory. Pascal writes that man can never know the whole of which he is a part; he assumes there is a whole because he has faith in his God; VW is not so sure.

The moments of "rest" that she records in her diary, and that such characters as Mrs. Ramsay experience, are but brief glimpses of the rich potential of human imagination that cannot be sustained in the actual world. The novels (and diary) display Pascalian dread in the face of an irresolvable problem, but they never give in entirely

or permanently to that dread: their joy is in being able to achieve that state of dread or anxiety. In the movement to despair, hope is renewed; a wavelike rhythm that informs all the novels.

*

That 'philosophy' with which VW is engaged in Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse is extremely abstruse. However, in Orlando its lineaments can be discerned with a clarity which, while lacking the poetic force of the other works, is helpful in unravelling their more complex moments. Orlando shares Clarissa Dalloway's feeling of surviving after death by absorption in the "ebb and flow of things" (MD, 11):

0
285

She, who believed in no immortality, could not help feeling that her soul would come and go forever with the reds on the panels and the greens on the sofa.

This soul, then, bears no resemblance to the Christian idea of the immortal breath of God informing human life. It is what might be described as the 'faculty' which apprehends beauty in the world (which, it was noted above, is almost synonymous with 'reality').

Towards the end of the book, Orlando looks down the long tunnel of time that her life has been, but the shock of realising herself in the present moment, as the clock strikes, instantly dissolves her memories. She is

"something tolerable, comprehensible" (289), or, it might be said, into pattern.

In the darkness of the mind in solitude is a pool "where things dwell in darkness so deep that what they are we scarcely know" (290). The style of Orlando (see above, pp. 51-2) enables 'VW' to come directly at ideas in a way that would seem strained in another work. It is in this "part furthest from sight" where things are unnamed (290) that the "shadow" of beauty is received, becoming a pool which reflects all that is seen. What she describes is a sort of psychic sight that apprehends not objects but their "beauty": the thing itself, the beauty of the world which cannot be fixed with a name. In this state, of the apprehension of the numinous, art and religion arise; those efforts to overcome life in time. The actual objects of the visible world remind Orlando of the present, and thus, a tension is introduced between the actual, and the transcendent world of beauty. This tension is necessary if mysticism is to be avoided: the danger of the tendency to mysticism is described in Mrs. Dalloway, in the passage about the "solitary traveller":

MD
64

Such are the visions which ceaselessly float up, pace beside, put their faces in front of, the actual thing: often overpowering the solitary traveller and taking away from him the sense of the earth, the wish to return, and giving him for substitute a general peace,

The complacent contemplation of nature and the dangerous mysticism it can lead to will be the focus of my next

chapter. Orlando experiences brief moments in which she seems to live her memory, but she is constantly anchored in the actual world of time by the visible world around her (291).

In darkness, when the myriad details of actual life are obscured, it is easier to 'see'

294 where things shape themselves and to see in the pool of the mind now Shakespeare, now a girl in Russian trousers, ...

'Reality' is not bound by the particular, named world, and yet inheres in that world. The possibility of transcendence that VW advocates is not an actual possibility, in the sense that it cannot share the modes of being established for identities in the actual world. The being of that abstract 'reality' that Orlando perceives in darkness, that Clarissa felt in the sky, and Mrs. Ramsay tended to in nature, is evidently intimately bound up with the question of the temporality of human being, to which we must now turn.

Notes to Chapter Five

1. (p.162) James Hafley, 'Virginia Woolf's Narrators and the Art of "Life Itself"', in R. Freedman ed., Virginia Woolf, 43

2. (p.167)

MD
35

Like a nun withdrawing, or a child exploring a tower, she went upstairs, paused at the window, came to the bathroom. There was the green linoleum and a tap dripping. There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room.

3. (p.167)

MD
36

Only for a moment; but it was enough. It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores. Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. But the close withdrew; the hard softened. It was over - the moment.

Chapter Six

A Reading of 'Time Passes'

Before moving to the question of temporality in the novels generally, it will be useful to look at what many readers have found to be a gratuitously obscure and eccentric piece of writing: the central 'Time Passes' section of To the Lighthouse. Ostensibly, it is intended as a representation of the passage of time, and if this were its only function it might justifiably be said that VW has lost control of her pen here. However, 'Time Passes' contributes significantly to the 'philosophy' implicit in the novels. What are seen as its excesses can be explained as VW's efforts to find some means of expressing what (in several diary passages) she acknowledges is beyond language. Her method in 'Time Passes' is to state what 'reality' is not.

"As an infinite circumference," writes Georges Poulet,

eternity ... is the vastest possible circle of duration; as the centre of this circumference it is the fixed point, and unique moment, which is simultaneously in harmony with all the circumferential points of this duration.¹

To the Lighthouse (which VW felt had "fetched its circle pretty completely") partakes of such double infinity, embodying a movement at once towards centre and circumference.

Intimations of this movement occur early on:

36-7 ...both of them looked at the dunes far away,
and instead of merriment felt come over them
some sadness - because the thing was completed
partly, and partly because distant views seem
to outlast by a million years (Lily thought)
the gazer and to be communing already with a
sky which beholds an earth entirely at rest.

In her diary on September 5th, 1926, VW wrote:

D. III The lyric portions of To the L. are collected
106-7 in the 10 year lapse, and dont interfere with
the text so much as usual.

The "lyric portions" do, nevertheless, connect with the
"text" as they reiterate Lily Briscoe's questions and
raise matters already seen to be of paramount importance
in the conception of the world of the novels in general.
That theme discussed above (pp. 169 f.) of the 'disprop-
ortion of man' returns in 'Time Passes', but embedded
less accessibly in a symbolic poetry which attempts a
pure abstraction. In her diary and working notes VW
frequently emphasised the experimental nature of the
middle section of the novel, and felt at a loss as to
how to approach it:

D. III I can't make it out - here is the most difficult
76 abstract piece of writing - I have to give an
empty house, no people's characters, the passage
of time, all eyeless and featureless with
nothing to cling to:

(30.4.1926)

When she dashed off a couple of pages, however, she felt that "This is not made up: it is the literal fact" (30.4. 1926). Writing to Vita Sackville-West a week after Lighthouse's publication, she admits that she once thought 'Time Passes' "impossible as prose" (L. III, 374) - an indication, perhaps, of how it should be approached.

The actual passage of time is fairly directly conveyed, by the description of the house's decay, the encroachment of nature, and phrases telling the reader that time is indeed passing, e.g.: "Night, however, succeeds to night," "Now, day after day," "Night after night, summer and winter." This section of the novel has an import beyond its functional message of a ten year "lapse". In her working notes, VW seems to emphasise her deeper concerns. It is worth setting down her plan for the section, as from this it is clear that she intended to encompass and probe themes prevalent in all her fiction, not just interpolate a piece of 'poetic prose':

To the Lighthouse

Now the question of the ten years
The Seasons
The Skull
The gradual dissolution of everything
This is to be contrasted with the permanence of - ?
Sun, moon, stars
Hopeless gulfs of misery
Cruelty
The War
Change
Cleaning Oblivion - human vitality - Old Woman
She hopped up, valorous, as if a principle
Human life [1 word illegible] projected
We are handed on by our children

Shawls and shooting capes
The devouringness of nature
But all the time this frame, accumulates
Darkness
The welling wind and water
What then is the medium through which we regard
human beings ?²

The last lines I believe refer to that vision of the
"emptiness about the heart of life" which VW experiences
in the passing of time, a vision that emerges with
far greater clarity and directness in her last novel
and the writings contemporary with it.

*

As 'Time Passes' begins, the horizon between sea and
sky almost disappears: night falls. This night adumbrates
the ten years of abandonment and yet is only an "ordinary"
night. A quasi-religious note is sounded almost immediately,
an indication of the broader import of this section:
"divine goodness" responds to "human penitence" by giving
a glimpse of noumena, the "thing beneath the semblance
of the thing" (TW, 116):

TTL
198

It seemed now as if, touched by human penitence
and all its toil, divine goodness had parted the
curtain and displayed behind it, single, distinct,
the hare erect; the wave falling; the boat
rocking, which, did we deserve them, should be
ours always.

Religious terms and ideal forms persist in 'Time Passes':

"divine promptitude", "light bent to its own image in adoration", "tokens of divine bounty", "dreamt holly"; "the shape of loveliness itself", "persistency itself", "some absolute good". The 'deity' allows only a glimpse of perfection: the "drench of hail" that shrouds the world's treasures makes it seem impossible

199 that we should ever compose from their fragments a perfect whole or read in the littered pieces the clear words of truth.

Here, certainly, Lily's aspirations are recalled, and the idea of a whole (or the "true nature of our experience", as it is termed in the contemporaneous 'Impassioned Prose' - see above, p. 125) arising from gathered fragments links 'Time Passes' to the wider thought of the novels. There can also be seen a close association between religion and art. The momentary visions of a 'reality' apart from actual reality are the typical concerns of VW's artists, that which they seek to capture and convey. The tendency to a transcendental 'beyond' in religious faith, it is suggested, shares the form of artistic perception and creation. The difference between the two yearnings lies in the willingness of art - at least VW's art - to accept defeat and negation as part of the experience, never to wish to be "blown to nothingness" (MD, 64) in a mystical transcendence of the actual.

The empty house is "seen" by the "nameless spirit" around which VW's thoughts were to revolve so incessantly as she wrote Between the Acts. As distance between perceiver and perceived is annihilated, in the vacancy arises pure form: "the shape of loveliness itself" (201). Such form is not in the actual world, and so not in time; lifeless and solitary, the form 'is' in eternity. Without the distancing, distorting, shaping and naming of human being, there is nothing: "pure form" is one of the myriad (false) names of nothingness (n.b. "a form from which life had parted", 201). Such form may, it is suggested, be glimpsed ("seen from a train window, vanishing so quickly"). It shares this characteristic with 'reality' and the notion of self or soul. Stillness is the key to the ideal; movement is essential to life; stasis is death. This shape of loveliness is, then, a form of death (the jugs and chairs are suitably shrouded). Qualities (like the beauty of the Acropolis in Jacob's Room, 147-8) do not share the modes of being of actual human life; only by human perception are they brought into the actual world³. The sounds of the world are folded into silence; only with the return of human life (218) do those sounds again become the fragments of a sought-after pattern. As VW noted in her diary, her intentions in 'Time Passes' were impossible to realise if come at directly. The meaning can only emerge as part of its overall context; by shaping round what is unsayable, it is 'said' in the act of reading.

Mrs. McNab - the "principle", "human vitality" - has moments of light in her darkness. Despite the quotidian rhythms of her existence, there is something in her that makes her smile and sing, a fundamental humanity; inarticulate, but sufficient to motivate life. The answer that is "vouchsafed" the beach-walking mystic and visionary (implying a resting in transcendence) is not to be shared. The sense here is that the inward-looking visionaries have little to offer human life. It is to the world of being with others, to the shared experience of actual human being that VW would direct our thoughts, illuminating the "incorrigible hope" that twines about even the most apparently desolate aspects of life.

The third walkers on the beach are "the wakeful, the hopeful" (204): they see a commensurability between nature and man, a comforting assurance that "good triumphs, happiness prevails, order rules" (205). The wakeful and hopeful assemble elements of nature in the belief that they thus bring together the fragments of an inner vision. Nature "declares" the truth of this vision, but if questioned, the vision at once evaporates. What seems to be implied here is that it is only the apparent order and unity of nature that impels man to seek a commensurate unity within himself. The passage is dotted with indications that such a project is to be rejected: the minds of men are mirrors in which clouds and shadows form; the season of the wakeful and hopeful is "acquiescent" spring, the

significance of which is soon revealed.

The wakeful and hopeful seek universal knowledge which, as Pascal knew, is hopeless:

35-6 If, as Descartes believed, the first question is to know oneself, the very act of the knowledge of self, contrary to what Descartes held, leads us at once, either to despair through the comprehension of our misery, or else to catastrophe by making obligatory the impossible, that is to say, universal knowledge.

(Poulet, Metamorphoses)

Death again starkly controverts all hope of security; the "diamond in the sand which would render the possessor secure" (205) is unattainable. 'Time Passes' is implicitly concerned with the urge to fix an absolute self, for it is time that proves always to be the downfall of the attempt to compose self. In this section of the novel VW is not so much attempting to render the experience of time, as time 'itself', the time of nature and eternity in which all human being appears as but a spark. This concern will loom larger in her last novel, but the notion is really impossible to grasp unless put in terms of human being. Poulet, writing about one of VW's favourite authors - Montaigne - draws attention to the inextricable relation of time and self, using an image familiar in VW's writing:

The instant is the kingdom of the imperceptible. It is the home of what Leibnitz was later to call the infinitely small entities. It is an

instant which is an instant of passage, and which therefore is less an instant than the passage from instant to instant; there is, so to speak, an infinity of microscopic changes in all the shades of being. It is a wager to attempt to "choose and lay hold of so many nimble little motions" (Montaigne), to hope to disentangle "a thing so mixed, so slender, and so fortuitous." It is all the more so because the incommensurable volubility of tenuous elements, which makes up the mind, is volubility of the thinking act as well as of its thoughts. Thus the self is dissolved, not only from instant to instant but even in the middle of the instant-passage, in a prismatic play like that of a spray of water.⁴

45

(Studies in Human Time,
my italics)

War ultimately demonstrates the illusion that a commensurability between man and nature is. "Those" who go down to the beach to seek answers in sea and sky are finally shaken out of complacency by the evidence of war. How does the image of an ashen-coloured ship reflect their benevolent deity? The tone is deeply mocking of that "scene calculated to stir the most sublime reflections and lead to the most comfortable conclusions" (207), setting itself firmly against the visions of divine harmony the Romantics (in particular) found in the contemplation of nature⁵. This intrusion of an image of man-made death forces the beach-walker to a new honesty: nature is entirely indifferent to man⁶.

That dream, then, of sharing, completing, finding in solitude on the beach an answer, was but a reflection in a mirror, and the mirror itself was but the surface glassiness which forms in quiescence when the nobler powers sleep beneath?

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The question-mark is surprising, but expressive of the movement towards the conclusion that "the mirror was broken" (208). By only looking outwards to nature, away from his own being, by making no effort, man simply reflects the nature he is thrown into, denying his actual being by losing it in the universal⁷. In support of this idea we can turn to a most significant entry in VW's diary, made on October 11th, 1929, in which the word "acquiescence" forms a direct link with the novel; the concerns of Between the Acts, it might also be noted, are once more adumbrated:

...and for all this, there is a vacancy and silence somewhere in the machine. On the whole I do not much mind; because what I like is to flash and dash from side to side, goaded on by what I call reality. If I never felt these extraordinarily pervasive strains - of unrest or rest or happiness or discomfort - I should float down into acquiescence. Here is something to fight; and when I wake early I say to myself Fight, fight. If I could catch the feeling, I would; the feeling of the singing of the real world, as one is driven by loneliness and silence from the habitable world; the sense that comes to me now of being bound upon an adventure; ... But anything is possible. And this curious steed, life, is genuine. Does any of this convey what I want to say? But I have not really laid hands on the emptiness after all.

D. III
260

(11.10.1929)

The import of this passage evidently spreads far beyond the immediate concerns. The approach to understanding VW's thought must, I feel, lie in such concatenation of passages, a gathering of fragments. With the mirror of

complacency broken, nature and man are divorced: art, in the form of Mr. Carmichael's poetry, is the fact of life that is set against mystic visions now (208).

Released from the illusion of reflected beauty and unity, nature is seen as a reasonless and indifferent force; time also, "(for night and day, month and year ran shapelessly together)" (209). Nature in the novel is like Pascal's desert island: it is what we are thrown into. Attempts to find unity between that emptiness (for nature is empty at heart) and our being are hopeless, resulting only in illusions. Memory, by which, as we have seen, the sense of identity must be formed and sustained, is helpless in stemming the rising "pool of Time":

TTL
213

What power could now prevent the fertility, the insensibility of nature? Mrs. McNab's dream of a lady, of a child, of a plate of milk soup? It had wavered over the walls like a spot of sunlight and vanished.

34

Here on the desert island, memory proves itself miserably ineffectual. It could only, by the vain miracle of affective reviviscence, transport us from island to island, from moment to moment, and from place to place. Never, for any moment nor for any place, could it tell us who put us there, nor what we are doing there.

(Poulet; Metamorphoses)

The language of 'Time Passes' reveals an acute struggle in VW's thinking: while suffused with the religious sense, it rejects the idea of any external agency, of the supernatural. Despite this, it does suggest an informing

'spirit' - or, at least, a pattern - which might be described as the non-being from which being arises, and against which being stands out. This otherness is usually misrepresented by mystics and visionaries who seek an escape from the actuality of human being. Without the creative power of human being, nature (or eternity -they seem synonymous here) will prevail. Human being, then, is seen as 'rescued' from the dark nothingness of amorphous nature/eternity.

The "singing of the real world", the "voice of the beauty of the world" (219) (Mrs. Ramsay was described as "the beauty of the world", 61), goes on unheeded by the sleepers, who might be taken as representing the majority of human beings. Again and again VW emphasises that apprehension of 'reality' is available only through effort. This is not to say that it can be achieved at will, for it is evident that only a very few are privileged to understand the effort required to live in such a way as to be susceptible to the experience. The voice of beauty is indifferent to those who sleep heedless of it: if they prefer to sleep, "gently then without complaint, or argument, the voice would sing its song" (220). It is significant that the passage closes with the awakening of Lily, the artist, to whom the song has penetrated (221).

To even think about what VW might mean is immediately to turn away from 'it' because its mode of being is metalinguistic. It is perhaps this inability of hers to put in actual terms what she means by 'reality', beauty,

soul that gives the 'philosophy' implicit in the novels
its essentially religious character.

Notes to Chapter Six

1. (p.178) Metamorphoses of the Circle, xii-xiii
2. (p.181) Quoted in Jane Novak, The Razor Edge of Balance, 57
3. (p.184) Poulet, Studies in Human Time, writes this of Montaigne's search for solutions:

Neither God nor nature gives being to thought; they give it only a momentary form. Only one thing remains: never to look for a phantom being outside the human condition, but to accept the situation for what it is, an existence which is not being, which is only "flux, shadow, and perpetual variation": "I do not depict being," says Montaigne, "I depict passage."

42-3

4. (p.187) See also, e.g., 'Moments of Being':

AHH
95

...she saw the very fountain of her being spurting its pure silver drops.

5. (p.187) Cf. Robert Kiely, Beyond Ecotism, Ch. 1
6. (p.187) See 'On Being Ill' (1930):

It is only the recumbent who know what, after all, Nature is at no pains to conceal - that she in the end will conquer; heat will leave the world; stiff with frost we shall cease to drag ourselves about the fields; ice will lie thick upon factory and engine; the sun will go out. Even so, when the whole earth is sheeted and slippery, some undulation, some irregularity of surface will mark the boundary of an ancient garden, and there, thrusting up its head undaunted in the starlight, the rose will flower, the crocus will burn. But with the hook of life still in us still we must wriggle. We cannot stiffen peaceably into glassy mounds. Even the recumbent spring up at the mere imagination of frost

CE IV
198

about the toes and stretch out to avail themselves of the universal hope - Heaven, Immortality. Surely, since men have been wishing all these ages, they will have wished something into existence; there will be some green isle for the mind to rest on even if the foot cannot plant itself there.

7. (p.188) It is interesting to note here the conclusion to a review of H. Fielding Hall's The Inward Light that VW wrote in 1908:

CW
46

The continued metaphors in which their philosophy is expressed, taken from the wind and light, waters, chains of bubbles and other sustained forces, solve all personal energy into one suave stream. It is wise and harmonious, beautifully simple and innocent, but, if religion is, as Mr. Hall defines it, "a way of looking at the world", is this the richest way? Does it require any faith so high as that which believes that it is right to develop your powers to the utmost?

8. (p.188) See also The Waves, holograph draft 2:

Graham
698

her effort is to
make us acquiescent as she is; ours, to fling
off, to get up, to explore, not to be overcome.
And I will not fail I said: I will not acquiesce.
I will not lose my sense of the enemy.

Chapter Seven

Time

Now there is nothing so mysterious, so enigmatic, so wonderful as Time. It is not only that it is the most difficult of all problems; it is also the most urgent, the one which most frequently confronts us and reminds us of its actual importance, the one which is perpetually experienced not only as a thought, but as the very essence of our being. We are not only living in time; we are living time; we are time.

*

VW's concept of time is essentially Romantic. A sense of transience, of the deficiencies of human life in time, pervades her writing, and with no belief in a supernatural agency, any possibility of transcending the horizon of time must be rooted in actual experience. The most significant feature of the Romantic concept of time is identified by Georges Poulet as a belief in the continued existence of the past. That such a belief was an important part of VW's thinking is vaguely implied even as early as The Voyage Out:

73

She was haunted by absurd jumbled ideas - how if one went back far enough, everything perhaps was intelligible; everything was in common; for the mammoths who pastured in the fields of Richmond High Street had turned into paving stones and boxes full of ribbon, and her aunts.

The immanence of the past in the present is felt more definitely later in the novel:

323

The time of Elizabeth was only distant from the present time by a moment of space compared with the ages which had passed since the water had run between those banks, and the green thickets swarmed there, and the small trees had grown to huge wrinkled trees in solitude.

Such intimations of the past's persistence in the present lead easily to a belief in the continued existence of some 'part' of people's being after death - a belief that Clarissa voices in Mrs. Dalloway. The fact of death 'temporalizes' human being; it is that which manifests the horizon of time by which all actual being is bounded. VW's novels (which she once wrote she would prefer to call "elegies") testify to a potential in human experience for perceiving a time out of time, for overcoming the limits of actual life through apprehension of a different mode of being altogether.

Her acute sense of life's transience and the search for a way of overcoming it may have arisen from the devastating experiences of her childhood. In an early memoir ('Reminiscences', 1907/8) she wrote that

MOB
31

the effect of death upon those that live is always strange, and often terrible in the havoc it makes with innocent desires.

The "greatest disaster that could happen" was the death of Julia, her mother. The sombre world of death and mourning that may be discovered in Leslie Stephen's Mausoleum Book is recalled throughout VW's fiction. It is interesting to note in the description of Julia

I leant out of the nursery window the morning she died. It was about six, I suppose. I saw Dr Seton walk away up the street with his head bent and his hands clasped behind his back. I saw the pigeons floating and settling. I got a feeling of calm, sadness, and finality. It was a beautiful blue spring morning, and very still. That brings back the feeling that everything has come to an end.

MOB
84

The late memoir, A Sketch of the Past (from which the latter quotation comes), makes clear that VW felt the deaths of her mother and Stella (her half-sister), and later her brother Thoby, in some way revealed to her the true lineaments of life:

But at 15 to have that protection removed, to be tumbled out of the family shelter, to see cracks and gashes in that fabric, to be cut by them, to see beyond them - was that good? ... I would see₃ (after Thoby's death) two great grindstones (as I walked round Gordon Sqe) and myself between them. I would typify a contest between myself and "them" - some invisible giant. I would reason, or fancy, that if life were thus made to rear and kick, it was at any rate, the real thing. Nobody could say I had been fobbed off with an unmeaning slip of the precious matter. So I came to think of life as something of extreme reality. And this, of course, increased my feeling of my own importance. Not in relation to human beings: in relation to the force which had respected me sufficiently to make me feel what was real.

MOB
118

Allowing for the retrospective modifications of memory, we may say that VW's sense of a distinct 'reality' apart from the general reality of everyday life began to develop very early in her life.

In many of the transitional sketches that helped VW towards Jacob's Room (see D. II, 13; 26.1.1920) - 'An Unwritten Novel', 'Kew Gardens', 'The Mark on the Wall' - the ghostly atmosphere of that novel is already prevalent, a sense that what is seen is transient, passed away as soon as looked at. Jacob's Room is elegaic, incorporating the traditional elements of lonely widows, tolling bells, and country churchyards; echoes of the dead reverberate through the novel, mingling inextricably with the voices of the living. It was in Jacob's Room that VW felt she had "found out how to begin (at 40) to say something in my own voice" (D. II, 186; 26.7.1922). Although death had been a significant element of her first novel, it does not assume the thematic importance it was to retain in her fiction until Jacob's Room.

This novel is, so to speak, 'bracketed', for instance by the repetition of certain phrases, giving it the appearance of being 'scenes from a life':

126 Then here is another scrap of conversation;
 the time about eleven in the morning; the scene
 a studio; and the day Sunday.

More than once it is stressed that Jacob is a shadow, blown through the pages of the book like a leaf by the wind. Even in the beginning, on the beach, there is an undefinable note of absence, of loss; a sense that Jacob is already gone when the work opens, that what follows is only an attempt to imagine his life (which is, of course, only

imaginary). This note can be heard in Archer's calling for his brother:

"Ja-cob! Ja-cob!" shouted Archer, lagging on after a second.

7 The voice had an extraordinary sadness. Pure from all body, pure from all passion, going out into the world, solitary, unanswered, breaking against rocks - so it sounded.

To call and receive no answer is an intimation of death. Jacob's death is unseen, unknown; all that is known of death is its effect on the living, which was VW's habitual focus. At the close of the book, as Bonamy echoes Archer's cry (a bracket), it is the continuing passage of time that dominates.

The sense of the passing of time grows increasingly strong in VW's diary from 1920 onwards, and with it her search for something apart from time, for moments of timelessness:

D. II
47-8

Nowadays I'm often overcome by London; even think of the dead who have walked in the city. Perhaps one might visit (city) the churches. The view of the grey white spires from Hungerford Bridge brings it to me; and yet I can't say what 'it' is.

(8.6.1920)

D. II
158

Why do I trouble to be so particular with facts? I think it is my sense of the flight of time: so soon Towers Place will be no more; & twigs, & I that write. I feel time racing like a film at the Cinema. I try to stop it. I prod it with my pen. I try to pin it down.

(22.1.1922)

As if to illustrate the truth of this theory, there is a remarkable "odd affinity" between Clarissa and Septimus ("She felt somehow very like him - the young man who had killed himself", 204). His death seems to endorse Clarissa's understanding of the nature of life, something she believes to be distorted and covered over by love and religion:

141 And the supreme mystery which Kilman might say she had solved, or Peter might say he had solved, but Clarissa didn't believe either of them had the ghost of an idea of solving, was simply this: here was one room; there another. Did religion solve that, or love ?

This simple 'philosophy of life' is expressive of the divisions between one human being and another. As has been noted many times, there is a profound sense of longing in VW's writings that arises largely from the sense of human separateness, and the failure of relationship to provide anything tangible.

Clarissa's "transcendental theory" suggests that divisions can be overcome, perhaps, by what VW sometimes called the soul ("the unseen part of us, which spreads wide"). The word 'soul' occurs frequently in the novel, and also in VW's diary from about 1922, but in both contexts it is never given any very clear meaning. She uses 'soul' to signify the essence of a person, and in this signification might be seen a move towards belief in transcendence, the existence of something apart from all modalities (a self). As already seen, however, this

essence cannot be approached directly or described:

D. II
234-5

...but then I should have to speak of the soul, and did I not banish the soul when I began? What happens is, as usual, that I'm going to write about the soul and life breaks in. ... In scribbling this, I am led away from my soul, which interests me nevertheless. My soul peeped out. For it is the soul I fancy that comments on visitors and reports their comments, & sometimes sets up such a to-do in the central departments of my machinery that the whole globe of me dwindles to a button-head.
(19.2.1923)

Love and religion destroy the "privacy of the soul" in Clarissa's view (140) by their attempt to conclude, to state what the essence of life is.

Mrs. Dalloway is explicitly concerned with the experience of time (an early title was The Hours) and the rôle of memory. Life is characterised as a tension between lived time and clock time. Freud, writing about Maury's famous dream of being guillotined (The Interpretation of Dreams, 88 f.) says that

131

it seemed to show that a dream is able to compress into a very short space of time an amount of perceptual matter far greater than the amount of ideational matter that can be dealt with by our waking mind.

VW's novels reverse this, emphasising the great discrepancy that exists between the time of the waking mind and that ticked off by clocks⁴. The most fundamental aspect of

lived time is tension, which arises from the workings of memory⁵. Mrs Dalloway successfully conveys this form of life, because the act of reading at once involves the reader in the ambiguities of the different characters' experiences of time. J. Hillis Miller has noted that memory often "displaces altogether the real present of the novel and becomes the virtual present of the reader's experience"⁶.

The seminal event of Clarissa's refusal of Peter at Bourton reverberates throughout the novel, seeming, to Peter at least, to have defined his life (see above, p. 97). It might be said that in the way shared memories irrupt into the present of the main characters can be seen a possibility of overcoming human separateness. The life of memory is not actual; it is an immaterial substance, an access to a timeless world within the world of time.

Clock time threatens an individual's sense of continuity, because it takes no account of the lived experience of time; this threat is actualised in the novel when Clarissa calls out after Peter, as he leaves her house after their reunion:

"My party! Remember my party tonight!" she cried, having to raise her voice against the roar of the open air, and, overwhelmed by the traffic and the sound of all the clocks striking, her voice crying "Remember my party tonight!" sounded frail and thin and very far away as Peter Walsh shut the door.

If Big Ben strikes clock time, the bell of St. Margaret's seems to 'sound' lived time: it does not coincide with the authoritative strokes of Big Ben, but seems "like something alive". For Peter, the sound contains past, present, and future; it recalls that moment from the past shared by he and Clarissa, which is separated from their 'present' by only a moment of space, but also by many of Big Ben's leaden circles. The moment of intimacy has its being in Peter's memory, at one remove, so to speak, from the actual. Peter himself is uncertain of the moment:

56 But what room? What moment? And why had he been so profoundly happy when the clock was striking?

The sound of the striking clock contains both his prevailing mood of sadness (at the memory of Clarissa's refusal) and his memory of happiness with her. The dislocation of these perspectives unnerves Peter, and produces an image of the future which compounds his wretched feelings. To regain his sense of identity, Peter rebels against the inexorable bell that is sounding away the moments of his life:

56 No! No! he cried. She is not dead! I am not old, he cried, and marched up Whitehall, as if there rolled down to him, vigorous, unending, his future.

"The future lies in the hands of young men like that",

says Peter as a squadron marches past. He seems to wish to reorganise his past, thinking himself back to how he was thirty years previously, to adapt his memories to his present consciousness in a way that will not represent to him what he feels is his failure. As if to deny the possibility of being anywhere but at the front of a rushing train of time, the human emblems of clock time sweep Peter's dreams and memories away:

57 ...on they marched, past him, past everyone, in their steady way, as if one will worked legs and arms uniformly, and life, with its varieties, its irreticences, had been laid under a pavement of monuments and wreaths and drugged into a stiff yet staring corpse by discipline.

The different times must be synthesised: linear, leaden circles, peeling out with inexorable regularity, and the erratic instants of a sudden plunge into the moment. Peter Walsh and Clarissa cannot bear to live lineally, but strive throughout the novel to complete a circle, joining past and present in the hope of achieving unity. The party at the end, which brings the protagonists of the earlier event together once more, does not solve the problem because the characters are no longer those people that came together at Bourton. This "incomplete circle" (Hillis Miller) is the form of the novel; it involves the reader by placing him in the memories of the characters (and vice-versa). For the reader, then, the circle can be completed in that the whole timescale is not in the

actual world of time and death, but in the virtual space between reader and text.

The form of the novel anticipates a historic consciousness that is enshrined in T.S. Eliot's quartet of 1935,

Burnt Norton:

Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
44-46 Point to one end, which is always present.

Such a historic consciousness is most fully expressed in VW's last novel, Between the Acts. For a formal articulation of what the idea implies, we may turn to Cassirer's Logic of the Humanities:

History, viewed as spiritual, is in no sense a mere succession of events separating and supplanting each other in time. It is, in the midst of this change, an eternal present. ... Its 'meaning' is in no one of its moments; and yet, in each of them, it is complete and unbroken.
56

The continuous present is created only in the act of reading. For the novel's characters, however, the moment passes, as do all moments.

If the Clarissa-Peter-Richard side of Mrs. Dalloway exemplifies the common human experience of time, that other strand of the novel, that relates Septimus Smith's final hours, constructs an image of the actual experience of timelessness. This is a paradox the possibility of which

is explained only by the breakdown of the limits 'normality' imposes on each individual: VW is quite explicit in her diary about the source in her own experience of the contours of Septimus's madness⁷.

Septimus seems to have fallen out of time; he is caught in a perpetual present, a horrific timelessness in which he is no longer sheltered by past and future⁸. The striking clocks of the actual world do not penetrate to Septimus because he experiences himself as beyond time, high above the world where time's "leaden circles" dissolve. It is peculiarly ironic that Septimus should be taken for "help" to the clockwork Bradshaw who gives just three quarters of an hour to his patients in his offices on Harley Street, where the clocks shred and slice the day (113).

Septimus's sense of the oneness of the world is a refusal to admit death: if he does not recognise the passage of time, he need not admit death. This, indeed, is the basic tenet of his "new religion"; birds sing to him "from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk; how there is no death" (28). It is in his belief in transcendence that Septimus is allied to Clarissa, the difference between them being that he has lost all touch with the actual. Like Clarissa, Septimus sees himself as wholly essence, as soul. It is for this reason that he cannot communicate his visions. They come to him "not in actual words" but in a "language" he cannot read (25). Clarissa, too, feels the pressure of "an inner

meaning, almost expressed" (36), but remains rooted in her embodied, time-bound, actual life.

Septimus's death reveals to Clarissa a "thing there was that mattered" (202): as in so many entries in the diary, language halts here. The meaning must be drawn from the similarity of expression that is found wherever VW writes of the 'essence' of life. Death reveals the "impossibility of reaching the centre" because it manifests the ultimate horizon of time in human life. However much the moment is expanded, the past recreated, or a sense of being outside time achieved, the actual fact of death circumscribes all effort. In death, however, Septimus both retains his integrity and communicates to Clarissa. This communication argues for an abstract 'reality' in which the soul can find rest and continue to exist, but not in the modes of actual life, and not within the scope of language.

*

In an essay on De Quincey ('Impassioned Prose', 1926),
VW asked in conclusion

CE I
172

Whether the prose writer, the novelist, might not capture fuller and finer truths than are now his aim if he ventured into those shadowy regions where De Quincey has been before him.

De Quincey's "most perfect passages", she wrote,

CE I are descriptions of states of mind in which,
172 often, time is miraculously prolonged and space
 miraculously expanded

This could describe many significant passages of VW's own novels, which seek to "make of the moment something permanent" (TTL, 249). The novels are lyrics, in Cassirer's definition that

by losing itself in the moment, seeking nothing else than to exhaust it of its entire mood and atmosphere [the lyric] thereby invests it with duration and eternity.

The effort to escape from the ceaseless flow of future to past that is our present is a common human effort, as Poulet notes:

22 Each poet, each religion, each philosophy,
 each time has collaborated in man's attempt
 to escape out of time.

Faith in the possibility of such an escape must entail - as it did in the Romantics' case - belief in the continued existence of the past. This Poulet holds to be the "essential belief" of "nearly all the Romanticists":

11 All our life, and especially all our childhood,
 with all our perceptions, images and feelings,
 and whatever ideas we have had, persists in our
 mind; but as we are living in duration, it is not
 permitted to us to have anything but rare glimpses,
 disconnected reminiscences, of this immense
 treasure stored in a remote place in our soul.

Life constantly vanishing into the past (e.g. TTL, 172-3) and the possibility of its recovery¹⁰ is a recurring centre in VW's thought, a significant mapping of the deep tension in all her thinking between faith and despair:

Now is life very solid or very shifting ? I am haunted by the two contradictions. This has gone on forever: will last forever; goes down to the bottom of the world - this moment I stand on. Also it is transitory, flying, diaphanous. I shall pass like a cloud on the waves. Perhaps it may be that though we change; one flying after another, so quick so quick, yet we are somehow successive, & continuous - we human beings; & show the light through.
But what is the light ?
(4.1.1929)

D. III
218

The "light" I understand as synonymous with 'reality': that essence that is apart from all modalities of being and continuous. It is this timelessness that Lily Briscoe attempts to capture in her painting through the recreation as a work of art of her own past. Memory and art are explicitly identified with one another by Lily:

That woman ... made out of that miserable silliness and spite (she and Charles squabbling, sparring, had been silly and spiteful) something ... which survived, after all these years complete, so that she dipped into it to re-fashion her memory of him, and it stayed in the mind almost like a work of art¹¹.

TTL
248-9

Lily continues by reframing "the old question which traversed the sky of the soul perpetually": What is the meaning of life ? The answer she gives to herself illuminates

once more the close association between the modes of being of memory and of art:

249 The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one. This, that, and the other; herself and Charles Tansley and the breaking wave; Mrs. Ramsay bringing them together; Mrs. Ramsay saying "Life stand still here": Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent) - this was of the nature of a revelation.

VW frequently wrote of novelists being 'closer' to life, to 'reality', than other artists. Fiction is defined by the creation of a world of time out of time. Novels can achieve a fixing of single moments because they embody a (fictional) present (which may be written as a past) that can be experienced over and over again as a 'present' in the act of reading. In this may be seen a correlation between VW's 'reality' and her concept of art's ability to overcome time (and hence death)¹².

*

Identity must have a base; this can be provided by the sense of one's physical being, by a sense of being defined by a name, or through relationship with another. Whatever a person's identity, it must exist in and through time; there must be a temporal as well as a spatial aspect in the formation of identity. However, the present is

not a unity to be fixed, but the endless flow of future to past. Because past and present can never (as far as actual human identity is concerned) be completely synthesised an autonomous identity can never form; it proceeds constantly towards death. To locate oneself in time, therefore, requires continuous effort.

The sense that life is a battle against nothingness, that all actions and efforts are merely necessary but futile attempts to disguise life's empty centre, is strong in VW's thinking. Clock time carries forward a vegetative life controlled by forces that have nothing to do with identity; individual life must be rescued from those forces¹³. This sense is prevalent in The Waves, in which the lives of the six characters appear as random moments of organisation rescued from unidentified chaos. The import of life being seen as poised over an abyss from which only an accident has momentarily drawn consciousness is that it is not, then, a progression from one moment to the next in order, but has its being in a loop that expands around us all - eternity. The past is always there, ready to irrupt into the present at any moment.

The precariousness of the hold that identity needs to retain on its 'present' is illustrated by a moment in Bernard's life:

And, what is this moment of time, this particular day in which I have found myself caught? The growl of traffic might be any uproar - forest trees or the roar of wild beasts. Time has

whizzed back an inch or two on its reel; our short progress has been cancelled. I think also that our bodies are in truth naked. We are only lightly covered with buttoned cloth; and beneath these pavements are shells, bones and silence.

81

This is not an isolated mood of a single moment but a characteristic expression of an attitude to human being that is found in other of VW's novels too. At the reunion dinner, Bernard recalls,

we felt enlarge itself round us the huge blackness of what is outside us, of what we are not.

197

It is this radical awareness of being in the face of the possibility of not being that charges VW's fiction with its need for faith and its tendency to despair.

I reflect now that the earth is only a pebble flicked off accidentally from the face of the sun and that there is no life anywhere in the abysses of space.

TW
159

In the face of such perception human history becomes meaningless:

It roars; the lighted strip of history is past and our Kings and Queens; we are gone; our civilisation; the Nile; and all life. Our separate drops are dissolved; we are extinct, lost in the abysses of time, in the darkness.

TW
160

Thus Louis voices the brooding perception of the ultimate

emptiness of human being that pervades all VW's fiction. For meaning, for a centre, she looked to a 'reality' that escaped the decadence of human being's spatio-temporal horizons, a 'reality' the experience of which she could express, but not the nature. Her faith is in a consciousness of eternity, dissolving the human-made divisions of past, present, and future, a 'being' in the mode of nothingness, offered in her art.

*

The hope for order, for meaning, is not abandoned after The Waves. At the party which closes The Years, bringing together the different generations, several characters are troubled by that now familiar sense of human separateness. In the face of the chaos to which memory reduces life (e.g. TY, 358) there is still a yearning for conclusiveness:

395 Millions of things came back to her. Atoms danced apart and massed themselves. But how did they compose what people called a life? ... Perhaps there's "I" at the middle of it, she thought; a knot; a centre.

It is the fact of the past's persistence into the present (in memory) that gives Eleanor Pargiter the vague hope of an order to life:

And suddenly it seemed to Eleanor that it had all happened before. . So a girl had come in that night in the restaurant: had stood, vibrating, in the door. She knew exactly what he was going to say. . . . As she thought it he said it. Does everything then come over again a little differently ? she thought. If so, is there a pattern; a theme, recurring, like music; half remembered, half foreseen ? . . . a gigantic pattern, momentarily perceptible ? . . . But who makes it ? Who thinks it ? Her mind slipped. She could not finish her thought.¹⁴

398

Peggy, too, feels intimations of the possibility of

a state of being, in which there was real laughter, real happiness, and this fractured world was whole; whole and free.

420

The Years offers no new ground; its predominant theme is the failure of communication and relationship to establish anything whole or lasting. In many ways the novel merely rehearses what VW had already learned. It is clear that the forlorn hope of Eleanor for "another life" (461) is a repetition of the desire to "make of the moment something permanent" in actual life. Such permanence is not in the power of life, the "here and now", but art. Eleanor wishes to "enclose the present moment; to make it stay" by filling it with past, present, and future (462). The effort is doomed to failure, to what Poulet has described as the

Shattering return to the misery of the human condition and to the tragedy of the experience of time: in the very instant man catches his

prey, experience dupes him, and he knows he is duped. His prey is a shadow. In the instant he catches the instant, the instant passes, for it is instant.

Any hope of "rest" in the actual world now seems entirely mistaken. In the development of her idea of 'reality' and experiences of the soul, VW emphasises the rootedness in actual life of her perceptions. Nevertheless, actual life has seemed hopelessly far removed from 'reality' in the novels. In the last few years of her life VW moved closer to the actual expression of her beliefs, achieving in Between the Acts a brilliant union of design and substance that holds within it the clearest exposition of her faith in 'reality'.

Notes to Chapter Seven

1. (p.194) Georges Poulet, 'Timelessness and Romanticism', p. 3 - all other references to Poulet in this chapter are to this essay, unless stated otherwise.

2. (p.196) A namesake of Julia's - Julia Eliot - displays just this sense in Jacob's Room:

168 ...the tumult of the present seems like an elegy for past youth and past summers, and there rose in her mind a curious sadness, as if time and eternity showed through skirts and waistcoats, and she saw people passing tragically to destruction.

3. (p.197) See also The Waves:

113 "There is the puddle," said Rhoda, "and I cannot cross it. I hear the rush of the great grindstone within an inch of my head. Its wind roars in my face.

4. (p.202) E.g. Orlando:

91 But Time, unfortunately, though it makes animals and vegetables bloom and fade with amazing punctuality, has no such simple effect on the mind of man. The mind of man, moreover, works with equal strangeness upon the body of time. An hour, once it lodges in the queer element of the human spirit, may be stretched out to fifty or a hundred times its clock length; on the other hand, an hour may be accurately represented on the timepiece of the mind by one second. This extraordinary discrepancy between time on the clock and time in the mind is less known than it should be and deserves fuller investigation.

5. (p.203) Cf. S.K. Langer, Feeling and Form:

Time exists for us because we undergo tensions and their resolutions. Their peculiar building-up, and their ways of breaking or diminishing

or merging into longer and greater tensions, make for a vast variety of temporal forms. If we could experience only single, successive organic strains, perhaps subjective time would be one-dimensional like the time ticked off by clocks. But life is always a dense fabric of concurrent tensions, and as each of them is a measure of time the measurements themselves do not coincide. This causes our temporal experience to fall apart into incommensurate elements which cannot all be conceived together as clear forms. When one is taken as a parameter, others become 'irrational', out of logical focus, ineffable.

112-113

6. (p.203) J. Hillis Miller, 'Virginia Woolf's All Souls' Day: The Omniscient Narrator in Mrs. Dalloway', p. 109

7. (p.204) See D. II, 272; 15.10.1923, and also note the following correspondence:

D. II
283

I've had some very curious visions in this room too, lying in bed, mad, & seeing the sunlight quivering like gold water, on the wall. I've heard the voices of the dead here.
(9.1.1924)

MD
152

...Septimus Warren Smith lying on the sofa in the sitting-room; watching the watery gold glow and fade with the astonishing sensibility of some live creature on the roses, on the wall-paper.

8. (p.207) See Orlando:

268

For what more terrifying revelation can there be than that it is the present moment? That we survive the shock at all is only possible because the past shelters us on one side and the future on another.

9. (p.209) E. Cassirer, The Logic of the Humanities, 85

10. (p.210) See, for example, A Sketch of the Past (1939/40):

Those moments - in the nursery, on the road to the beach - can still be more real than the present moment. ... At times I can go back to St Ives more completely than I can this morning. I can reach a state where I seem to be watching things happen as if I were there. That is, I suppose, that my memory supplies what I had forgotten, so that it seems as if it were happening independently, though I am really making it happen. In certain favourable moods, memories - what one has forgotten - come to the top. Now if this is so, is it not possible - I often wonder - that things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds; are in fact still in existence? And if so, will it not be possible, in time, that some device will be invented by which we can tap them? I see it - the past - as an avenue lying behind; a long ribbon of scenes, emotions. There at the end of the avenue still, are the garden and the nursery. Instead of remembering here a scene and there a sound, I shall fit a plug into the wall; and listen into the past. I shall turn up August 1890. I feel that strong emotion must leave its trace; and it is only a question of discovering how we can get ourselves again attached to it, so that we shall be able to live our lives through from the start.

MOB
67

11. (p.210) See above, p. 96, referring to D. III, 189; 8.8.1928, where VW wrote of her memory of a friend's visit "making a work of art for itself".

12. (p.211) See, e.g., A Writer's Diary, 225; 18.9.1934:

But then, next day, today, which is Thursday, one week later, the other thing begins to work - the exalted sense of being above time and death which comes from being again in a writing mood.

See also above, p. 129

13. (p.212) Cf. A Sketch of the Past:

One must get the feeling of everything approaching and then disappearing, getting large, getting small, passing at different rates of speed

past the little creature; one must get the feeling that made her press on, the little creature driven on as she was by the growth of her legs and arms, driven without her being able to stop it, or to change it, driven as a plant is driven up out of the earth, up until the stalk grows, the leaf grows, buds swell. That is what makes all images too static, for no sooner has one said this was so, than it was past and altered.

MOB
79

14. (p.215) Cf. Poulet, 'Timelessness and Romanticism':

Paramnesia seems to bring forth before our eyes a past which is still real, still alive. It is as if, abruptly, we were projected into a timeless world or into a world where time does not flow but stands still. The incredible idea that all the past we thought we had left for ever, continues to stay here, at our very feet, invisible but intact, and in all its forgotten freshness, shoots forth in our minds. Of course, paramnesia is merely an illusion. It does not bring back the past. It just makes a perception look like a recollection. ... Generally our memory grows gradually fainter; it tends to disappear. But sometimes some association may revivify the past sufficiently to make it flash after a long oblivion into our consciousness; and if those associations are very potent, the flashing may be so intense that it has the vividness of the present.

4

15. (p.216) Poulet, Studies in Human Time, 85

Chapter Eight

Between the Acts

In nearly all that she wrote in the last five years of her life VW was deeply concerned with the relationship between life and art. This preoccupation is marked in her biography of Roger Fry, in her notes and drafts for a projected new book of criticism¹, in autobiographical writings - particularly A Sketch of the Past -, in her diary, and in Between the Acts. It is in those "hybrid books in which the writer talks in the dark to himself for a generation yet to be born"² -namely, her diary and A Sketch of the Past - that she is found writing directly and investigatively about her feelings and beliefs over the last few years of her life. What VW once wrote of her sister's paintings is especially true of her last novel: it yields its full meaning

Rosen- only to those who can tunnel their way behind
baum,172 the canvas into masses and passages and relations
 and values of which we know nothing -

Behind Between the Acts is a matrix the elements of which are displayed in the writings contemporary with the novel, in which those necessary "masses and passages and relations and values" can be discerned.

In Between the Acts the brooding, isolated artist sets against the pathetic pageant of "our island history" a private vision of beauty which gives meaning to life through the perception of a pattern in privileged moments. This vision has been the centre of VW's art, but never so completely realised as in her last work. In Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse, especially, there have been moments when the chaotic fragments of seemingly absurd existence have coalesced, revealing a pattern in which brief security may be found:

TTL
249 In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was struck into stability.

In Between the Acts this vision is expressed primarily through Lucy Swithin's faith. Before looking at the novel itself, however, we must examine the context in which it was written: "the present state of my mind" (AWD, 290; 26.4. 1938).

The most salient feature of VW's diary from early in 1937 is a sense of freedom; not a relaxed, secure freedom, but a kind of hysteria arising from her feeling that there was no longer anything in life to "contain" her. As I pointed out early on, identity must have a base of some sort: in the last years of her life the securities upon which VW's identities rested began to disappear. Lytton Strachey and Roger Fry had died (1932

and 1934); people who had been part of her world began to die - Janet Case (1937), Jack Hills (1937), Ottoline Morrell (1938), Ka Cox (1938). Even if relatively unimportant as friends, such deaths were to VW an erosion of her particular world. The death in 1937 of her nephew Julian Thoby Bell may well have seemed to her a cruel repetition of the sudden death of her brother Thoby (in 1906), and also to presage the many deaths the imminent war would bring, mirroring the days before the First war. In a memoir of her nephew VW wrote that "I am so composed that nothing is real unless I write it"³. This is significant, for in reading her diary from 1937 onwards the sense emerges that writing was all she could cling to for stability.

From this awareness perhaps came her assertion of freedom, of independence. She felt that the encircling wall of her audience had disappeared, and so she would now write only for herself:

One thing I think proved, I shall never write to "please", to convert; now am entirely and forever my own mistress. (6.8.1937) ... But I now feel entirely free. Why? Have committed myself, am afraid of nothing. Can do anything I like. No longer famous, no longer on a pedestal: no longer hawked in by societies: on my own, for ever. (26.4.1938) ... for in God's name I've done my share, with pen and talk, for the human race. ... Yes, I deserve a spring, I owe nobody nothing. (29.3.1940)

AWD

From the silence she felt all around her came another sense, coexisting with her "freedom", of utter meaninglessness:

What's odd ... is the severance that war seems to bring: everything becomes meaningless: can't plan: then there comes too the community feeling: all England thinking the same thing - this horror of war - at the same moment. Never felt it so strong before. Then the lull and one lapses again into private separation. (15.4.1939) ... Boredom. All meaning has run out of everything. ... Yes, it's an empty meaningless world now. ... And for the hundredth time I repeat - any idea is more real than any amount of war misery. ... recovering that sense of something pressing from outside which consolidates the mist, the non-existent. (6.9.1939)

AWD

Her mood in the diary of these years tends strongly to despair; she struggled to find something to push against in order to achieve a sense of identity, but felt often that her world, and thus her life, was very near its end:

I feel, if this is my last lap, oughtn't I to read Shre? But can't. I feel oughtn't I to finish off P.H.: oughtn't I to finish something by way of an end? The end gives its vividness, even its gaiety & recklessness to the random daily life. ... No echo comes back. I have no surroundings. I have so little sense of a public that I forget about Roger coming or not coming out. Those familiar circumlocutions - those standards - which have for so many years given back an echo & so thickened my identity are all wide and wild as the desert now. I mean, there is no "autumn", no winter. We pour to the edge of a precipice ... And then? I can't conceive that there will be a 27th June 1941. This cuts away something even at tea at Charleston. We drop another afternoon into the millrace. (22.6.1940) ... All the walls, the protecting and reflecting walls, wear so terribly thin in this war. There's no standard to write for; no public to echo back; even the "tradition" has become transparent. ... And perhaps the walls, if violently beaten against, will finally contain me. ... tomorrow when my book comes out ... I may feel once more round me the wall I've missed - or vacancy? or chill? (24.6.1940) ... What is the phrase I always remember - or forget. Look your last on all things lovely. (9.1.1941) ... Yes, I was thinking: we live without

AWD a future. (26.1.1941).

As Susan M. Kenney has pointed out⁴, the general tenor of the diary did not find its way into Between the Acts. The novel, she finds, is affirmative on the whole. Although I would discern a more apocalyptic tone, it is certainly true that in Between the Acts we are shown "the effort renewed": again and again everything seems about to grind to a halt, and vacancy to prevail, but each time something rescues the scene - a lowing cow, a shower of rain, an old man's brash cry of "Bravo!" - and life lurches on. The novel is a testament of hope created in the face of despair (see above, p. 173).

In her late memoir A Sketch of the Past, begun at her sister's suggestion in 1939, VW traces a fundamental polarity in her view of life to childhood experiences. She writes of three "exceptional moments" which often "came to the surface unexpectedly". Briefly, these moments were: a feeling of "hopeless sadness" during a fight with her brother, Thoby; a sense of wholeness on looking at a flower; horror at hearing her parents mention the suicide of a man who had been staying at St. Ives (MOB, 71). Two of these moments find their way into her fiction: Neville, in The Waves, is transfixed at hearing of a suicide; the two passages describing the experience are remarkably similar:

TW
17

...I heard about the dead man through the swing-door last night when cook was shoving in and out the dampers. He was found with his throat cut. The apple-tree leaves became fixed in the sky; the moon glared; I was unable to lift my foot up the stair. ... There were the floating, pale-grey clouds; and the immitigable tree; the implacable tree with its greaved silver bark.

MOB
71

We were waiting at dinner one night, when somehow I overheard my father or my mother say that Mr. Valpy had killed himself. The next thing I remember is being in the garden at night and walking on the path by the apple tree. It seemed to me that the apple tree was connected with the horror of Mr. Valpy's suicide. I could not pass it. I stood there looking at the grey-green creases of the bark - it was a moonlit night - in a trance of horror. I seemed to be dragged down hopelessly, into some pit of absolute despair from which I could not escape. My body seemed paralysed.

The moment of "wholeness" reappears in Between the Acts, and again there is a distinct descriptive homology between novel and memoir:

MOB
71

I was looking at the flower bed by the front door; "That is the whole", I said. I was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves; and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was a part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower. It was a thought I put away as likely to be very useful to me later.

George grubbed. The flower blazed between the angles of the roots. Membrane after membrane was torn. It blazed a soft yellow, a lambent light under a film of velvet; it filled the caverns behind the eyes with light. All that inner darkness became a hall, leaf smelling, earth smelling of yellow light. And the tree was beyond the flower; the grass, the flower and the tree were entire. Down on his

16-17 knees grubbing he held the flower complete.

In her biography of Roger Fry (1940) VW wrote of

161 moments of vision , when a new force breaks in,
 and the gropings of the past suddenly seem to
 have meaning.

The meaning of these moments from her own past now, in
1939, seems clear to her; they represent a "profound
difference" between satisfaction and despair:

MOB This difference I think arose from the fact
71-2 that I was quite unable to deal with the pain
 of discovering that people hurt each other;
 that a man I had seen had killed himself. The
 sense of horror held me powerless. But in the
 case of the flower I found a reason; and was
 thus able to deal with the situation.

All through her life and fiction the possibility of
order, of pattern, has been felt in the midst of uncertainty,
the possibility of a transcendence of the passage of time.
In Between the Acts this possibility is in the foreground
of the work: an explicit "private vision" is set against
the "scraps, orts, and fragments" of daily life. VW, in
the last years of her life, asserted what before she only
more tentatively attested to: a 'reality' apprehended by
very few, by artists mainly, that is apart from actual
life and yet rooted in it; not mysticism, but a coming to
fruition of the potential of imagination to order the world
of experience in the forms and modes of art.

It seems likely that the review of Fry's life and work she made to write his biography helped VW to reach this new positiveness, for he too had written of a similar perception:

But if reason must stop short, beyond reason lies reality - if nothing will make him doff his reason, nothing will make him lose his faith. The aesthetic emotion seems to him of supreme importance. But why? - he cannot say. "One can only say that those who experience it feel it to have a peculiar quality of 'reality', which makes it a matter of infinite importance in their lives. Any attempt I might make to explain this would probably land me in the depths of mysticism. On the edge of that gulf I stop." But if he stops it is in the attitude of one who looks forward. We are always left with the sense of something to come.

RF
229

In support of the suggestion that VW found a new certainty in her vision in the last few years of her life, we can turn once more to her diary:

I lay awake so calm, so content, as if I'd stepped off the whirling world into a deep blue quiet space and there open eyed existed, beyond harm; armed against all that can happen. I have never had this feeling before in all my life; but I have had it several times since last summer: when I reached it, in my worst depression, as if I stepped out, throwing aside a cloak, lying in bed, looking at the stars, these nights at Monk's House.

AWD
281

(9.4.1937)

As in those many records of her summer "retreats" at Rodmell, here she has drawn security from her deepest despair; descending into the depths she finds rest in

'reality'. During the summer of 1936, to which she refers here, she was devastated by the grind of revising The Years and Three Guineas. Of that time she wrote that she had "never been so near the precipice of my own feeling since 1913 -" (AWD, 268-9; 11.6.1936). It was an "extraordinary summer" in which she felt she had destroyed her writing gift. Thus, she subsequently determined to concentrate on her own, private vision, to write for herself:

I would like to write a dream story about the top of a mountain. Now why? About lying in the snow; about rings of colour; silence; and the solitude. I can't though. But shan't I, one of these days, indulge myself in some short releases into that world? Short now for ever. No more long grinds: only sudden intensities.
(22.6.1937)

AWD
283

There is a hint, too, that her faith was consolidated even earlier:

...I must cling to my "freedom" - that mysterious hand that was reached out to me about four years ago. (26.4.1938) ... still I'm free. This is the actual result of that spiritual conversion (I can't bother to get the right words) in the autumn of 1933 or 4 - when I rushed through London buying, I remember, a great magnifying glass, from sheer ecstasy, near Blackfriars: when I gave the man who played the harp half a crown for talking to me about his life in the tube station. (20.5.1938).

AWD

There is nothing to be found in her writings of 1933 or '34 that refers to a "spiritual conversion". There is, however,

an entry in her diary made in the autumn of 1934 that might be read as the record of a moment in which her faith in the power of art to achieve 'reality' came home to her with force. It concerns the funeral of Roger Fry (who had died on September 9th) which took place on "a day as it happened of extraordinary beauty" (RF, 298):

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

But then, next day, today, which is Thursday, one week later, the other thing begins to work - the exalted sense of being above time and death which comes from being again in a writing mood. And this is not an illusion, so far as I can tell. Certainly I have a strong sense that Roger would be all on one's side in this excitement, and that whatever the invisible force does, we thus get outside it.⁵

(18.9.1934)

AWD
224-5

From 1937, VW's world of friends who had "fought with our brains, loves and so on" seemed to disappear ever faster. Her houses at Mecklenburgh Square and Tavistock Square, in London, were both bombed, destroying books, letters and furniture accumulated over many years. VW's mood may be judged from the following fragment, from a sketch written in late October, 1939, headed 'London in War':

Everyone is on business. - Their minds are made up. It is extremely sober. The streets are [..] lit. They have gone back to the 18th century. Nature prevails. I suppose badgers and foxes wd. come back if this went on, & owls & nightingales. This is the prelude to barbarism. The city has become merely a congeries of houses lived in by people who work. There is no society. no luxury no splendour no gadding & flitting. All is serious and concentrated. [It is] as if the song had stopped - the melody, the unnecessary the voluntary. Odd if this should be the end of town life.⁶

Other details from this period contribute to the sense of ending: for example, in 1936 Violet Dickinson returned to VW all the letters she had written her - a strange gift from VW's adolescence (see L.VI, 87, 89).

VW could, however, still create, could still expand the bounds of the moment by the ordering of chaos that her art achieved in creating its own world. Although the usual view of the end of 1934 and beginning of 1935 is that it was a desolate time for VW (see Bell, II, 183), I suggest it may have offered her something to fight against, so strengthening in the years that followed her resolve to "squeeze the moment"⁷ and continue the effort. There is no suggestion whatever that VW suddenly accepted any conventional, systematic religion; her continued vehemence against the arrogance of Christianity is attested to, for example, in her letters to Ethel Smyth (e.g. L. V, 319-22). What I am suggesting is that the deeply personal vision of 'reality' that VW developed throughout her life, and her faith in the possibilities of transcendence through art, now became the necessary foreground of her thought. What

had frequently been a vaguely articulated, shadowy adumbration (however deeply felt) was now confidently grasped and directly embodied in her last novel.

* * *

That "deep blue quiet space" into which VW passed when she seemed to step "off the whirling world" (AWD, 281; 9.4.1937) was a relief from the vacancy and inconsequence of life around her. She longed for solitude in which she could "glide my way up & up into that exciting layer so rarely lived in: where my mind works so quick it seems asleep" (AWD, 312; 11.4.1939). Lucy Swithin, like her author, is seen early in Between the Acts drawn to an impersonal quality felt in the sky:

There was a fecklessness, a lack of symmetry and order in the clouds, as they thinned and thickened. Was it their own law, or no law, they obeyed? Some were wisps of white hair merely. One, high up, very distant, had hardened to golden alabaster; was made of immortal marble. Beyond that was blue, pure blue, black blue; blue that had never filtered down; that had escaped registration. It never fell as sun, shadow, or rain upon the world; but disregarded the little coloured ball of earth entirely. No flower felt it; no field; no garden.

30

Isa thinks that Lucy sees "God there, God on his throne" (31), but there is nothing in Lucy's thinking to corroborate this.

the house, once to return with her brother, Bart, to the pageant (83, 141), as if a signal had been given, though nothing is said. Isa, Giles, and William each say "without words" that they are desperately unhappy (205). It is to silence that art should lead. The picture in the dining-room at Pointz Hall which leads those who look at it "down green glades into the heart of silence" (62) is an access to that medium which circumscribes the entire novel. To clarify this admittedly rather obscure notion we may look out from the world of the novel to those elements of its background that have already proved illuminating.

In A Sketch of the Past VW touched briefly on the idea of an impersonal medium circumscribing the whole of life⁹. Although she says that she is simply making a note of something that interests her as a reminder to return to it, I believe the following passage goes some way to explaining the sense in the novel that everything is somehow connected. She has been writing about her childhood holidays in St. Ives, recalling the "pure delight" that that place offered her senses:

The lemon-coloured leaves on the elm trees, the round apples glowing red in the orchard and the rustle of the leaves make me pause to think how many other than human forces affect us. While I am writing this, the light changes; an apple becomes a vivid green. I respond - how? And then the little owl [makes] a chattering noise. Another response. St. Ives, to cut short an obscure train of thought, about the other voice or voices and their connection with art, with religion: figuratively, I could snapshot what I mean by fancying myself afloat, [in an element]

MOB
115

which is all the time responding to things we have no words for - exposed to some invisible ray: but instead of labouring here to express this, to analyse the third voice, to discover whether 'pure delights' are connected with art, or religion: whether I am telling the truth when I see myself perpetually taking the breath of these voices in my sails, and tacking this way and that, in daily life as I yield to them - instead of that, I note only this influence, suspect it to be of great importance, cannot find how to check its power on other people; and so erect a finger here, by way of signalling that here is a vein to work out later.

This vein is worked out in the novel, in which the "third voice" (e.g. 137, 139, 142) seems to exist beyond the perceptions of actual life, connecting consciousnesses.

The idea of "things we have no words for" will also be found to be of great significance in this novel, as has already been noted in discussing its precursors.

Between the Acts is at once a hall of mirrors and a chamber of echoes; words and phrases ring throughout the book, slipping in and out of different minds, reflected sometimes by the actors, sometimes by the audience. These echoes and repetitions bind the book together, making of it an enclosed world, constantly fragmented and reunited by the shifty nature of words. On this June day in 1939 words will not stay still: to Giles Oliver they rise up and become menacing (74) or scornful (174); to William Dodge they become symbolical (88). Words take on substance, rolled and thinned on the nurses' tongues like sweets (15), or peppering the audience "as with a shower of hard little stones" (95). In many ways it is emphasised that life is bound together, given form by

language. Triplets link together actors and audience, gentles and simples: "cut, cut, cut" (43); "Empty, empty empty; silent, silent, silent" (47); "Hurry, hurry, hurry" (90); "Chuff, chuff, chuff" (93, passim.); "Tick, tick, tick" (100, passim.); "climbing, climbing, climbing" (116); "Death, death, death" (210); "Tears, tears, tears" (210, 234); "life, life, life" (245); there are several more. Words and phrases spill over, colliding with each other. Language is described as an infection (174). Examples of the enormously complex rhyming and rhythming of Between the Acts can be found on every page, creating a web of sound in which life is, so to speak, suspended. The last scene of the pageant (216) represents this web of language, as the actors assemble and "each declaimed some phrase or fragment from their parts" (215-6). The word "their" is significant here, for in the cacophony that follows are heard not only fragments from the pageant, but also echoes from the thoughts and utterances of the audience. Some phrases even have a double echo, such as "I am not in my perfect mind", which Giles muttered early on (103), echoing King Lear (IV: vii).

Language imposes over the confusion and chaos of life an order that is only apparent: as the last scene of the pageant shows, the web of language is in fact a chaos. As long as there are no gaps, no silences, the audience is happy, for silence reveals that "emptiness about the heart of life" that cannot be accepted by the crowd. Acquiescence (as 'Time Passes' stated) is the easy way out:

The gramophone, while the scene was removed, gently stated certain facts which everybody knows to be perfectly true. ...

The view repeated in its own way what the tune was saying. The sun was sinking; the colours were merging; and the view was saying how after toil men rest from their labours; how coolness comes; reason prevails; and having unharnessed the team from the plough, neighbours dig in cottage gardens and lean over cottage gates.

The cows, making a step forward, then standing still, were saying the same thing to perfection. Folded in this triple melody, the audience sat gazing;

158-9

As long as they are distracted from themselves, the audience is happy; very few can be at home in solitude; silence brings discomfort. If reality is not distanced, mediated somehow, it cannot be borne. Miss La Trobe's experiment, in which she intends to douche the audience with "present-time reality", fails because what they are exposed to is not framed. It is only when life is presented selectively that anyone notices it; for the most part we live unconsciously, not seeing what is right before us¹⁰. Only those such as Lucy 'see' with the vision VW attests to, see the beauty of the world.

The verbal condition of human being is, however, not the whole picture. As already noted, there is the suggestion in the novel that felt influences pass between people without words. "Thoughts without words," wonders Bart, the exemplar of reason, "Can that be?" (68). It would seem from the experience of Lucy Swithin and Miss La Trobe that such thoughts can not only be, but are the privilege only of those of a certain faith. Beyond words is a timeless medium (that which "is outside of us ...

what we are not", TW, 197).

There is a long passage excised from the published novel that concerns the silence of "the thing that exists when we aren't there" (D. III, 114; 30.10.1926, Also see above, pp. 136 & 154). Perhaps because it has the tone of philosophical speculation, VW deleted the passage, putting in its place the two cryptic sentences that follow the description of the pictures in the dining-room:

47 Empty, empty, empty; silent, silent, silent.
 The room was a shell, singing of what was
 before time was; a vase stood in the heart of
 the house, alabaster, smooth, cold, holding the
 still, distilled essence of emptiness, silence.

Behind these lines is felt the idea that art can hold within it the timeless 'reality' which is the background, so to speak, against which being stands out¹¹. Art can "make of the moment something permanent" because its form transcends the modes of actual life. Some understanding of the implications of these lines from the novel may be gained from T.S. Eliot's Burnt Norton (1935):

137-143 Words move, music moves
 Only in time; but that which is only living
 Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
 Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
 Can words or music reach
 The stillness, as a China jar still
 Moves perpetually in its stillness.

In her novel, VW aspires to a poetic communication of concepts she attempted to explain in the deleted passage.

That passage seems to me to embody the central concerns of this study of the novels; it reads as follows:

There was silence in the dining room, for lunch delayed. The chairs were all drawn up, and the places ready; wine glasses, knives and forks, napkins, and in the centre the variegated flowers which Bartlet picked, mixed and bunched together after a colour scheme of his own. But who observed the dining room? Who noted the silence, the emptiness? What name is to be given to that which notes that a room is empty? This presence certainly requires a name, for without a name what can exist? And how can silence or emptiness be noted by that which has no existence? Yet by what name can that be called which enters a room when the company is still in the kitchen, or the nursery, or the library; which notes the pictures, then the flowers, and observes, though there itself. The room is empty. The great dictionary which records the names of infinitesimally small insects, has a name for grains of different sand - one is shell, the other rock; has ignored this presence, refusing to attempt to name it. Certainly it is difficult, to find a name for that which is in a room, yet the room is empty; for that which perceives pictures knife and fork, also men and women; and describes them; and not only perceives but partakes of [them], and has access to the mind in its darkness. And further goes from mind to mind and surface to surface, and from body to body creating what is not mind or body, not surface or depths, but a common element in which the perishable is preserved and the separate becomes one. Does it not by this means create immortality[] And yet we who have named other presences equally impalpable - and called them God for instance or again the Holy Ghost, have no name but novelist, or poet, or sculptor or musician, for this greatest of all preservers and creators. But this spirit this haunter and joiner, who makes one where there are two, three six or seven, and preserves what without it would perish is nameless[] Nameless it is, yet partakes of all things named; it is rhyme and rhythm; it is dress and eating and drinking, is procreation and sensation; is love and hate and passion and adventure. partakes of the dog and the cat, of the bee and the flower and of bodies in coats and skirts.

This nameless spirit then, who is not "we" nor "I", nor the novelist either, For the novelist all agree must tell a story; and there are no stories for this spirit; this spirit is not concerned to follow lovers to the altar, nor to cut chapter from chapter; and the [h]write as novelists do The end with a flourish; since there is no end; this being, to reduce it to the shortest and simplest word, was present in the dining room at Pointz Hall for it observed how different the room was empty from what the room was when - as now happened - people entered. 12

The fictional world is created by an autonomous, impersonal presence, but this presence can nowhere actually be located - it is actually absent. The audience in the novel discover this:

227

Whom could they make responsible? Whom could they thank for their entertainment? Was there no one?

By this strange mode of being the absent presence might be said to create immortality: the world of a novel 'is' actually nowhere, and yet it locates itself in the world of each reader in the act of reading, thereby becoming a valid part of the actual world. This "something/nothing" shares its mode of being (which is actually non-being) with the ideas of soul and 'reality'. Thus it might be said that art (in VW's sense) is a product of the soul that gives access to that medium by which all life is surrounded - 'reality'. In her memoir of Julian Bell and in A Sketch of the Past (MOB, 72), VW wrote that writing things down made them "real" for her, brought them under her control and made them "whole". Writing fiction

is creating a world which escapes the spatio-temporal horizons of actual life, in the sense described above. Her surer belief in this concept may have contributed to the feeling of freedom noted in the last few years of her life. As her diary reveals, she felt there was no future: her world had disappeared. Like Lucy Swithin, perhaps, she felt "We've only the present", the continuous present of writing.

VW was observing the final chaos from a tiny island of illusory security in which the villagers continued their meaningless doings as the encroaching darkness edged closer¹³. This apocalyptic feeling is strong in Between the Acts:

164-5 Only a few great names - Babylon, Nineveh, Clytemnestra, Agamemnon, Troy - floated across the open space. Then the wind rose, and in the rustle of the leaves even the great words became inaudible; the audience sat staring at the villagers, whose mouths opened, but no sound came.

Leaning against a tree, the artist is tormented by her failure to ward off the emptiness:

165 Illusion had failed. 'This is death,' she murmured, 'death.'

Only for instants does the artist have the power of the gods to overcome time:

180

Ah, but she was not merely a twitcher of individual strings; she was one who seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a recreated world. Her moment was on her - her glory.

VW mocks the puppeteer artist in Between the Acts, allowing her only a brief triumph in the giving of her vision, as Lily Briscoe triumphs in the instant she makes her final brush-stroke. "A vision imparted is relief from agony," but, "She hadn't made them see" (117). Art cannot simply give the vision to everybody; as has been repeatedly emphasised this religion of art requires effort; in Lucy's terms, "hours of kneeling in the early morning" (239).

*

Between the Acts disintegrates "our island history", taking away from the assembled audience any sense of autonomy or sovereignty in their own present. In the loop of eternity the "ages" of the pageant are meaningless: "You don't believe in history," says William Dodge to Lucy, when she says there were no such people as the Victorians - "Only you and me and William dressed differently" (203). In Lucy's apprehension of timeless 'reality' the periods of history are dissolved. This perception of the pageant is endorsed by the erosion of the audience's sense of identity, afforded them by dress and their sense of their 'own' time:

175 Yet somehow they felt - how could one put it - a little not quite here or there. As if the play had jerked the ball out of the cup; as if what I call myself was still floating unattached, and didn't settle. Not quite themselves they felt.

207 They were neither one thing nor the other; neither Victorians nor themselves. They were suspended, without being, in limbo.

For Lucy time, as passage, is irrelevant; she is marking the approach of death¹⁴, but sustains her 'real' life through her faith in beauty. The audience is given security by the external trappings and conventions of life, including the monotonous plod of time:

177 Chuff, chuff, chuff went the machine. Time was passing. How long would time hold them together ?

Isa longs to escape to a realm of death where "Change is not" (181); Miss La Trobe sways perpetually between despair and triumph. Only Lucy is at peace, untroubled; only she seems to have found rest.

The pool in Orlando was an image of the depths of the mind (see above, p.175). In To the Lighthouse the "pool of Time" would eventually cover all; Nancy turned a rock-pool into an entire world. In Between the Acts Lucy sees a world in the lily-pool:

239 Now the jagged leaf at the corner suggested, by its contours, Europe. There were other leaves. She fluttered her eye over the surface, naming leaves India, Africa, America. Islands of security, glossy and thick.

As the last of the audience leaves, the pageant over, Lucy is found alone by the lily-pool. In this moment of solitude she expresses her faith:

240 "Ourselves," she murmured. And retrieving some glint of faith from the grey waters, hopefully, without much help from reason, she followed the fish; the speckled, streaked, and blotched; seeing in that vision beauty, power, and glory in ourselves.

Her vision is contradicted by her brother's unfeeling reason, but this does not trouble her. That which she apprehends through the efforts of her faith is a universal medium, surrounding all life; in the words of To the Lighthouse, Lucy hears "the voice of the beauty of the world". Looking back to Mrs. Ramsay's search for faith (TTL, 101) it can be seen now that the vision itself is not new in VW's writing; what is new in Between the Acts is the directness with which the private vision of faith in transcendent 'reality' is set against the despair of actual life in time.

Silenced, she returned to her private vision; of beauty which is goodness; the sea on which we float. Mostly impervious, but surely every boat sometimes leaks ?

He would carry the torch of reason till it went out in the darkness of the cave. For herself, every morning, kneeling, she protected her vision. Every night she opened the window and looked at the leaves against the sky. Then slept. Then the random ribbons of birds' voices woke her.

The elements of her faith are these: that life is surrounded by a halo of beauty, a nameless quality inhering in the actual, but not actual and so free of the constraint and decadence of space and time; all beings are afloat on this "sea" of beauty. For the most part all people are impervious to beauty, but sometimes it is glimpsed - as manifest in the novel by the sense of unity the audience sometimes catches in music, the perception of beauty as the actors stand in fading sunlight after the pageant (228), and the unspoken communications that seem carried by a medium other than words. To live entirely by reason, the logical terms of actual life, is to cast a light into darkness that is merely artificial, never to turn to see the light of 'reality'. Abstract, impersonal beauty resides in the natural world (the uncivilized earth is a constant emblem of timelessness in the novels), and can be perceived by those whose faith is strong enough to recognise the emptiness at the heart of life and not turn away from it.

To see this faith in a context wider than that of Between the Acts, it will be recalled that art - particularly literary art - was said to embody an abstract (bodiless) 'reality' in a curious mode of being that is apart from actual being. The 'reality' VW felt behind and beyond actual life is the virtual property of great art (such as hers) because such creation is free from the personal, time-bound, death-tending life of its creator to exist on its own terms in the locationless space of art.

Throughout her life and writings VW apprehended the 'reality' behind appearances, that is, the ignored inheritance of all humanity. Her achievement is the creation of a literary form which brings the transcendent into the actual, brings eternity into the world of time in the act of reading. Her diary and novels are full of the records of particular, intense "moments of being" in which 'reality' came closer. In A Sketch of the Past, for the first time in her life, she wrote in general terms directly of what she believed was the nature of the conceptual "rod" that her writing constantly held to. In the memoir she once again states that her entire life has stood upon a base formed in childhood. Writing was "what is far more necessary than anything else" (MOB, 73) because art enshrines the lineaments of 'reality', the form of the "thing itself", timeless and yet inherent in the world of time. This passage is explained by the entire effort of VW's life and art, which were inextricably interwoven with each other; it is with this slowly emergent "philosophy", now grasped firmly and become her own, that I have been concerned:

...And so I go on to suppose that the shock-receiving capacity is what makes me a writer. ...it is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words. ... From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we - I mean all human beings - are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the

work of art. Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock.

MOB
72

Notes to Chapter Eight

1. (p.221) Published as 'Anon.' and 'The Reader' in Twentieth Century Literature, 25, 3, 4, Fall/Winter 1979 pp. 382-435

2. (p.221) See 'The Human Art' (1940):

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Instead of letters posterity will have confessions, diaries, notebooks, like M. Gide's - hybrid books in which the writer talks in the dark to himself for a generation yet to be born.

3. (p.223) Quoted in Q. Bell, II, p. 255; note how it continues:

& then I am so composed that nothing is real unless I write it. And again, I know by this time what an odd effect Time has: it does not destroy people - for instance, I still think perhaps more truly than I did, of Roger, of Thoby: but it brushes away the actual personal presence.

4. (p.225) 'Two Endings: Virginia Woolf's Suicide and Between the Acts', University of Toronto Quarterly, xlv, 4, Summer 1975; pp. 265-289

5. (p.230) See also the following from VW's diary, quoted by Q. Bell (II, 180):

Then Desmond came up: said "Wouldn't it be nice to walk in the garden? Oh we stand on a little island" he said. "But it has been very lovely" I said. For the first time I laid my hand on his shoulder and said "Don't die yet." "Nor you either" he said. "We have had wonderful friends" he said.

(15.9.1934)

6. (231) Quoted in Twentieth Century Literature, 25, 3, 4, Fall/Winter 1979 (Monk's House Papers, A 20)

7. (p.231)

Still I see Lytton's point - my dear old serpent. What a dream life is to be sure - that he should be dead, and I reading him: and trying to make out that we indented ourselves in the world; whereas I sometimes feel it's been an illusion - gone so fast; lived so quickly; and nothing to show for it, save these little books. But that makes me dig my feet in and squeeze the moment.

AWD
314

(29.7.1939)

8. (p.233) E.g.

32: It was, he supposed, more of a force ...
140: She was thinking, he supposed, God is peace ...
204: She was off, they guessed, on a circular tour ...

9. (234) It is apposite at this point to recall a famous passage from one of VW's best-known essays, 'Modern Fiction' (1919):

...life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible ?

CR I
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10. (p.237) Reading over Roger Fry's Vision and Design when preparing her biography, VW could not have avoided the following passage from 'An Essay in Aesthetics' that explains the effect of framing:

If we look at the street itself we are almost sure to adjust ourselves in some way to its actual existence. We recognise an acquaintance, and wonder why he looks so dejected this morning, or become interested in a new fashion in hats - the moment we do that the spell is broken, we are reacting to life itself in however slight a degree, but, in the mirror, it is easier to abstract ourselves completely, and look upon the changing scene as a whole. It then, at once, takes on the visionary quality, and we become true spectators, not selecting what we will see, but seeing everything equally ... The frame of

19-20 the mirror, then, does to some extent turn the reflected scene from one that belongs to our actual life into one that belongs rather to the imaginative life.

11. (p.238) See The Waves:

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

12. (p.240) This passage, marked "silence" in the margin, is from

[BTA] Typescript with author's corrections, unsigned, 2 April '38 - July 30 '39 (earliest dated draft)

in the Berg Collection. It is begun on p. 56 and again on p. 57 from which I quote (with obvious errors corrected).

13. (p.241) See letter to Judith Stephen:

L.VI
400 We're acting village plays; written by the gardener's wife, and the chauffeur's wife; and acted by the other villagers. Also we're doing this that and the other about an air-raid shelter.

(29.5.1940)

14. (p.243)

AWD
315 Oh and I thought, as I was dressing, how interesting it would be to describe the approach of age; and the gradual coming of death. As people describe love. To note every symptom of failure: but why failure? To treat age as an experience that is different from the others; and to detect every one of the gradual stages towards death which is a tremendous experience, and not as unconscious, at least in its approaches, as birth is.

(7.8.1939)

Appendix

The Self in Philosophical Thought

In using the term 'self' I immediately (and confidently) assume some sort of understanding of it (as Heidegger said we already have some intuition into Being, otherwise we could not begin to question it). This intuitive understanding would not, however, very long resist any pressure to clarify 'self'; the concept has changed in meaning and importance throughout the history of Western thought. Here I propose to trace one, arbitrarily chose, line of its development. Try as we might to begin from a true beginning, however, it is impossible for us not to always already have that first inkling of what we mean when we say 'self'. Thus the account is biased from the start.

*

(i) Socrates

Socrates' disappointment at what he saw as Anaxagoras' missed opportunity to study Mind is the decisive point in the shift of emphasis in Greek thought, from the atomism and study of phenomena of the Ionians to the investigation into what Socrates called the 'soul'. To a fifth-century B.C. Athenian, 'soul' was a sort of shadow; his 'self' was his body.

In the uncertain years following the Persian wars, the

thinkers known as Sophists began to question the materialism of the preceding ages, and the centre of their thought moved from the object to the subject. Socrates advanced on their relativism by conceiving universal concepts that might stand firm while the particular varied. Man's soul was posited by Socrates as that faculty which knows good from evil and infallibly chooses the good. He spent his life questioning those he met about what they considered to be the ends of life, and he found that what most people considered their goal was invariably happiness under one guise or another. True happiness, he held, could be found only by a turning inwards, obeying his Delphic injunction to "Know thyself". "My very good friend," Socrates would challenge his fellow citizen,

61 ...Are you not ashamed that you give your attention to acquiring as much money as possible, and similarly with reputation and honour, and give no attention or thought to truth and understanding and the perfection of your soul ?
 ('The Apology', The Last Days of Socrates)

The keynote for this age of enquiry into man's essence, inaugurated by Socrates, is found in the celebrated second chorus of the Antigone of Sophocles, first performed when Socrates was about 54, in 442 B.C. :

Many the wonders but nothing walks stranger than man.
This thing crosses the sea in the winter's storm,
making his path through the roaring waves.
And she, the greatest of gods, the earth -

ageless she is, and unwearied - he wears her away
as the ploughs go up and down from year to year
and his mules turn up the soil.

... ..

Language and thought like the wind
and the feelings that make the town,
he has taught himself, and shelter against the
cold,
refuge from rain. He can always help himself.
He faces no future helpless. There's only death
that he cannot find an escape from. He has contrived
refuge from illnesses once beyond all cure.

Socrates is known to us largely through the writings
of his pupil, Plato, who developed his teacher's theories
for himself. His dualistic conception of man reappears
in the Neo-Platonists, St. Augustine, Descartes, and the
line of thinkers descending from Cartesian thought.
Throughout Plato's Dialogues, the soul's priority over the
body is emphasised:

op.cit.
109-110 'Surely the soul can best reflect when it is
free of all distraction such as hearing or sight
or pain or pleasure of any kind - that is,
when it ignores the body and becomes as far as
possible independent, avoiding all physical
contacts and associations as much as it can, in
its search for reality.'
('Phaedo')

The true philosopher is always preparing for death. The
import of this is made explicit by Socrates in the 'Phaedo':

We are in fact convinced that if we are ever to
have pure knowledge of anything, we must get
rid of the body and contemplate things by
themselves with the soul by itself. It seems,
to judge from the argument, that the wisdom
which we desire and upon which we profess to
have set our hearts, will be attainable only

111 when we are dead, and not in our lifetime.

It begins to be clear that Socrates' conception was not of an individual self, but of a universal essence of which each man partakes. The Pythagorean "ghost in the machine" is given its almost archetypal expression in the 'Phaedo', developed by Socrates into an idea of man's divine essence. The soul strives continually for a higher state, and man's most important concern is the care of his soul:

op.cit. 131 But when the soul investigates by itself, it passes into the realm of the pure and everlasting and immortal and changeless; and being of a kindred nature, when it is once independent and free from interference, consorts with it always and strays no longer, but remains, in that realm of the absolute, constant and invariable, through contact with beings of a similar nature. And this condition of the soul we call Wisdom.

A strict dichotomy is made between body and soul, much to the disadvantage of the body:

op.cit. 132 The soul is most like that which is divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, and ever self-consistent and invariable, whereas body is most like that which is human, mortal, multiform, unintelligible, dissoluble and never self-consistent.

This division persists throughout Western thought. When his friends ask how they are to bury him, Socrates laughs for, as he has explained to them, he ("this Socrates here who is talking to you now") cannot be killed, merely released from a body ('Phaedo', op.cit., 179).

Plato, in The Republic (Book IV) speaks of a tripartite division of the soul into : reason, the calculating, deciding faculty; appetite or desire, i.e. the basic physical drives; and, lastly, a rather vague faculty perhaps best called spirit. Plato's use of these divisions is not consistent, for sometimes he speaks of a single mental energy in three different manifestations, and sometimes of three autonomous faculties. The vagueness of these early concepts is apparent, not least from the way in which mind, soul, spirit, and self are all roughly analogous. Plato's concept of man's inner plurality does not really work if our consciousness of our inner conflicts is taken into account: a more unified concept is demanded than that offered by Platonic psychology.

Nevertheless, Socrates and Plato begin the search for self. The soul, said Socrates, must be discovered by each person for himself; discovery cannot be taught. Once realised, evil was no longer possible. The essence of man as a moral entity founds all later investigation into this question.

*

(ii) Descartes

I shall now close my eyes, stop up my ears, turn away all my senses, even efface from my thought all images of corporeal things, or at least, because this can hardly be done, I shall consider them as being vain and false; and thus

113 communing only with myself, and examining my
 inner self, I shall try to make myself, little
 by little, better known and more familiar to
 myself.

(3rd Meditation)

In his Socratic-sounding project, Descartes reduces thought to its most primary level, and finds that the fundamental thought is thinking that I think. He wishes to establish God's existence by mathematically precise principles. Reflecting on the fact that he doubts leads him, in the 3rd Meditation, to see that he must be imperfect, as to know is a greater perfection than to doubt. He has an idea of perfection and this can only have come from a perfect being - God. Also in the 3rd Meditation comes Descartes' second proof: if he had created himself he would have made himself perfect; since he is not perfect but has an idea of perfection he must have been created by another who is perfect - God. The so-called "ontological proof" of the 5th Meditation is that, as absolute perfection is the sum total of all possible perfections, God - being absolute perfection - must necessarily exist, as existence is one of the perfections. From this, Descartes gains a confidence in the veracity of God, from which he proceeds to confidence in our own "clear and distinct ideas". An omnipotent God, thought Descartes, ensures my continued existence through creating and recreating me at every moment the same 'me' as in the moment preceding. Time, for Descartes, was a discrete series and in it we exist, in the immutable perfection of God.

The coqito experience is to a great extent intuitive: certain basic qualities are only to be known intuitively. It is in this way that we know the general character of the states we understand as consciousness. Descartes' first task was to establish what the essence of our conscious states was, and then to show its independence of material objects and their properties. Underlying the whole of Descartes' Natural Philosophy is the "qualitative difference and existential independence of minds and bodies" (S.V. Keeling, Descartes, 101). Replying to Hobbes' objections, Descartes maintains that what thinks is a 'substance':

Keeling
op.cit.
106

It is certain that thinking cannot exist without a thing which thinks, or generally, that any accident or activity cannot be without a substance of which it is the activity.

(Reply to the Third Objections)

In the experience of coqito I intuit simple natures such as substance, thinking, and existence, and also natures which are neither 'things or affections of things' but 'eternal truths' or, as Descartes sometimes calls them, 'common notions'. Simple natures, in the coqito experience, are perceived to be connected in a way that can be expressed by saying "my present conscious-state entails the present existence of that self which is its subject, and the subject I name "I". To know anything, says Descartes, is to know oneself as knowing it; it can be seen already how Descartes begins the subjective trend of modern philosophy which, as Whitehead put it, "most

characteristically differentiates it from mediaeval and ancient metaphysics".

Descartes held that, because the defining attributes of mind and body were totally different, there could be no causal connection between them. His view of the mind and body being separate caused him difficulty, for he could not maintain that there was no interaction at all, as this was intuited: the problem, as he saw it, was how we could understand the connection, or, indeed, how we come to know of the connection in the first place. The self of Descartes, the individual 'I' of his writings, is one that professes to need no body:

103

Am I so dependent on body and senses that I cannot exist without them? But I had persuaded myself that there was nothing at all in the world: ... was I not, therefore, also persuaded that I did not exist? No indeed; I existed without doubt, by the fact that I was persuaded, or indeed by the mere fact that I thought at all.
(2nd Meditation)

And therefore, from the mere fact that I know with certainty that I exist, and that I do not observe that any other thing belongs necessarily to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing, I rightly conclude that my essence consists in this alone, that I am a thinking thing, or a substance whose whole essence or nature consists in thinking. And although perhaps (or rather as I shall shortly say, certainly,) I have a body to which I am very closely united, nevertheless, because, on the one hand, I have a clear and distinct idea of myself in so far as I am only a thinking and unextended thing, and because on the other hand I have a distinct idea of the body in so far as it is only an extended thing but which does not think, it is certain that I, that is to say my mind, by which I am what I am, is entirely and

156-7 truly distinct from my body, and may exist
without it.

(6th Meditation)

Descartes never adequately reconciled this denial of the body's necessity with the fact of its existence and relation to the mind. He answered the question of how we know of the mind-body connection by again turning to intuition.

A consequence of the dualism of material and mental substance is the dualism of knowledge and experience. It is, said Descartes, by pure thought alone that we come to know the physical world.

112 But now I have come back imperceptibly to the point I sought; for, since it is now known to me that, properly speaking, we perceive bodies only by the understanding which is in us, and not by the imagination, or the senses, and that we do not perceive them through seeing them or touching them, but only because we conceive them in thought, I know clearly that there is nothing more easy for me to know than my own mind.

(2nd Meditation)

Keeling
op.cit.
106 When my mind, which knows itself but still doubts of everything else, looks around in order to extend its knowledge, it discovers certain common notions. From these it constructs various demonstrations that carry within them such conviction that their truth cannot be doubted so long as we concentrate attention on them

(Principles of Philosophy, I,
xiii)

We never perceive the natural world or the bodies in it, for we perceive that which represents (and usually misrepresents) in sensory media, that world. Again, Descartes

is arguing the primacy of the thinking self to the detriment of the body: the self can come to know the universe on its own, without the experience of the senses. However, by this he is once more brought to the problem of the fact that we are embodied beings, and the dependence (psychologically) of the self upon the body cannot be ignored, as Descartes is well aware.

He distinguishes two mental operations involved in having "an idea, a thought, a cognition" : 'pure thought', which is a mode of the self's activity alone, and 'sensation' which is exclusively a mode of the body's activity as a physiological organism. The picture of knowledge that emerges is one in which the body's sensory experience is taken over, as an obscure and confused impression, by the self which then clarifies it, replacing the physiological product with a "clear and distinct idea". As Keeling notes, "a completed knowledge completely unified would be a complete reflexion of all reality" (185).

Descartes is a great divider and subdivider. Having discovered that the self was "I thinking I think", in effect, he proceeded to characterise this self's functions, distinguishing numerous activities. The cognitive characteristics have been outlined above; there were also characteristics of affective and conative (willing) activity. These latter could occur on either bodily or mental occasion: states which presupposed a bodily change were known by Descartes as 'passions' of the self and 'actions' of the body; conversely, those requiring mental change he

designated 'actions of the self'. Acts of volition, too, (which could only be initiated by the self) were divided into those the end of which lay in some further state of the willing self (as in the desire for more complete knowledge), and those the end of which was in some state of the body (as in the desire for increased physical strength). The self is free in its will and this Descartes held to be an innate idea: we can choose to assent or not, or even postpone our decisions until we have understood more, or reflected.

Despite his study of our ways of knowing, the nature of the relationship between body and mind (self) eluded Descartes always. His ultimate position is one in which he accepts the union, but cannot explain it, and in a way he must crave indulgence for its going against the general import of his philosophical theory. The self, to Descartes, is thinking:

there can exist in us no thought of which, at
Keeling the very moment in which it is in us, we are
op.cit. unaware.

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(Reply to the Fourth Objections)

We can never deny that the self is thinking, for this would deny its essence. There is no medium between the 'I' and the thought "I ---". As H. Caton writes (The Origin of Subjectivity),

The literary 'I' of Descartes' first person narration is the datum through which his principle manifests itself.

Despite its disparagement of the body and rather gratuitous dichotomies, Descartes' cogito ergo sum clears the way for modern thought on the self.

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(iii) Locke

Influenced by Descartes, Locke was nonetheless not a Cartesian. He was an empiricist in that he believed all the material of our knowledge came from sensory experience. He did, in contrast to Descartes, oppose the theory of innate ideas, holding that all our ideas are ultimately derived from sensation or reflection. This may suggest that Locke conceived of the mind as passive, but this is not so as he distinguished between simple and complex ideas: while the former were received passively, the mind exercises an activity in producing the latter. The Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690) had a psychological intent, as may be gathered from the Introduction, where Locke gives as the first point of his method to enquire

64

into the original of those ideas, notions, or whatever else you please to call them, which a man observes, and is conscious to himself he has in his mind; and the ways whereby the understanding comes to be furnished with them.

For my purposes here, Book II, Chapter 27 - 'Of

Identity and Diversity' - is most interesting. Identity, writes Locke, consists in our seeing a thing at a particular time and at a particular place.

206-7 For we never finding, nor conceiving it possible, that two things of the same kind should exist in the same place at the same time, we rightly conclude that whatever exists anywhere at any time excludes all of the same kind, and is therefore itself alone.

There is no doubt about God's constant self-identity because he is eternal, immutable and omnipresent. In the case of finite things, however, their identity will be in each case determined in relation to the time and place in which they exist. The principle of individuation is easily recognised as

208 existence itself which determines a being of any sort to a particular time and place, incommunicable to two beings of the same kind.

Locke applies his principles to the self-identity of man, finding that it consists in

210 nothing but a participation of the same continued life, by constantly fleeting particles of matter, in succession vitally united to the same organized body.

Locke's was a view of man as a more integrated, coherent being than the man of Descartes' theory. When we speak of the "same" man we are usually referring to a continuing

bodily identity:

210 He that shall place the identity of man in anything else, but, like that of other animals, in one fitly organised body, taken in any one instant, and from thence continued, under one organization of life, in several successively fleeting particles of matter united to it, will find it hard to make an embryo, one of years, mad and sober, the same man, by any supposition, that will not make it possible for Seth, Ismael, Socrates, Pilate, St Austin, and Caesar Borgia to be the same man.

If we were to take identity of soul as that which makes a man the same through time, there would, says Locke, be no way of controlling what we intended by the word "same"; this is characteristic of his concern with language.

Locke does not exclude the mind from what makes identity in man, but says that the "same successive body" must also be taken into account when we have "that idea in our minds of which the sound 'man' in our mouths is the sign" (211).

Personal identity for Locke consists in consciousness, which he declares is inseparable from and essential to thinking. A person is defined as

211 a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places.

When we perceive, we know that we do so, and it is this knowledge that enables each person to call himself a self, to himself; no one can perceive without knowing that he does so. The identity of a person extends back as far as

his consciousness extends back to any past thought or action. From this Locke draws the conclusion that if someone can have at different times a distinct and incommunicable consciousness, it cannot be said that he is the same at one time as at another:

217 which, we see, is the sense of mankind in the solemnest declaration of their opinions, human laws not punishing the mad man for the sober man's actions, nor the sober man for what the mad man did;

In the same way, a sleeping person is not the same as that person awake.

The fact that we forget introduces a difficulty to this question of continuous identity. We do not always have "the whole train of our past actions before our eyes in one view" (212). We are intent, usually, on our present thoughts, and in sleep have no thoughts at all ("at least none with that consciousness which remarks our waking thoughts"). These interruptions and omissions raise the question of whether we are the same thinking thing ("substance") continuously; Locke emphasises that he is not here talking of personal identity, for different "substances" are united by consciousness into a single person in the same way that the 'different' bodies (i.e. as they develop, grow) of animals are united in one animal by the unity of one continued life. It is consciousness that makes one self to oneself, not the various thinking "substances":

For it is by the consciousness it has of its present thoughts and actions, that it is self to itself now, and so will be the same self, as far as the same consciousness can extend to actions past or to come; and would be by distance of time, or change of substance, no more two persons, than a man may be two men by wearing other clothes today than he did yesterday, with a long or short sleep between; the same consciousness uniting those distant actions into the same person, whatever substances contributed to their production.

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Locke's concept of the self, as consciousness, is altogether more 'human' than that of Descartes. "Consciousness alone makes self" (218) for it is only identity of consciousness that brings together all the different substances to make the single self. This self is the concern of each person, and we would have that self happy. Any part of our bodies (any "substance" that is) that is "vitally united" to our consciousness is a part of ourselves, but can become a real part of another person if separated from that "vital union by which that consciousness is communicated" (219). The name for the self that is present to one ("vitally united to the present thinking being") is person. The personality's being a continuous identity is founded in a concern for happiness, an "unavoidable concomitant of consciousness"; something conscious of pleasure and pain desires "that that self that is conscious should be happy" (220).

The third book of Locke's Essay is devoted to language. He assumed that thought in itself is really distinct from the use of words and symbols, taking as proof of this the fact that the same thought can be expressed in different

linguistic forms and languages. At the conclusion of the Essay Locke calls for a study of "the doctrine of signs":

443 For, since the things the mind contemplates are none of them, besides itself, present to the understanding, it is necessary that something else, as a sign or representation of the thing it considers, should be present to it: and these are ideas. ... The consideration, then, of ideas and words as the great instruments of knowledge makes no despicable part of their contemplation who would take a view of human knowledge in the whole extent of it. And perhaps if they were distinctly weighed, and duly considered, they would afford us another sort of logic and critic, than what we have hitherto been acquainted with.

This project of Locke's has been taken up only very recently; it is a witness to the modernity of his thought, which has been noted in his concept of the self as consciousness.

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(iv) Hume

In his A Treatise of Human Nature (1738-40, later An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, 1751) Hume made it clear that he was taking up Locke's original project of determining the extent of human knowledge. He saw human nature as the "capital or centre" of the sciences, and so held that a science of man should be developed:

As the science of man is the only solid foundation

for the other sciences, so the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation.

Like Locke, Hume derived all the mind's contents from experience; we must start, he said, with empirical data, and not any supposed intuition of essences. "Perceptions" are, in general, the mind's contents, and these Hume divided into impressions and ideas, the difference between them being described in terms of 'vividness'. Hume's first concern was to distinguish between the immediate data of our experience and our thoughts about them.

Fundamental to Hume's thought is a natural belief in the continuing existence of the body independently of the mind or perception:

Treatise
I,2,6

Let us fix our attention out of ourselves as much as possible; let us chase our imagination to the heavens, or to the utmost limits of the universe; we have never really advanced a step beyond ourselves, nor can conceive any kind of existence, but those perceptions which have appeared in that narrow compass. This is the universe of the imagination, nor have we any idea but what is there produced.

This independent existence of the body must be taken for granted; all we can do is enquire into the cause of our belief in this existence: it is on the imagination that depends our supposition that there are objective and independent counterparts of certain impressions. Hume's position that it is natural ('animal') belief that should prevail in human life sets him apart from Locke and Berkeley;

reason, for Hume, cannot justify these beliefs beyond giving some sort of psychological account of their origin.

Characteristically, Hume decided that the problem of the substance of the soul is best dismissed as beyond our comprehension. However, if there is no (extended or unextended) substance we can call soul, this puts in question personal identity (in terms of a specific 'self'). Hume, of course, denied that we can have any idea of self distinct from our perceptions. He asks from what impression an idea of self could derive, for

I,iv,6
238 If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same, through the whole course of our lives; since self is supposed to exist after that manner

There is no such impression, and so the idea of self does not exist; perceptions exist separately from one another, without need of "anything to support their existence" (239). Hume tries to find self by looking within for some particular object amongst others:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, ... I never catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception ...

We are, then, "nothing but a bundle of different perceptions", all of which are in a continual state of flux and movement: none of these remains the same for a single moment. Now follows Hume's famous description of the mind: it is

a kind of theatre where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no simplicity in it at one time, nor identity in different; whatever natural propension we have to imagine that simplicity and identity ... They are the successive perceptions only that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place where these scenes are represented or of the materials of which it is composed.

239-40

We do, though, presume an identity, and this, to Hume, is a pretence. We substitute this idea of identity for what is really a relation between objects, feigning

the continued existence of the perceptions of our senses, to remove the interruption [between perceptions of different objects]; and run into the notion of a soul, and self, and substance, to disguise the variation.

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Our notions of identity are fictions, and we carry over this trait from our perception of the phenomenal world to the mind of man. Personal identity is, to Hume, a product of imagination, which pretends that what is in fact a series of connected ideas is a "smooth and uninterrupted progress of thought" (246). It is memory that he holds to be the chief source of the idea of personal identity, because it is by its operation that we are aware of the causal relations between perceptions.

As memory alone acquaints us with the continuance and extent of this succession of perceptions, it is to be considered, upon that account chiefly, as the source of personal identity. Had we no memory, we never should have any notion of

247 causation, nor consequently of that chain of causes and effects, which constitute our self or person.

Concluding his Treatise, Hume dismisses questions of personal identity from philosophy, saying that they are really "grammatical" difficulties. However, he was aware of the problems his view of the self as a fiction gave rise to. His Cartesian identification of the person with 'mind' ignored the role played by our awareness of the body in judging personal identity, and because he was concerned to be consistent in his thesis, Hume was led into implausibilities. He talks, for instance, as though the entities to which identity is ascribed are perceptions. In an Appendix to the Treatise Hume admitted that he could not say what it is that gives us the sense of simple unity and identity which binds our perceptions together into one self.

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(v) Coleridge

There is a "spontaneous" consciousness natural to all reflecting beings; beneath, or behind this is a philosophic consciousness which is concerned with transcendental knowledge. In Biographia Literaria Coleridge images the human situation as a landscape:

118-9 The first range of hills, that encircles the scanty vale of human life, is the horizon for the majority of its inhabitants. On its ridges the common sun is born and departs. From them the stars rise, and touching them they vanish.

Most people only know this range imperfectly, lacking either the courage or the curiosity to investigate its higher reaches. In each age there have been a few who have realised that the sources of their knowledge lie beyond the sight of the common range. This realisation is an intuition, operating without words, and it is only those who feel within them that "the wings of the air-sylph are forming within the skin of the caterpillar" who can "acquire the philosophic imagination, the sacred power of self-intuition". This openness to some 'higher' knowledge Coleridge sees as the requisite for the true philosopher, and so even the most learned and cultivated may not be able to reach the heart of philosophy.

The "spirit" - by which this higher knowledge is intuited - communicates by way of its "freedom", which is the common element of all spirits:

121 Where the spirit of a man is not filled with the consciousness of freedom ... all spiritual intercourse is interrupted, not only with others, but even with himself.

Philosophy is concerned with "objects of the inner sense", according to Coleridge, and thus cannot (as geometry can) provide an outward intuition for each of its constructions.

However, if philosophy is to "arrive at evidence" it must, like geometry, begin with the inner sense's primary construct, the postulate from which knowledge can issue, as the moving point is the postulate for geometry. To find this primary postulate the "direction" of the inner sense must be found, and this direction is determined by an act of freedom. Coleridge's language is necessarily vague here as he is applying concrete terms to what he has already said is beyond words. Consciousness acts freely; this is its first principle. There is, however, a difference from mathematics in that there are different degrees of inner sense, and thus philosophy's first principle has a moral or "practical" side, that is not open to the understanding of all. To someone without the required inner sense,

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the whole is groundless and hollow, unsustained by living contact, unaccompanied with any realising intuition which exists by and in the act that affirms its existence, which is known because it is, and is, because it is known.

The postulate of philosophy thus arrived at is the Socratic injunction "Know thyself", for philosophy is the "science of BEING altogether". Knowledge, real knowledge (i.e. that which is true), depends on "the coincidence of an object with a subject"; our thought must correspond to the thing represented to it. Coleridge now terms all that is objective "Nature", and all that is subjective "Self". He states the problem of thinking about thinking:

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During the act of knowledge itself, the objective and subjective are so instantly united, that we cannot determine to which of the two the priority belongs. There is here no first, and no second; both are coinstantaneous and one. While I am attempting to explain this intimate coalition, I must suppose it dissolved.

Nature exists without being perceived, and so if we start from the object, we have to account for the subject; this is the task of natural philosophy. Transcendental, or "intelligential" philosophy begins with the subject, and so must account for the object. The transcendental philosopher must not allow the subjective to be intruded on by the objective, and so must 'purify' his mind (as Descartes did by doubt). As the fundamental presumption for the natural philosopher is that things are without us, so for the transcendental philosopher it is: "I am." The latter must demonstrate the identity of the fact of our being, and that nature exists in itself. The "man of common sense" believes that he sees a table, not a phantom table from which he can deduce by argument the existence of a table he does not see. Coleridge opposes this "realism" against contemporary metaphysics,

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which banishes us to a land of shadows, surrounds us with apparitions, and distinguishes truth from illusion only by the majority of those who dream the same dream.

If we know, we must know something: "Truth is correlative to being." In trying to elucidate what he calls his "Dynamic Philosophy" Coleridge seeks an absolute

truth, something "which is, simply because it is". This cannot be an object, because each thing "is what it is in consequence of some other thing"; neither can it be a subject (as distinguished from an object). There is no third term, and so the principle is to be found in the identity of subject and object together: the sum, I am, which Coleridge says he will term indiscriminately "spirit, self, and self-consciousness" (131). The sum

131-2 is a subject which becomes a subject by the act of constructing itself objectively to itself; but which never is an object except for itself, and only so far as by the very same act it becomes a subject.

Coleridge finds that we know ourselves to be, and ourselves as knowing that we are, in a great eternal circle: "I am, because I affirm myself to be; I affirm myself to be, because I am." This knowledge is the "ground" of all that we know. The self must continually dissolve the identity of subject and object in order to know that there is an identity, and thus the self consists in an act, in will:

133 The self-conscious spirit therefore is a will; and freedom must be assumed as a ground of philosophy, and can never be deduced from it.

The principle of self, the "primary ACT of self-duplication", is the indirect principle of all the sciences, and is the "immediate and direct principle of the ultimate science ... transcendental philosophy." Coleridge points out that he

is confining his investigation to transcendental philosophy alone, i.e. to the question of knowledge, and the principle he has arrived at is the principle of knowing, not of being. If the natural and transcendental philosophies were somehow merged (that is, if it were possible to investigate the identity of subject and object without separating them) we would pass from philosophy to religion, in fact the two would become one:

134 We begin with the I KNOW MYSELF, in order to end with the absolute I AM. We proceed from the SELF, in order to lose and find all self in GOD.

Thus Coleridge limits his enquiry to what is possible for us, while having a sense of a more perfect knowledge, out of our reach. He suggests that our primary self-knowing may be derived from some higher consciousness, which may itself be derived from a higher, and so on in an infinite regression. If we attempt - as either natural or transcendental philosophers - to go beyond our self as the ground of our knowledge, we are "whirled down the gulf of an infinite series."

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(vi) Freud

Taking a large leap across the emergence of what is best described, in general and retrospectively, as a

psychological approach to the question of self (German Idealism, Coleridge, etc. in opposition to positivist thought) and leaving aside positivism's conviction that philosophy must be scientific if it is to have cognitive value, we come to Freud and the first really comprehensive, dynamic investigation of what the self might be.

Freud's idea of the self emerges as a complex of relationships, conflicts and compromises inspired by psychic energy. He frequently altered the terms in which he expressed his concepts, as indeed his ideas were developed and modified. In a sense, one could say his entire work is a study of the self. To build up an idea of how he saw the self we must trace a line through his work and attempt to extract what is relevant to our purpose here. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920) Freud wrote that

the study of dreams may be considered the most trustworthy method of investigating deep mental processes.

We may begin, therefore, by looking at The Interpretation of Dreams (1900).

In Chapter 7 - 'Psychology of Dream Processes' - we find this:

There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure; this is because we become aware during the work of interpretation that at that point there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unravelled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream's navel, the spot

671-2 where it reaches down into the unknown. The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought.

Some would say that this 'tangle' is the most interesting and relevant part of the psychic processes, in the question of what the self is. Freud, however, despite his saying (in The Unconscious, 1915) that "a gain in meaning is a perfectly justifiable ground for going beyond the limits of direct experience", was concerned to give a natural scientific model of the mind. Although he swept away many of the 19th century positivists' conceptions, their language and 'spirit' influenced his thought.

In The Interpretation of Dreams Freud assumes that the unconscious is "the general basis of psychical life" (773), and within this lies the smaller sphere of the conscious. Our conscious thoughts all have an unconscious preliminary stage, although not all that is unconscious need come to be conscious. The unconscious is "the true psychical reality", and its innermost nature is unknown to us; unknown, that is, in the way that the external world's "reality" is unknown "by the communications of our sense organs". From his study, Freud develops a system in which "excitatory material" flows into the conscious ('Cs.') from without (the perceptual - Percept. - system) and from within. The concept is marked, as is familiar in Freud's writings, by its topographical description: Freud concretizes his insights. His interest was, after all, practical, not

philosophical: the concept of the unconscious was necessary to his model, and as has already been noted already, he was prepared to put weight on a hypothesis unsupported by experience if it led to a gain in understanding the meaning of the mind's activities.

Having divided the self into unconscious, preconscious and conscious systems, Freud takes the first steps in developing this into the later id, ego and superego in Beyond the Pleasure Principle. Finding that in analysis patients resisted certain ideas, Freud surmised that this originated from the "higher strata" of the mind which carried out repression. The resistance was unconscious in the early stages of treatment, and from this Freud detected a shortcoming in the contrast previously made between the conscious and the unconscious: the distinction should rather be between "the coherent ego and the repressed". Much of the ego, especially what could be called its "nucleus", is unconscious, and only a small part of it can properly be termed "preconscious". Speculating on the evidence of psychoanalysis led Freud to further his description of mental processes and again the concreteness of his model is remarkable:

What consciousness yields consists essentially of perceptions of excitations coming from the external world and of feelings of pleasure and unpleasure which can only arise from within the mental apparatus; it is therefore possible to assign to the system Pcpt. - Cs. a position in space. It must lie on the borderline between outside and inside; it must be turned toward the external world and must envelop the other psychical systems.

A notable feature of Freud's concept of what is, in effect, the self is that view of it as an entity buffeted on all sides by experience and sensation, an entity through and around which "energies" are in constant tension and flux. The "living organism" must be protected against stimuli; this is almost more important than their reception. Our sense organs are provided with protection against "excessive amounts" or "unsuitable kinds" of stimuli:

The protective shield is supplied with its own store of energy and must above all endeavour to preserve the special modes of transformation of energy operating in it against the effects threatened by the enormous energies at work in the external world - effects which tend towards a levelling out of them and hence towards destruction. The main purpose of the reception of stimuli is to discover the direction and nature of the external stimuli; for that it is enough to take small specimens of the external world, to sample it in small quantities.

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This protection cannot, however, be given against stimuli from within the system itself. Taking pleasure and unpleasure as the principles on which the system operates, Freud explains that if too much "unpleasure" comes from within, it is treated as though it was coming from outside in order that the external shield may be used against it: this is the origin of projection.

In keeping with his general view of the self as a nexus of conflicting instincts and drives, Freud has drawn a sharp distinction between 'ego instincts' and sexual instincts, the former being seen as an inclination to death, the latter to life. The case is not, though, so

clear-cut, for there are sexual instincts operating in the ego. Maintaining his dualistic approach, Freud alters his original division to one in which the basic conflict of the self is between life-instincts and death-instincts. Significantly, Freud finds that in "the greatest pleasure attainable by us" (sexual intercourse - "us" being restricted to men) there is a moment of 'extinction' (56) - a sort of fusion of the life- and death-instincts. So far, then, Freud's system is a fairly complex one in which two instincts are in perpetual conflict, and from this conflict arises the psychic energy of our lives. Freud's theory was continually revised, its terms refined and altered, and it is therefore unwise to make conclusive, definite statements about it: it should be seen as a process.

The Ego and the Id (1923, Standard Edition XIX) is a work helpful in clarifying the concepts of the central period of Freud's thought. The fundamental premiss of psychoanalysis is the division into what is conscious and what is unconscious. There are ("We have found - that is, we have been obliged to assume -", 14) powerful mental processes that produce all the effects within the system that ordinary ideas do; indeed, their effects can become conscious as ideas, though the processes themselves do not. Before being made conscious, the ideas are in a state that has been called repression; this is, obviously, a prototype for the unconscious. Further to this, two sorts of unconscious have been discovered: one in which ideas are potentially conscious (Pcs.), and one in which they cannot become so (Ucs.). However, Freud writes, these distinctions now

prove to be inadequate. In each person there is "a coherent organisation of mental processes" which he calls the ego (17), and it is to this that consciousness is attached. The ego controls the discharge of "excitations" into the external world, and it also "supervises all its own constituent processes". The ego "goes to sleep at night" (14) and yet continues to function as a censor on dreams. Here Freud seems to have got himself into difficulties: when awake, the ego prevents repressed instincts from issuing in actions, thus they seek to escape in dreams, a sort of compromise. If the ego sleeps, then instincts hold sway in the mind, but to do this they would need the energy and tension provided by waking life. Sometimes Freud tries to solve the problem by the notion of a "drowsy" ego, but this is unsatisfactory.

In psychoanalysis, repression reveals something in the ego itself that is unconscious; something, that is,

SE XIX which produces powerful effects without itself
17 being conscious and which requires special work
 . before it can be made conscious.

Freud discovers that in view of this finding, from the point of view of analytic practice, it is inadequate to derive neuroses from the conflict between conscious and unconscious. He substitutes for his original antithesis one between the ego and that repressed part which is separated from it. While it is true that all that is repressed is Ucs., not all that is Ucs. is repressed; part of the ego is

Ucs., and this is not, like Pcs., something latent.

Freud turns his attention to thought-processes next,
which

SE XIX
19 represent displacements of mental energy which
 are effected somewhere in the interior of the
 apparatus as this energy proceeds on its way
 towards action

Anything that becomes conscious must at one time have been
conscious already; anything that arises from within,
seeking to become conscious, must try to change into
external perceptions, and this is made possible by means
of memory traces, or what Freud calls "mnemic residues" (20).
Internal thought processes are made into perceptions by
"word-presentations"; Freud takes this as a demonstration
of the theorem that "all knowledge has its origin in
external perception" (23). The model of the self now
receives new dimensions as Freud names that which begins
by being Pcs., starting out from the perceptual system, the
'ego' and "the other part of the mind into which this
entity extends and behaves as though it were Ucs." (23)
the 'id'. An individual is thus seen as a

24 psychical id, unknown and unconscious, upon whose
 surface rests the ego, developed from its nucleus
 the Pcpt. system.

The ego does not envelop the id, and is not sharply
separated from it; the lower portion merges into it,

and through the id, the repressed can communicate with the ego. Freud's concrete visualisation is emphasised by his diagrams of the system he describes. The ego is in direct contact with the external world, through the system Pcpt. - Cs., and tries to bring its influence to bear on the id. It "endeavours to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle which reigns unrestrictedly in the id" (25). Basically, the ego can be taken as representing reason and common sense, whilst the id contains the passions. The ego is also primarily a bodily ego, in that it is ultimately derived from physical sensations.

The 'superego' is "less firmly connected with consciousness" (28). To describe it, Freud returns to his sexual theories. The superego is a "precipitate" in the ego, which is formed from a union of the father- and mother-identifications which are the general result of the sexual phase of development dominated by the Oedipus complex; it is its heir, and thus also "the expression of the most powerful impulses and most important libidinal vicissitudes of the id" (34). The superego is the representative of the internal world (the id), as the ego is of the external. The conflicts between the ego and the superego, the ideal will, are made analogous by Freud to the conflict between real and psychical, external and internal; his model of the mental self thus retains its 'physical' attributes. The superego seems to be a sort of 'spirit', the 'higher man'; it is, says Freud, "the germ from which all religions have

evolved" (37). The superego becomes what can be called conscience through its conflict with the actual performance, in the "real" world, of the ego.

In a late lecture, tellingly entitled The Dissection of the Psychological Personality (1932), Freud says:

89 We wish to make the ego the matter of our enquiry, our very own ego. But is that possible? After all, the ego is in its very essence a subject: how can it be made into an object?
(New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis)

Freud's answer is that the ego can be split, one part observing the other. This subdivision of the ego has been seen always to be a deep theoretical need of Freud's. His 'objectivity' does not, however, preclude him from profound insights:

ibid. 90 [The insane] have turned away from external reality, but for that very reason they know more about internal, psychical reality and can reveal a number of things to us that would otherwise be inaccessible to us.

The superego, it seems, is the agency that 'observes' the ego, but the id is the "dark, inaccessible part of our personality" (105); we learn what we can about the id from the study of dreams and neuroses. Freud always shied away from philosophy (or rather, from philosophizing):

ibid.
106

There is nothing in the id that corresponds to the idea of time; there is no recognition of the passage of time, and - a thing that is most remarkable and awaits consideration in philosophical thought - no alteration in its mental processes is produced by the passage of time.

The ego has simultaneously to obey three "tyrannical" masters: external reality, the superego, and the id. After making these subdivisions, though, Freud would wish us to allow "what we have separated to merge once more". Freud was a scientific observer of and researcher into the mind, whose mechanistic formulations are shot through with brilliant intuitions into the darkness of human minds (intuitions which perhaps are not done justice to in this cursory sketch). Throughout I have equated 'mind' with 'self'; I think the equation justified in the light of Freud's intentions. He was concerned to build up a model of the structure of the mind, by which the work of psychoanalysis could be carried forward:

ibid.
112

Psychoanalysis' intention is, indeed, to strengthen the ego, to make it more independent of the super-ego, to widen its field of perception and enlarge its organisation, so that it can appropriate fresh portions of the id. Where id was, there ego shall be. It is a work of culture - not unlike the draining of the Zuider Zee.

(vii) Merleau-Ponty

Self in the works of Merleau-Ponty is at once an elusive and a most central idea. In all thinking about the self a duality has been introduced, explicitly or tacitly, to explain what it is that thinks 'I'. Merleau-Ponty writes of a "paradox of immanence and transcendence" in perception: a thing perceived is present to the perceiver, and yet there is always something more to it. Perception is the basis of our experience, in Merleau-Ponty's view; it is on this base that we build up other levels of experience (e.g. the cultural world). All consciousness is, in a sense, perceptual, even consciousness of self, and so the experience of self in the mind partakes of that presence and that absence which is always inherent in the paradoxical experience of perception. Addressing the Société française de philosophie shortly after the publication of Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty states the objection to his theory that he is proposing to answer:

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[that] I grasp myself in pure reflection completely outside perception, and that I grasp myself not now as a perceiving subject, tied by its body to a system of things, but as a thinking subject, radically free with respect to things and with respect to the body.

('The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences' in O'Neill ed.)

To answer this Cartesian objection, Merleau-Ponty begins by examining the cogito, finding, in the first place, that the cogito of Descartes and of psychologists is an "instantaneous constatation" by which the thinker is limited to grasping that 'I think' (op.cit. 205). This experience is limited to the instant and to silence; taken as the primary truth, it is incapable of formulation as truth. Secondly, the cogito can be taken in that sense found in Descartes' Regulae as not only the grasping of the fact that 'I think', but also as evidence of the objects that thought intends. Thirdly, Merleau-Ponty finds the only "solid" meaning of the cogito is the act of doubting, "by which I put in question all the possible objects of my experience". Doubt cannot be doubted as it grasps itself in its own operation: the mind grasps itself as a particular thought in act, and is in this way assured of itself as not only thinking, but thinking something in particular. This takes Merleau-Ponty outside the "psychological" cogito, and is the criterion for consciousness of self, as is seen in the chapter on 'The Cogito' in Phenomenology of Perception:

All thought of something is at the same time self-consciousness, failing which it could have no object. At the root of all our experiences and all our reflection, we find, then, a being which immediately recognises itself, because it is its knowledge both of itself and of all things, which knows its own existence, not by observation and as a given fact, nor by inference from any idea of itself, but through direct contact with that existence. Self-consciousness is the very being of mind in action.

In the preface to Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty rejects the scientific conceptions of man, which have dominated philosophy and psychology:

I am not the outcome or the meeting-point of numerous causal agencies which determine my bodily or psychological make-up. I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological or sociological investigation. I cannot shut myself up within the realm of science. All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless.

Man is the "absolute source", whose basic experience of the world is to be recovered by phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty rejects the 'inner man' of St Augustine; we know ourselves only as in the world, and a true coqito reveals us as "being-in-the-world". In Phenomenology of Perception, as J.F. Bannan has said, (The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty), the central problem is the paradox of how there is "for us an in itself" (Phenomenology, 71). There is no universal resolution of one and other for Merleau-Ponty: the other (alter ego) is a problem:

But this is precisely the question: how can the word 'I' be put into the plural, how can a general idea of the I be formed, how can I speak of an I other than my own, how can I know that there are other I's, how can consciousness which, by its nature, and as self-knowledge, is in the mode of the I, be grasped in the mode of Thou, and through this, in the world of the 'one' ?

(Phenomenology of Perception)

The other stands before me as an in itself, and yet exists for himself: I must treat him as the former to distinguish him from myself, and as the latter in order that he can be a consciousness perceiving me. It is not my consciousness that is myself (that consciousness discerned by reflection) but that constitutes my self; consciousness is not enclosed within myself, so that it can constitute "other (my)selves" (358).

Perception is our experience of "our presence at the moment when things, truths, values are constituted for us". In Phenomenology of Perception Merleau-Ponty tries to define a method "for getting closer to present and living reality", and applies this method to man's relation to reality and to others at the level of perceptual experience; it should (he says in that address to the Société referred to above) be applied to other areas of man's relation to others. Throughout his writings, Merleau-Ponty comes again and again to a view of our being characterised by paradox:

If we actually reflect on our situation, we will find that the subject, thus situated in the world and submitting to its influence, is at the same time he who thinks the world. No world whatsoever is conceivable that is not thought by someone. Hence while it is true that the empirical subject is a part of the world, it is also true that the world is no more than an intentional object for the transcendental subject.

241

(Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man' in J.O'Neill, ed.)

We live in constant tension, of being and of time;

ibid. 211 Just as I grasp time through my present, I perceive others through my individual life, in the tension of an experience which transcends itself.

For Merleau-Ponty there are, as we have seen, two selves: the empirical, and the transcendental. In phenomenology - specifically in what Husserl called the 'reduction' - the transcendental (unreflected) self seeks to explain both the manifestations of the external world and the empirical, incarnate self.

In the ambiguous self, Merleau-Ponty finds, as he thought Montaigne did,

123 the place of all obscurities, the mystery of mysteries, and something like an ultimate truth ('Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence', in O'Neill, ed.)

)
Merleau-Ponty's ultimate truth is the primacy of perception in seeking to understand our being-in-the-world. The body is the medium through which we experience the world:

82 The body is the vehicle of being-in-the-world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be interinvolved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them.

(Phenomenology of Perception)

Phenomenology is in many ways a philosophical method especially

for the elucidation of the self, for it treats man in his being, rather than as an object. This sketch does scant justice to Merleau-Ponty's work, but it should show at least the entirely different conceptual framework with which this modern movement approached perennial problems.

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(viii) R.D. Laing

R.D. Laing uses the insights of phenomenology to examine the self of a person who, for one reason or another, has deviated from what the majority regards as normal. Although Laing is careful to point out the narrow limits of his interest in The Divided Self (1960), his ideas can be extended far beyond those limits: he himself gives an example of his thesis' wider relevance in his frequent reference to writers and artists (most notably Holderlin, Kafka, Blake, Dostoevski). The Divided Self is concerned with schizoid and schizophrenic individuals: a schizoid person is not able

to experience himself 'together with' others or 'at home' in the world ... he does not experience himself as a complete person but rather as 'split' in various ways, perhaps as a mind more or less tenuously linked to a body, as two or more selves, and so on.

17

Man is split up in the language of psychoanalysis and

psychiatry, and thus an examination can never take as its starting point a unitary whole, as man is a collection of components: psyche and soma, mind and body, personality, self. Into this language of division Laing brings the thought of Heidegger, Binswanger, Merleau-Ponty - that unifying movement of modern thought that sees man as being-in-the-world. The other, in the language of existential phenomenology, as seen as person or organism, is "the object of different intentional acts" (op.cit.,21).

Laing questions the validity of our concepts of sanity and insanity: a person is called sane by common consent; insanity is a disjunction of a certain degree between two people, one of whom is accepted as sane. A sane person has an autonomous sense of identity, and we will see that autonomy is important in Laing's understanding of the so-called insane person. Ontological insecurity leads a person to learn tricks to get by in life:

37. 'All that you can see is not me', he says to himself. But only in and through all that we do see can he be anyone (in reality).

Such a person is "irreal" if his actions are not his real self: if once he stops pretending to be what he is not, and

37. steps out as the person he has come to be, he emerges as Christ, or a ghost, but not as a man: by existing with no body, he is no-body.

What is essential to Laing's understanding is that what is true existentially for a person is lived by that person as 'really' true.

Self, to Laing, is a core of being, that voice with which we address ourselves within. An ontologically insecure person might feel his self partially divorced from his body (42). All the efforts of such a person are towards preserving an identity, a self: he can take nothing for granted, but must keep a tight control over every aspect of his life, both alone and in relation to others. Others threaten the insecure person with loss of self in three ways:

- (i) by love or understanding, the self may be 'engulfed', lost in the other;
- (ii) if the individual feels he is an empty space, he fears the implosion of reality, even while longing for the space to be filled;
- (iii) others may deprive one of subjectivity, treating one as an 'it'.

The insecure self is thus particularly vulnerable in the world at large, as Laing explains:

...if one experiences the other as a free agent, one is open to the possibility of experiencing oneself as an object of his experience and thereby of feeling one's own subjectivity drained away. One is threatened with the possibility of becoming no more than a thing in the world of the other, without any life for oneself, without any being for oneself. In terms of such anxiety, the very act of experiencing the other as a person is felt as virtually suicidal.

The self is the "basic existential core" of a person, and its autonomy is essential to the person's sense of identity, of being at home in the world. The first move in the establishment of this autonomy is the sense of being separate from other people; an ontologically insecure person feels bound up with others "in a sense that transgresses the actual possibilities within the structure of human relatedness" (52).

The primary split in an ontologically insecure person is between mind and body: usually the person feels most closely identified with mind; that is, his self is predominantly felt as a mental entity. An embodied person feels that he began when his body did and will die when it does; if a person is unembodied, has never quite become incarnate, he feels somewhat detached from his body. Thus there is what Laing calls a "basic difference in the self's position in life" (66): although the basic issues arise in the same way for the unembodied as for the embodied person, the contexts in which they are experienced are radically different, and thus the issues are lived differently. Although embodiment may not ensure ontological security, it is a starting-point which is

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the precondition for a different hierarchy of possibilities from those open to the person who experiences himself in terms of a self-body dualism.

An unembodied person develops a false self with which to live in the world; the body (by whose actions this self

is known in the world) is the core of the false self. Thus the 'true' self, that insecure self that hides within, cannot directly experience the world because it is mediated through the body. Laing illustrates this split with the case of "David", who holds what he calls his 'own', 'inner', 'true', or 'real' self to have nothing to do with those activities by which he is known to others, which he calls his 'personality'. 'Personality' is a false-self system; the real self remains hidden, treating the false selves as depersonalized others. Once a person has come to experience himself in this way, a process of self-destruction is initiated, for what is intended to defend the timid 'inner' self in fact destroys it. Often the inner self is split as it seeks to become "a relationship which relates itself to itself".

It is not by any means certain that such a person will develop to the psychotic stage and disintegrate, but it is the path to such a state that Laing is concerned with here. It is, he notes, (89) possible to "live out" "authentic versions of freedom, power and creativity". This is especially true of many schizoid artists: though relatively isolated from others, they succeed in "establishing a creative relationship with things in the world, which are made to embody the figures of their fantasy" (89). Laing has pointed the way to a most fruitful and interesting relationship between the self of an artist and his created work; reading The Divided Self many of Virginia Woolf's characters come to mind (e.g. Rhoda and Louis in The Waves,

Septimus Smith in Mrs. Dalloway). In much literature, especially that of the modernist period, Laing discovers insights very similar to his own, (which are, of course, based on clinical experience): Blake, Beckett, Kafka, have all written of states of mind (from a subjective point of view) which Laing encounters in treating schizoid and schizophrenic individuals.

The schizoid person lives in the heart of the despair and paradox that characterises so much thought and art in the twentieth century. Often he believes in his own destructiveness:

In the last resort he sets about murdering his 'self', and this is not as easy as cutting one's throat. He descends into a vortex of non-being in order to avoid being, but also to preserve being from himself.

93

The 'inner' self crouches within, looking out on perceptions and actions it feels have nothing to do with it: its aim is transcendence, to be a pure subject, and so it must never allow itself to be influenced by experience, which would pin it down and give it an objective existence. In order to feel 'real', however, the schizoid individual must be "self-conscious" either temporally or spatially. The individual moves even closer to a psychotic state because the false-self system cannot really provide the sense of reality the inner self requires. The inner self, becoming more and more isolated and hating, yet desperately needing, the false-self system, has to devise ways of "acquiring"

reality. This it achieves by touching, imitating, or stealing in a "magical" way. Spiralling ever downwards, towards psychosis, the schizoid individual feels "guilty at daring to be, and doubly guilty at not being, at being too terrified to be" (157). Psychiatry usually cannot detect the imminent disintegration of the inner self as it is concerned with accounting for the false selves.

Ultimately, the inner self fragments into several parts, all of which have a certain sense of 'I', and all of which regard the rest as others ("not-me", 158).

The inner self is the centre of the person's being, for that person. If this centre does not hold, neither the body-experience nor the self-experience of the person can retain a sense of identity. The individual is flung into a state Laing suggests could best be described as "chaotic nonentity":

162 In its final form, such complete disintegration is a hypothetical state which has no verbal equivalents. ... In its most extreme form it is perhaps not compatible with life.

Language has been vitally important to Laing from the outset of his study; it is worth noting his belief in states of mind that go beyond the limits of language, for if these are possible it can easily be seen how language distorts our ideas of others and of self, by supposing that language always coincides with the reality it is intended to represent. In Laing's view, schizophrenia comes to mean the outcome of

189 a more than usual difficulty in being a whole person with the other, and with not sharing the common-sense (i.e. community sense) way of experiencing oneself in the world.

Identity requires an other; it has to be realised through relationship. In Self and Others (1961) Laing continues his investigations into self:

86 Every relationship implies a definition of self by other and of other by self. ... A person's 'own' identity cannot be completely abstracted from his identity-for-others. His identity-for-himself; the identity others ascribe to him; the identities he attributes to them; the identity or identities he thinks they attribute to him; what he thinks they think he thinks they think ...

Self, for Laing, can mean many things: an inner self which is the voice with which we address ourselves; or how each other in our lives experiences us. Self is not static, nor is it necessarily ever completely known:

ibid. 126 In 'putting myself into' what I do, I lose myself, and in so doing I seem to become myself. The act I do is felt to be me, and I become 'me' in and through such action. Also, there is a sense in which a person 'keeps himself alive' by his acts; each act can be a new beginning, a new birth, a re-creation of oneself, a self-fulfilling.

In all his works Laing sees the self as the being-in-the-world of the individual. To be in the world in the most fulfilled way is to seek out self and come to terms with it in the world of others; in this, Laing is following exactly the

path of his philosopher predecessors:

127 To be 'authentic' is to be true to oneself, to be what one is, to be genuine. To be 'inauthentic' is to not be oneself, to be false to oneself: to be not as one appears to be, to be counterfeit.

If this appears over-simple, or difficult to grasp, it is because Laing can only indicate how self is to be realised. Each individual must come to terms with being, within and for his own particular self.

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