

VIRGINIA WOOLF:
THE UNFATHOMABLE DEEP
AND
ROMANTIC TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

The first chapter is an attempt to demonstrate the relationship between certain key features of Virginia Woolf's work and the artistic and philosophical theories of the English Romantics. Particular attention is focused upon the common distinction between two contrasting orders of experience, which are metaphorically denominated "the depths" and "the surface" in the writings of Virginia Woolf. Discussion follows of the pattern or rhythm, designated "the Rebirth archetype", into which these two states often fall, and its significance both in art and in life. Within this context, as well as that of Romantic myth in general, Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, and the final section of The Waves are examined in the following three chapters.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS AND EDITIONS USED
OF VIRGINIA WOOLF'S WORKS

- AWD A Writer's Diary, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth Press, 1969).
- BA Between the Acts (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972).
- CE Collected Essays, 4 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1966-67).
- D Mrs Dalloway (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972).
- HH A Haunted House and Other Short Stories (London: Hogarth Press, 1953).
- L To the Lighthouse (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969).
- O Orlando: A Biography (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970).
- VO The Voyage Out (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970).
- W The Waves (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971).

Quotations from the essays, novels, and diary will be identified by page references incorporated into the text. Where no abbreviation is given, reference to the novel which is named or implied in the chapter heading may be assumed.

I

THE ROMANTIC HERITAGE

1.

It is a curiosity of modern criticism that the affiliation between the work of Virginia Woolf and that of the English Romantics has never been adequately examined. While detailed studies have been made of the influence of Romanticism upon artists like D. H. Lawrence, W. B. Yeats, and Wallace Stevens, the subject receives no more than a passing mention -- if that -- in the major critical books devoted to Virginia Woolf. And yet her indebtedness to Romantic theory and ideas is at least the equal of any of the above-mentioned writers'; indeed, it may be seen as an element of almost central importance in her fiction.

As an introduction to this whole question, we may briefly consider Mrs Woolf's first and most important statement of her own artistic position. Quentin Bell has called "Mr

Bennett and Mrs Brown" "Virginia's own private manifesto";¹ and, as such, it may bear some comparison, in the spirit if not the letter, with another "manifesto", the "Preface" to the second edition of the Lyrical Ballads. Each refutes some manner of "neoclassic theory and practice";² each reacts against a conception of art that places a higher value upon externals, upon "something outside", than upon "things in themselves" (CE, I, 327). Wordsworth approaches his humble rustics, as Virginia Woolf approaches Mrs Brown, in an attempt to convey the mystery of "the spirit we live by, life itself" (CE, I, 337). And both writers recognize the crucial importance of the evocation of "feelings" in such attempts; Mrs Woolf's statement that "both in writing and in reading it is the emotion that must come first" (CE, II, 126) has all the stark, uncompromising boldness of an early pronouncement by William Hazlitt or J. S. Mill. In short, it is not too far-fetched to consider Virginia Woolf's position in 1924 with respect to the Edwardian novelists as being in a way analogous to the artistic reaction of "imagination" against "reason", as Shelley understands those terms in the first paragraph of A Defence of Poetry.

¹Virginia Woolf: A Biography, II, 105.

²English Romantic Writers, ed. Perkins, p. 320.

11.

As I hope to demonstrate, however, the affinities between Mrs Woolf's art and the Romantic tradition are much deeper and stronger than these few preliminary observations might suggest. That they may be put into the context of critical opinion, let us examine the writings of one of the major modern commentators on Romantic theory. In his essay, "The Romantic Myth", Northrop Frye regards Romanticism primarily as a re-interpretation or transformation of Christian mythology. The "unfallen state, or lost paradise of Eden" of Christian myth is now seen as

a sense of an original identity between the individual man and nature which has been lost . . . Man has "fallen", not so much into sin as into the original sin of self-consciousness, into his present subject-object relation to nature, where, because his consciousness is what separates him from nature, the primary conscious feeling is one of separation. The alienated man cut off from nature by his consciousness is the Romantic equivalent of post-Edenic Adam.³

To be in such a state is to know only one's self, and therefore to suffer. But there is a remedy, one which "seeks to draw the antidote to self-consciousness from consciousness itself. A way is to be found not to escape from or limit knowledge but to convert it into an energy finer than intellectual."⁴ Frye

³A Study of English Romanticism, pp. 17-18.

⁴Hartman, "Romanticism and Antiself-consciousness", reprinted in Romanticism: Points of View (2nd ed.), eds. Gleckner and Enscoe, pp. 287-88.

calls such "energy" "expanded knowledge", and points out that it is identified by Wordsworth and Coleridge with the imagination.⁵ The chief "way" in which self-conscious knowledge is "converted" is the practice of poetry, which attempts to reunite nature with man "by the primitive and simple forms of union, analogy and identity, simile and metaphor",⁶ just as mythology, from which poetry descends, shows man united with nature in such figures as sun-gods and sea-gods.⁷ Thus, as the human imagination seeks the best "unself-conscious medium for itself",⁸ man tries to find again his true "Self", his original "identity".

Now whereas in the older mythology the spatial metaphors for this quest were upward ones, "in Romanticism the main direction of the quest of identity tends increasingly to be downward and inward, toward a hidden basis or ground of identity between man and nature"⁹ and "is often expressed in imagery of depth or descent".¹⁰ The descent is frequently

⁵A Study of English Romanticism, p. 20.

⁶Cf. AWD, p. 97: "Returning health This is shown by the power to make images; the suggestive power of every sight and word is enormously increased. Shakespeare must have had this to an extent which makes my normal state the state of a person blind, deaf, dumb, stone-stockish and fish-blooded."

⁷Frye, p. 10.

⁸Hartman in Romanticism: Points of View, p. 289.

⁹Frye, p. 33.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 47.

made through water (due partially to the influence of the myth of Atlantis, the sunken island kingdom),¹¹ and its goal is always a feminine one (for the nature from which man has been cut off is, in its principal aspect, his mother).¹² However, in somewhat the same way that external nature is, in Shelley's phrase, both "destroyer and preserver" and human pleasure is so intimately connected with pain,¹³ so the communion which is achieved in the depths "may be with a God who is the ultimate reality of both man and nature, or it may simply be with an amoral nature."¹⁴ Death is often associated with this experience because it is "the only point at which one visibly enters into an identity with nature" and therefore "all we can usually see of what may or may not be the fullest entering into life."¹⁵ One of Frye's major conclusions, then, is that the journey down to the fountainhead of one's being is a brave but perilous one. "Just as the sun is the means

¹¹Frye, "The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism", in Romanticism Reconsidered, ed. Frye, pp. 17-18.

¹²Frye, A Study of English Romanticism, p. 18.

¹³Ibid., p. 43. Cf. Rachel Vinrace's question: "why was there so much pain in happiness?" (VO, p. 290); and "The String Quartet": "Sorrow, sorrow. Joy, joy . . . Woven together, inextricably, commingled . . ." (HH, p. 29).

¹⁴Frye, A Study of English Romanticism, p. 34.

¹⁵Ibid.

but not a tolerable object of sight, so the attempt to turn around and see the source of one's vision may be destructive¹⁶ . . . Thus the world of the deep interior of Romantic poetry is morally ambivalent";¹⁷ it may be either new heaven or new hell.

One of the chief contemporary theorists of this world was Thomas Carlyle. In his essay of 1831 entitled "Characteristics", he describes man's primordial identity with nature as a state of "paradisaic [sic] Unconsciousness",¹⁸ in which "we stood as in the centre of Nature, giving and receiving, in harmony with it all".¹⁹ We have since been condemned to "conscious" life, and so to "Division, Dismemberment"; this state, however, is but the tip of the proverbial iceberg:

Of our Thinking, we might say, it is but the mere upper surface that we shape into articulate Thoughts; -- underneath the region of argument and conscious discourse, lies the region of meditation; here, in its quiet mysterious depths, dwells what vital force is in us; here, if aught is to be created, and not merely manufactured and communicated, must the work go on. Manufacture is intelligible, but trivial; Creation is great, and cannot be understood.²⁰

¹⁶One is reminded here of the recurrent image in Virginia Woolf of the moth playing about the flame, or the bird dashed into the glass that covers the lighthouse beam.

¹⁷Romanticism Reconsidered, p. 19.

¹⁸Critical and Miscellaneous Essays, IV, 3.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 2.

²⁰Ibid., p. 4.

Yet when Carlyle discusses somewhat later the context of "Creation", it no longer seems quite so quiet or amenable to meditation: "Evil, in the widest sense we can give it, is precisely the dark, disordered material out of which man's Freewill has to create an edifice of order and Good."²¹ It is clear that the "unconsciousness" of the depths of the self is not now so "paradisiac" as it was before its antithesis came into being: "on the bottomless boundless Deep . . . all human things fearfully and wonderfully swim";²²

Under all [Nature's] works, chiefly under her noblest work, Life, lies a basis of Darkness, which she benignantly conceals; in Life too, the roots and inward circulations which stretch down fearfully to the regions of Death and Night, shall not hint of their existence, and only the fair stem with its leaves and flowers, shone on by the fair sun, shall disclose itself, and joyfully grow.²³

A substantial number of these insights, as one might suspect with Carlyle, were originally suggested to him by the writings of a German author of the previous generation, Jean Paul Friedrich Richter, whose work Carlyle did much to popularize in England through essays and commentary. Richter is more explicit than his disciple with regard to the ambivalence -- indeed, the chaos -- of "the night-side of the unconscious".²⁴

²¹Ibid., p. 25.

²²Ibid., p. 3.

²³Ibid., p. 4. Cf. the imagery applied to Louis in The Waves, as on p. 9.

²⁴Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, p. 211.

It is the common origin of the devil and the Infinite, of terror and guilt and of dreams and poetry. (In fact, Richter associates the genius and the sleep-walker; the former "'in his clear dream . . . is capable of more than in waking, and in darkness does he mount every height of reality.'"²⁵) M. H. Abrams has pointed out the similarities between Richter's concept and Jung's "collective unconscious", which is as well "a primordial abyss whence emerge the monsters of our dreams and night-fears, and also the visions of our myth makers, poets, and seers."²⁶ Here then is some corroboration of Frye's argument that "for Romantic mythology the greatest experiences of life originate in a world which is also the world of death and destruction."²⁷

Having consulted both a modern and a contemporary commentator, let us now turn to one of the most famous poems of the Romantic legacy, Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner". The Mariner can be seen as the archetypal Romantic hero, cut off from an original communion with nature²⁸ by some inexplicable crime against her, in consequence of which his voyage leads him out into "that silent sea" where no man has

²⁵Quoted in Abrams, p. 212.

²⁶Abrams, p. 211.

²⁷A Study of English Romanticism, p. 44.

²⁸Ibid., p. 18.

ever been before²⁹ (at this point we may tacitly note the possible significance of this motif). Suddenly the ship is becalmed (Georges Poulet has remarked upon the "meditative immobility"³⁰ of the depths of the self). In her discussion of the poem, Maud Bodkin focuses particularly upon the "ambivalent character"³¹ of the "slimy things"³² which the Mariner sees in the ocean, and speculates as to "what kind of symbolic value the imagination of Coleridge, ever seeking a language for something within, would feel in those shapes, slimy and miscreate in the stagnant water, that yet glowed with gemlike colour and strange fire."³³ Miss Bodkin then directs us to the very modern analogue used by Abrams. "Progression", writes Carl Jung, is

"the daily advance of the process of psychological adaptation" [i.e., in Carlyle's terms, the business of "conscious" living, on the "surface"], which, at certain times, fails. Then "the vital feeling" disappears . . . and repressed contents appear, of inferior and unadapted character. "Slime out of the depths" he calls such contents . . . -- but slime that contains not only "objectionable animal tendencies, but also germs of new possibilities of

²⁹English Romantic Writers, ed. Perkins, p. 407, 11. 105-06.

³⁰Metamorphoses of the Circle, p. 93.

³¹Archetypal Patterns in Poetry, p. 52.

³²English Romantic Writers, p. 407, l. 125.

³³Archetypal Patterns in Poetry, pp. 42-43.

life." . . . Before "a renewal of life" can come about, Jung urges, there must be an acceptance of the possibilities that lie in the unconscious contents "activated through regression . . . and disfigured by the slime of the deep".³⁴

And so, in this reading of the poem, the Ancient Mariner, by "accepting" the creatures of the calm, takes his first step toward self-redemption; the ship can sail back to land.

Jung's theory of a psychological pattern involving first an apparent loss of "vitality" ("Regression") and then "a renewal of life" ("Progression"), and its perceptible relationship to the structure of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", plainly sets Frye's discussion of the Romantic myth of descent in a new and broader perspective. Miss Bodkin, having examined image-sequences in Coleridge, Verhaeren, and the Book of Jonah (with its myth of "'the night journey under the sea'"³⁵), suggests the pattern of, first, "a movement downward, or inward toward the earth's centre, or a cessation of movement";³⁶ a "sinking down toward quiescence [here we take note of the Mariner's "gentle sleep"³⁷], as in the womb of the mother";³⁸ "a transition toward severed relation with

³⁴ Ibid., p. 52.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 54.

³⁷ English Romantic Writers, p. 409, l. 295.

³⁸ Archetypal Patterns in Poetry, p. 68.

the outer world, and, it may be, toward disintegration and death. This element in the pattern is balanced by a movement upward and outward -- an expansion or outburst of activity, a transition toward reintegration and life-renewal"³⁹ -- which latter element is exemplified in the Mariner's "renewed child-like vision, reaching outward in love and delight"⁴⁰ toward moon and stars, and the sea-creatures they illumine. And to this general pattern is given the name of "the Rebirth archetype".⁴¹

Georges Poulet, in his discussion of Fichte, describes the operation of the two elements in the pattern in this way: "man is an autonomous source of light and power, a will which projects itself from beyond its original contraction. First the 'I' takes shape in its initial punctuality, then it radiates in the circle of the 'not I'."⁴² Many manifestations of this "archetypal pattern" are to be found as well in English Romantic theory. There is the famous combination in A Defence of Poetry, for example, of Platonism and a kind of neo-Augustan doctrine of the "sympathetic imagination": "Shelley describes the poet as envisioning his Ideas in isolation from an audience,

³⁹Ibid., p. 54.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 70.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 54.

⁴²Metamorphoses of the Circle, p. 99.

like a nightingale who 'sings to cheer its own solitude'; nevertheless, the effect of his poetry is centrally moral,"⁴³ and, in the poet's own words, the "great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person not our own."⁴⁴ The two facets of Shelley's theory complement each other, and are to be understood in a distinct order. Carlyle also conceives of two phases in a pattern, one being private and individual, the other social and moral; for him, society is "a new collective individual . . . a second all-embracing life, wherein our first individual Life becomes doubly and trebly alive, and whatever of Infinitude was in us bodies itself forth and becomes visible and active."⁴⁵

Yet it is also possible, I believe, to assign a peculiarly artistic significance (besides the social/moral one) to the outward-and-upward movement of the pattern. Coleridge, describing the process of poetic creation, writes that "the artist must first eloin himself from nature in order to return to her with full effect . . . He merely absents himself for a season from her, that his own spirit, which has the same ground with nature, may learn her unspoken language in its main

⁴³ Abrams, p. 130.

⁴⁴ English Romantic Writers, p. 1076.

⁴⁵ Critical and Miscellaneous Essays, IV, 11.

radicals, before he approaches to her endless compositions of them."⁴⁶ In other words, he abandons "natura naturata", descends into the depths for the vital imaginative ore of "natura naturans", and then returns to "body forth" his insights in another of nature's many "compositions" -- that is, a work of art. It is only upon the return to "consciousness" that the poem can be written, shaped, literally "created", for although the depths of the self contain the visionary ore, it is crude ore, wordless, its language as yet "unspoken". When Coleridge says that the secondary Imagination is the faculty which "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates",⁴⁷ his omitted syntactical object is "the conscious awareness of 'natura naturata'." The idea is very close to Miss Bodkin's "downward movement toward disintegration". The upward movement, on the other hand,⁴⁸ is represented in the last half of the sentence: "in order to re-create, . . . to idealize and to unify." The final result, in the words of Albert Gérard, is "a work which is an analogue of nature because it reveals the ideal unity underneath the diversity of its sensuous appearances."⁴⁹

⁴⁶"On Poesy or Art", in English Romantic Writers, p. 494.

⁴⁷Biographia Literaria, XIII, in English Romantic Writers, p. 452.

⁴⁸This is not to imply, of course, the operation of two separate activities, but rather two facets of one organic process.

⁴⁹"On the Logic of Romanticism", reprinted in Romanticism: Points of View, p. 264.

The whole matter of the "ideal unity" of nature and therefore of the great work of art leads us to the crucial question of Romantic epistemology -- the relation between self and non-self, subject and object. The direction of the flow of imaginative energy may vary -- in Wordsworth, the object is assimilated into "the egotistical sublime"; in Keats, the self is "negatively capable" of entering into the essence of the object⁵⁰ -- but the "energy" itself is always a constant factor. As Coleridge wrote, in nature, "every Thing has a Life of it's own, & . . . we are all one Life."⁵¹ The goal of Coleridge's own epistemology is nothing less than the reconciliation of the dualism of nature and the self, "that they may be 'coinstantaneous and one'."⁵² And since it is only in the expansive depths of the self that this reconciliation can be effected, "ultimate knowledge is self-knowledge, for only in this act are subject and object one."⁵³ Therefore, epistemological "direction", if one may put it that way, is not so important as the fact that "in the Romantic construct there is

⁵⁰See Wasserman, "The English Romantics: The Grounds of Knowledge", reprinted in Romanticism: Points of View, p. 340.

⁵¹Letter to Sotheby, in English Romantic Writers, p. 526.

⁵²Wasserman in Romanticism: Points of View, p. 341.

⁵³Ibid.

a center where inward and outward manifestations of a common motion and spirit are unified, where the ego is identified as itself because it is also identified with something which is not itself."⁵⁴

To quote one of Coleridge's most encyclopaedic apothegms, then, "the mystery of genius in the Fine Arts" is "to make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought, and thought nature".⁵⁵ Shelley echoes this when he writes of the fortunate few who "are always children."

Those who are subject to the state called reverie feel as if their nature were dissolved into the surrounding universe, or as if the surrounding universe were absorbed into their being. They are conscious of no distinction. And these are states which precede, or accompany, or follow an unusually intense and vivid apprehension of life.⁵⁶

Such an "apprehension" is most frequently, of course, the experience of the poet, for it is especially he who feels himself to be "part of a total process, engaged with and united to a creative power greater than his own because it includes his own."⁵⁷ Frye christens this the poet's "vehicular form". This "sense of identity with a larger power" is sometimes

⁵⁴Frye, Romanticism Reconsidered, p. 17.

⁵⁵"On Poesy or Art", in English Romantic Writers, p. 494.

⁵⁶"On Life", in English Romantic Writers, pp. 1069-70.

⁵⁷Frye, Romanticism Reconsidered, p. 14.

"a heightened state of consciousness in which we feel that we are greater than we know, or an intense feeling of communion".⁵⁸ The vast creative power of which man sporadically has intimations is, in all probability, the home from which he has been exiled, the true Self from which he has split away into mere self-consciousness. It is the One Mind, the One Spirit, the One Life that meets us constantly in the Romantic corpus. In its most radical dramatization, it is Blake's Albion -- the primordial God-man who is the ultimate reality of all things.

111.

In August, 1899, seventeen-year-old Virginia Stephen and her sister were bicycling in the countryside, and a letter records their falling into a "'mystical'", "'dreamy'" and cloud-haunted mood: "'Coming back we forgot all our cares . . . in gazing -- absorbing -- sinking into -- the Sky.'"⁵⁹ Nineteen years later, Mrs Woolf wrote an essay in which she praises George Meredith for "his power of summoning nature into sympathy with man and of merging him in her vastness" (CE, I, 237). Without pretending to garb our subject in the philosopher's mantle and attribute to her a consistent "doctrine", we may

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 15.

⁵⁹Bell, Virginia Woolf: A Biography, I, 66.

acknowledge the fact that both of these passages feature perfect balance and reciprocity with regard to the relation of man and nature -- a reciprocity very like that which characterizes Coleridge's most famous theoretical statements. In fact, most of Virginia Woolf's fictional approaches to "reality" are fundamentally Romantic; the most important of these will now be examined.

All of Mrs Woolf's writings, regardless of specific genre, find their common thematic and metaphorical centre in the key Romantic distinction between two orders of experience -- (self-)consciousness and un(self-)consciousness. Other variations upon these two correlatives which appear frequently in her work include day and night, waking life and sleep, time and eternity, fact and vision, masculinity and femininity, egotism and impersonality, and -- perhaps most importantly -- "the surface" and "the depths".⁶⁰ Many critics have commented upon her habitual employment in the novels of the latter pair of images; they also occur constantly in the pages of her diary, a fact which indicates that the surface/depths schema may enclose a central truth about Virginia Woolf's very

⁶⁰That the concern with two worlds or two realities is a basic Woolfian characteristic has now been generally accepted by most critics. One, Irma Rantavaara, is of an opinion which is rather extreme and yet contains a kernel of truth: she feels that the tendency to "see everything arranged in antithetical patterns" is the mark of a "true romantic" ["On Romantic Imagery in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, with a Special Reference to Antithesis", Neophilologische Mitteilungen, LX (April, 1959), 77].

personality. In the depths the work of creation goes on; to surface is to assume a social identity:

I want as usual to dig deep down into my new stories without having a looking glass flashed in my eyes . . . (AWD, p. 74).

Sydney comes and I'm Virginia; when I write I'm merely a sensibility. Sometimes I like being Virginia, but only when I'm scattered and various and gregarious. Now, so long as we are here, I'd like to be only a sensibility (AWD, p. 48).

After a period of social activity, she cries: "O to be private, alone, submerged" (AWD, p. 295), and protests, "I am going to . . . let myself down into my mind" (AWD, p. 142). Moreover, in the diary as in the novels, the depths are watery; the author longs to be "slipping tranquilly off into the deep water of my own thoughts navigating the underworld" (AWD, p. 80).

This underworld can be navigated in various ways and with various degrees of success. In Virginia Woolf's work, we find that sleep, illness, daydream, submission to drugs, and artistic creation can all lead, to one extent or another, within its precincts. Furthermore -- and this is in the best Romantic tradition -- it is an obviously ambivalent realm. Referring to her own personal experience, Mrs Woolf wrote: "'the dark underworld has its fascinations as well as its terrors.'"⁶¹ When one is ill, one "is now exalted on a peak and needs no help from man or God, and now grovels supine on the floor"

⁶¹ Unpublished diary entry, quoted by Bell, Virginia Woolf: A Biography, II, 84.

(CE, IV, 195). Similar imagery is used in the essay, "The Moment: Summer's Night", where the night-watchers first feel themselves unified, "all embracing, all gathering," and part of the snowy peaks on which they lie "augustly" exposed to the light of the moon, and then give rein to the impulse "to be consumed", to be the rider of the random wind which gallops nowhere, "to be part of the eyeless dark" (CE, II, 294-96).

Entry into the world of the unfathomable deep can also be brought about through the acute experience of a powerful emotion, such as that aroused by love or death; this is plainly the context within which the drama of The Voyage Out is played. In a provocative new book, James Naremore has examined intensively the "extraordinary ambivalence"⁶² of the depth-imagery in Virginia Woolf's first novel. The voyage out, which Harvena Richter translates as a voyage "in"⁶³ -- to the depths of the self -- does indeed bring both "death" and "some unexampled joy" (VO, p. 28) to Rachel. As he tries to confront the fact of Rachel's illness, Terence Hewet feels at one moment that "the real world, the world that lay beneath the superficial world", is a world of peace, security and forgetfulness (VO, p. 348); at the next that it is one of pain and suffering (VO, p. 350). But Rachel's death makes it clear that the "peace"

⁶²The World Without a Self, p. 38.

⁶³Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage, p. 28.

he imagines is a specious one, and seems to confirm Helen Ambrose's fear that, "underneath", "terrible things" are going on, moving to the command of some "profound and reasonless law" (VO, p. 266). Certainly the predominant mood of the novel owes something to Romanticism, but it is a post-1830 decadent Romanticism. The Voyage Out was Virginia Woolf's first and last Schopenhauerian work;⁶⁴ it is atypical insofar as it weighs the balance in favour of "the waters of annihilation" (CE, IV, 193).

Yet there may possibly be another explanation for Rachel's fate, one which owes less allegiance to the gratuitously chaotic and destructive nature of the depths than Naremore, in his zeal to prove his thesis that Virginia Woolf is an erotic visionary fascinated by death,⁶⁵ would have us believe. Let us recall for a moment the Romantic reformulation of the myth of the Fall: man once enjoyed a sense of identity with nature, but has now split away from her into a separate consciousness. There is a scene in The Voyage Out in which Hirst and Helen stand on a terrace which affords a panoramic view of town, plain, mountains and sea (VO, p. 207). Helen wordlessly sweeps her arm out in a wide arc, as if to say, "All this is our heritage." But no character in the novel ever consistently

⁶⁴See Frye, A Study of English Romanticism, p. 32.

⁶⁵The World Without a Self, p. 3.

considers the universe as such. Time and again it is seen as something apart and alien from man, and usually hostile and menacing as well. One of Terence's final impressions about the world is that it is immeasurably enormous, and in ludicrous opposition to all these "tiny men and women . . . The nearness of their bodies in this vast universe, and the minuteness of their bodies, seemed to him absurd and laughable. Nothing mattered, he repeated; they had no power, no hope" (VO, pp. 350-51). Rachel too has intimations of human life as a transient light soon overcome by "vast masses of substance . . . so immense and so desolate" (VO, p. 123). But at other times she most certainly does not see the relationship between herself and nature as some kind of frightful opposition. It is at such times that Terence reveals his jealousy, which is par excellence the possessive jealousy of the lover:

"There's something I can't get hold of in you. You don't want me as I want you -- you're always wanting something else." . . .

It seemed to her now that what he was saying was perfectly true, and that she wanted many more things than the love of one human being -- the sea, the sky. She turned again and looked at the distant blue, which was so smooth and serene where the sky met the sea; she could not possibly want only one human being. (VO, p. 307)

There exists a very instructive parallel between what Rachel "wants" in The Voyage Out and what her creator wants in the essay entitled, "The Narrow Bridge of Art". Virginia Woolf there envisages a new literary genre, which might be called, for lack of a better label, the poetic novel. She writes:

it will give not only or mainly people's relations to each other and their activities together, as the novel has hitherto done, but it will give the relation of the mind to general ideas and its soliloquy in solitude . . . We have come to forget that a large and important part of life consists in our emotions toward such things as roses and nightingales, the dawn, the sunset, life, death, and fate; we forget that we spend much time sleeping, dreaming, thinking, reading, alone; we are not entirely occupied in personal relations . . . The psychological novelist has been too prone to limit psychology to the psychology of personal intercourse; we long sometimes to escape from the incessant, the remorseless analysis of falling into love and falling out of love, of what Tom feels for Judith and Judith does or does not altogether feel for Tom. We long for some more impersonal relationship. We long for ideas, for dreams, for imaginations, for poetry. (CE, II, 225)

What is of chief interest here is the clearly secondary role assigned to "personal relations" and "falling into love" when considered as potential subject matter for the highest literary art, and the correspondance between this theory and Rachel's own obscure "longing". If one admits such a set of priorities, it quickly becomes evident that what is most unsatisfactory about "personal relations" is the very fact that they are "personal".

For this word Virginia Woolf has a synonym which holds a primary position in her critical and "philosophical" vocabulary -- "egotistical". The word must be understood in a very wide and general sense: anything whose final effect is to leave one with an impression of one's separation from "nature" -- in the most inclusive possible sense of that term -- is "egotistical". Egotism is Mrs Woolf's version of Romantic

self-consciousness. . If the text of The Voyage Out is carefully examined, it will be seen that Terence and Rachel, the two innocents, "develop" in almost perfect step with each other throughout the course of the novel, until one seems almost the mirror-image of the other. In their last scene, "they seemed to be thinking together; he seemed to be Rachel as well as himself" (VO, p. 358). A pronominal plural in one sentence⁶⁶ suggests that Terence, as well as the girl, has died. Rachel's fatal illness comes to symbolize the radical solipsistic separation to which her "love" has condemned her: "She was completely cut off, and unable to communicate with the rest of the world, isolated alone with her body" (VO, p. 335). This "egotistical" danger had been foreshadowed just three chapters earlier, when the lovers looked into a mirror and were "chilled", "for instead of being vast and indivisible they were really very small and separate, the size of the glass leaving a large space for the reflection of other things" (VO, p. 308). To be self-conscious is to be separate from "other things", and to be separate is to suffer.

It is also, in Virginia Woolf's view, to create inferior art. Hence we find her condemning the "damned egotistical self" (AWD, p. 23) in Joyce and numerous other modern writers, who are "centred in a self which, in spite of its

⁶⁶ "They had now what they had always wanted to have, the union which had been impossible while they lived." (VO, pp. 358-59)

tremor of susceptibility, never embraces or creates what is outside itself and beyond" (CE, II, 108). As the syntax suggests, the writer sees no contradiction between "embraces" and "creates", even though the latter infers that the "essence of reality" (AWD, p. 101) is the product of the artistic self, and the former that this essence resides in the non-self.⁶⁷

This seeming paradox is easily resolved, however, if we remember three things: first, Coleridge's statement that "we are all one Life"; second, the consequent Romantic ambivalence regarding epistemological "direction"; and third, the fact that there is a centre in the Romantic construct "where the ego is identified as itself because it is also identified with something which is not itself."⁶⁸ As long as we are dealing with

⁶⁷Naremore momentarily grants that the two terms "may not be so contradictory as they seem. It is likely that Virginia Woolf regarded the aesthetic act, whether in the form of a party or a painting, as a means of apprehending an underlying order in life which is concealed from us by everyday existence" (The World Without a Self, p. 74). This I believe to be a valid and workable hypothesis. However, he reserves his right to find "something of a problem" here; and indeed, by the Conclusion, we find him drawing distinctions between "artistic" creators and "suicidal" embracers -- Septimus Warren Smith and Mrs Ramsay are put in the latter category (p. 243) -- who are, in his opinion, fascinated by death.

⁶⁸Frye, Romanticism Reconsidered, p. 17. See pp. 14-15 of this chapter. Jean Guiguet describes Virginia Woolf's artistic approach to this vital centre in strikingly similar terms -- that is, as a process capable of resolving all dualities: "she strives to reach to the very core of a human being, to that nucleus of pure reaction where the self and the non-self, whatever they may be, interact, merging into one another or asserting differentiation" (Virginia Woolf and Her Works, p. 72).

paradoxes, there is another one, blood-brother to the preceding, which deserves attention. Virginia Woolf, that professed anti-egotist, wrote these words: "bad poetry is almost always the result of forgetting oneself -- all becomes distorted and impure if you lose sight of that central reality" (CE, II, 190). More befuddling still, we have her round opinion that, while the artist's self "is essential to literature," it "is also its most dangerous antagonist. Never to be yourself and yet always -- that is the problem" (CE, II, 46). The situation posed here is identical to Geoffrey Hartman's discussion of Wordsworth's predicament in knowing "self-consciousness to be at once necessary and opposed to poetry."⁶⁹ Then we remember that self-consciousness is an illness which carries within it the seeds of its own cure;⁷⁰ a way must be found to convert it into "self-knowledge", which is "ultimate knowledge".⁷¹ This way is to become a creator; and to become a creator one must sink down beneath the idiosyncratic and multifarious surface of mere "personality", mere "egotism", into the artistically fertile depths of the "centre" of which Frye speaks above, the depths of the self.

⁶⁹"Romanticism and Antiself-consciousness", reprinted in Romanticism: Points of View, p. 293.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 287.

⁷¹Wasserman, "The English Romantics: The Grounds of Knowledge", reprinted in Romanticism: Points of View, p. 341.

The basic problem of the modern "leaning-tower" writer, Mrs Woolf feels, is that the inner mind is paralyzed because the surface mind is "always hard at work" (CE, II, 176). And yet such surface-scratching may serve a most useful purpose, for "by analysing themselves honestly", these writers may have exorcised the old repressive demons of the nineteenth century, and allowed their successors to "inherit that unconsciousness which . . . is necessary if writers are to get beneath the surface, and to write something that people remember when they are alone" (CE, II, 178). Not only the emphasis upon the relation between unconsciousness and creativity, but the entire process of the argument here is strongly reminiscent of Carlyle's "Characteristics" -- so much so that one is led to wonder whether the similarity can be purely coincidental. In that essay, it is "Metaphysical Speculation" which is posited as "a necessary evil", but also "the forerunner of much good."

The fever of Scepticism must needs burn itself out, and burn out thereby the Impurities that caused it; then again will there be clearness, health. The principle of life, which now struggles painfully, in the outer, thin and barren domain of the Conscious or Mechanical, may then withdraw into its inner sanctuaries, its abysses of mystery and miracle; withdraw deeper than ever into that domain of the Unconscious, by nature infinite and inexhaustible; and creatively work there.⁷²

⁷²Critical and Miscellaneous Essays, IV, 35.

Carlyle's final verdict, like Professor Hartman's, is that "Self-contemplation . . . is infallibly the symptom of disease", but it also may or may not be "the sign of cure."⁷³

If the cure is successful, if the descent is made and the ego is identified with something not itself and therefore with itself, one will then have arrived at "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" (AWD, p. 132). Mrs Woolf knew this as something that "beat fiercely close to me" (AWD, p. 56), as "not oneself but something in the universe that one's left with" (AWD, p. 101). What is most important for us as readers is that this "something" almost always turned out to be "the impulse behind another book" (AWD, p. 102). It is variously symbolized by the "fast flying always disappearing black object, drawn rapidly ahead of us" in the sketch, "Gas" (CE, II, 298-99), by the wild goose in Orlando, by Bernard's "'fin in a waste of waters'" (W, p. 162). This "reality", which is not oneself but something within which one is included, is none other than the "vehicular form" of the Romantic poet. An impression of it is conveyed only in those works which attain to the very highest level of art. In Wuthering Heights, writes Virginia Woolf,

⁷³Ibid., p. 7.

it is the suggestion of some "power underlying the apparitions of human nature and lifting them up into the presence of greatness that gives the book its huge stature among other novels" (CE, I, 89). Reading Emily Bronte and Melville, "we get a vision of presence outside human beings, of a meaning that they stand for, without ceasing to be themselves" (CE, II, 96).

And what, precisely, is this "presence"? It is the source of the presentiment by which every man is haunted as long as he lives -- Carlyle's paradisiac, unconscious "wholeness", Coleridge's One Life, Shelley's One Mind, Blake's Human Form Divine.⁷⁴ It is man reunited with his natural heritage, redeemed from self-consciousness, repossessed of the true Self. This is the concept that inspires Virginia Woolf's several "visionary giants", especially those which lie on mountain-tops⁷⁵ and thus enclose the world beneath them (Orlando lying on the oak-tree root is "riding the back of the world", O, p. 228); it inspires the figure of Bernard, who becomes omniscient (like Orlando) and representative of all men; it inspires the eclipse-watchers of "The Sun and the Fish", who "had put off the little badges and signs of individuality" and assumed instead a "moving and disturbing unity", who "were related to

⁷⁴Cf. Rantavaara in "On Romantic Imagery in Virginia Woolf's The Waves", Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, LX (April, 1959), 85: "Nowhere is Virginia Woolf more thoroughly a romantic than in her pantheistic belief in the universal Oneness of everything".

⁷⁵See AWD, p. 283, entry of June 22nd.

the whole world" and "were come for a few hours of disembodied intercourse with the sky" (CE, IV, 178-80). It is also directly related to our author's unique stylistic experiments with the uniform narrative voice -- a technique which is excellently analyzed in James Naremore's book. Throughout The Waves, the novel in which this stylistic device is perfected, sounds the voice of, not six characters, but one; and, as the conclusion reveals, it is this very one that speaks in the cosmic interludes. This voice is anonymous and purely "poetic", the voice of the Self which has been "enlarged and set free" (CE, II, 108); for, as we read in the diary, "the thing is to free one's self: to let it find its dimensions, not be impeded" (AWD, p. 213). Specifically in the character of Bernard, The Waves portrays the apotheosis of self-consciousness into what Albert Gérard, in discussing the position of the Romantic poet, has called "impersonal egotism".⁷⁶ Earlier, I drew attention to Mrs Woolf's view that there is an "impersonality which belongs to our own emotions at their strongest" (CE, II, 274); such must perforce be true as well of the greatest artists, those "who manage to infuse the whole of themselves into their works, yet contrive to universalize their identity so that, though we feel Shakespeare everywhere about, we cannot catch him at the moment in any particular spot" (CE, II, 275). Other artists who have

⁷⁶"On the Logic of Romanticism", reprinted in Romanticism: Points of View, p. 265.

reached this zenith include Turgenev (who writes with a self "which has been so rid of superfluties that it is almost impersonal in its intense individuality", CE, I, 253), De Quincey (CE, IV, 2-3), Shelley (CE, IV, 23), and, of course, Melville and Emily Bronte (CE, II, 96-98).

Virginia Woolf must finally be regarded as a High Romantic, because she holds art to be nothing short of redemptive -- and in three senses. First, it makes the artist himself "whole" (AWD, p. 208) to the point of placing him "above time and death" (AWD, p. 225); second, it establishes an identity, a kind of spiritual continuum, between artist and audience ("I think writing, my writing, is a species of mediumship. I become the person", AWD, p. 285);⁷⁷ third, by manifesting its own harmony with nature,⁷⁸ art intimates the essential unity of all things ("'We' . . . the composed of many different things . . . we all life, all art, all waifs and strays -- a rambling capricious but somehow unified whole", AWD, pp. 289-90).

In conclusion, I would like to delve somewhat more deeply into the process of artistic creation as Virginia Woolf understood it, and to examine it especially in the light of

⁷⁷See also AWD, pp. 214, 336, 337, 339.

⁷⁸Some of the most obvious symbolic examples of this appear in Between the Acts. The cows and the rainfall complement the pageant and save it from disintegration; Giles' and Isa's final confrontation in "reality" also takes shape as the opening scene of Miss La Trobe's next play.

the descent/ascent pattern peculiar to the Rebirth archetype. Mrs Woolf produced several sketches of "depth"-experiences which may or may not have been intended as allegories of this process; but the question of intention is not crucial, since it is a basic pattern of images with which we are concerned, and this pattern always remains constant. In one passage in her diary, for example, the author considers the possibility that her illnesses may be "partly mystical. Something happens in my mind. It refuses to go on registering impressions. It shuts itself up. It becomes chrysalis. I lie quite torpid . . . Then suddenly something springs . . . a tremendous sense of life beginning . . ." (AWD, pp. 153-54). Another equally vivid, if more magnificent, description of the symbolical death-to-rebirth sequence is given in "The Sun and the Fish". The eclipse of the sun, which renders the earth withered and skeletal, is likened to the gradual heeling over and sudden capsizing of a boat, and hence to death by water. But then the light slowly and miraculously returns; and "never was there such a sense of rejuvenescence and recovery" (CE, IV, 181). With the return to conscious awareness, the observer becomes acutely cognizant not of her own existence, but of that of woods, hills, and valleys, of the world becoming "more and more solid", of "an infinite number of farmhouses, of villages, of railway lines", and finally, of "the whole fabric of civilization" (CE, IV, 181). To quote Poulet again, the "I" is radiating in the circle of

the "not I".⁷⁹ We have noted the recording of similar impulses by Shelley and Carlyle.

Identification with the "other" as the climactic final movement of the Rebirth pattern is presented in a most radical fashion in the "short story", "The Mark on the Wall". The speaker first professes her wish "to sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts" (HH, p. 42). And sure enough, toward the end of the piece there is a "depth"-meditation, in which she is "rooted in the centre of the world and gazing up through the grey waters" (HH, p. 46). However, the thought of "Whitaker's Almanack" (that is, the world of "hard separate facts") forces her to return abruptly to the surface and push on with her investigation as to "what that mark on the wall really is" (HH, p. 46). For this is all part of "Nature's game" (HH, p. 47): she prompts us to take action as a way of ending any "deep" emotional experience. A miniature nightmare of Whitakers and Archbishops and Lord High Chancellors having set in, contemplation of the mark provides "a satisfying sense of reality", of having "grasped a plank in the sea" (HH, p. 47). It is like "waking from a midnight dream of horror" and worshipping some solid object which is "proof of some existence other than ours"⁸⁰ (HH, p. 47). The

⁷⁹Metamorphoses of the Circle, p. 99.

⁸⁰Cf. Rhoda's need for "something hard" in The Waves, pp. 22-23.

piece then closes with a passage of amazing empathic identification with such an object, a tree. The vivid detail in this exercise of the "sympathetic imagination" is so intensive as to rival anything in Keats. In "The Mark on the Wall", we must acknowledge the operation of a general pattern, of a "game" which is supervised by nature: first the mind withdraws into the watery depths, and then, upon surfacing, it projects itself upon and even merges with an external "real" object. As Shelley would put it, this is a going-out of our own nature to identify with what is not our own. The implications of such a process are primarily (but by no means exclusively) social and moral.⁸¹

As we saw with the Romantics, moreover, the Rebirth archetype may also be usefully placed in a purely artistic perspective. There comes a point for the writer at which he must absent himself from the incessant shower of impressions scored upon his surface consciousness (CE, II, 106-07) and "become chrysalis". In that state he can sift experience for the all-important emotional kernel, and "fathom and explore the depths of that single emotion" (CE, IV, 2). But the

⁸¹J. K. Johnstone in The Bloomsbury Group recognizes the existence of this pattern in Virginia Woolf's work. He describes the nature and function of the depth-experience, and stresses its relation to the outward movement toward identification with the other: "though Mrs Woolf wished to find union with a reality infinitely greater than her ego, she knew that one's soul must possess itself and be free before it can expand and communicate" (pp. 142-43).

process does not end here, of course. For writer and reader alike, there is "something beyond emotion, something which though it is inspired by emotion, tranquillizes it, orders it, composes it" (CE, II, 127). If one wishes, like Percy Lubbock, to call this something "form", one must understand by it only the placing of certain emotions in their right relations to each other in order to "make them tell" -- a placing which is accomplished through structural and stylistic "methods" (CE, II, 129). Mrs Woolf dislikes the word, "form", because it suggests an "alien substance" which must be superimposed upon emotions (CE, II, 126), and consequently a rupture in the organic unity of the creative process; but certainly one may accept the postulated unity while at the same time ascribing to it two complementary phases -- one metaphorically downward and unconscious, the other upward and (necessarily) conscious. This pattern is again implied in the following passage: "the writer becomes -- if he can -- unconscious. In fact, his under-mind works at top speed while his upper-mind drowns. Then, after a pause the veil lifts; and there is the thing -- the thing he wants to write about -- simplified, composed" (CE, II, 166). When the veil lifts, the upper-mind suddenly visualizes the "form" in which the work shall be written.

Jean Guiguet feels that Virginia Woolf's task as an artist is twofold: "the apprehension of that reality [of the

depths] and the expression of it";⁸² this is confirmed in "On Re-reading Novels", where the author's own terms are "vision" and "expression" (CE, II, 126). Guiguet describes "form", or the "expressive" function, "as comprising all the elements, all the forces which, applied to emotion -- the material of the novel -- transform it, achieve a kind of transmutation of reality."⁸³ Thus the artist gives shape to the shapeless depths, and, as in Coleridge's definition of the secondary imagination, recreates the world; Miss La Trobe is "one who seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a recreated world" (BA, p. 108).

Edmund Spenser is another creator of such a world, one which is like "a great bubble blown from the poet's brain" (CE, I, 18). Part of Virginia Woolf's fascination with The Faery Queen stems from her impression that it seems to lay bare to the reader's eye (and also his ear) the harmonious co-operation of the inward and outward phases of the creative process. Spenser does not even bother "bringing his characters to the surface"; his voice is indistinct, and his verse "a celestial rocking-horse . . . lulling, soporific. It sings us to sleep . . ." (CE, I, 17). Yet it is nonetheless true that

⁸²Virginia Woolf and Her Works, p. 72.

⁸³Ibid., p. 74.

his is "a world of astonishing physical brilliance and intensity; sharpened, intensified as objects are in a clearer air; such as we see them, not in dreams, but when all the faculties are alert and vigorous" (CE, I, 18). Then there is De Quincey, whose scenes "have something of the soundlessness and the lustre of dreams. They swim up to the surface, they sink down again into the depths" (CE, I, 170), and whose paragraphs are set "flowing and following like the waves of the sea" (CE, I, 171). But he is no subjective mystic, for he has the ability to "draw a little apart, see people in groups, as outlines", and thus make them "memorable and full of beauty" (CE, I, 172).

Virginia Woolf's most brilliant allegory of the creative process, in my opinion, is her description in "Reading" of the Stephen children's moth-hunts (the context confirms our suspicion of allegory). The intrepid band of adventurers set out on a night-journey "into the depths of the wood", which are "cold, alien, and unyielding" (CE, II, 24). The lamp that is placed on the ground attracts insects whose movements "made one think of sea creatures crawling on the floor of the sea" (CE, II, 23). Finally, on the trunk of a remote tree which stands "as if upon the very verge of the world" (CE, II, 24), sits the prize -- the great scarlet underwing. It is captured. Then the memory of the sound of a falling tree reminds the writer of "the little shock" (CE, II, 25) which wakes the

sleeper in the early morning (for the night-journey "into the depths" is also, of course, the journey of the sleeper). This shock is "of a creative character" (CE, II, 25) and leads to a heightened "sense of reality" (HH, p. 47) and definiteness similar to that experienced by the newly-surfaced dreamer of "The Mark on the Wall". Now, things "have emerged, stated themselves."

As with a rod of light, order has been imposed upon tumult; form upon chaos. Perhaps it would be simpler to say that one wakes, after Heaven knows what internal process, with a sense of mastery. Familiar people approach all sharply outlined in morning light. Through the tremor and vibration of daily custom one discerns bone and form, endurance and permanence. (CE, II, 25)

"Order", "form" and "outline" are all "technical" terms, and are all applicable to the concern of the artist as a deliberate, conscious craftsman in words.

As we might expect, these matters of aesthetics are of especial importance in To the Lighthouse, in which an artist plays a central role. Throughout that novel also appear many other variations on the Rebirth archetype, which, as a controlling metaphor, is relevant not only to the affairs of art, but to those of life as well. The fact that it is almost totally absent in Mrs Dalloway, as we shall see, ultimately raises the question of whether any of the characters in that book can be considered fully alive.

II

MRS DALLOWAY

Little Mr Bowley, who had rooms in the Albany and was sealed with wax over the deeper sources of life, but could be unsealed suddenly, inappropriately, sentimentally, by this sort of thing -- poor women waiting to see the Queen go past -- poor women, nice little children, orphans, widows, the War -- tut-tut -- actually had tears in his eyes. A breeze flaunting ever so warmly down the Mall through the thin trees, past the bronze heroes, lifted some flag flying in the British breast of Mr Bowley and he raised his hat as the car turned into the Mall and held it high as the car approached and let the poor mothers of Pimlico press close to him, and stood very upright. The car came on. (p. 23)

This early passage from Mrs Dalloway epitomizes the predominant mood, tone, and thematic tenor of Virginia Woolf's fourth novel, the novel which, of all her works, has probably provoked the least fortunate critical reaction. One of the several quotations from A Writer's Diary which are often used to preface studies of Mrs Dalloway reads as follows: "In this book I have almost too many ideas. I want to give life and death, sanity and insanity; I want to criticise the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense" (AWD, p.

57). The quotation marks generally close, however, directly after the semi-colon. Critics have seized upon Mrs Dalloway as a second Secret Sharer and eagerly pointed out the parallels between the experiences of Clarissa and Septimus, perhaps thinking that they have thereby fulfilled their hermeneutical duties. But such is hardly the case; a great many questions still remain unanswered, and a few, in fact, seem not even to have been asked. It has generally been accepted, following the author's prompting,¹ that the two main characters represent two halves of some larger identity; but what, to begin with, can be the artistic rationale behind splitting personality up into the "irrational, uncontrolled unconscious" and the "controlled rational conscious"² in so radical a manner? Perhaps the split may be significant in itself -- especially since we have seen how Virginia Woolf is wont to consider these two states as complementary elements within a single psychological or aesthetic process. In Mrs Dalloway, then, the reader is confronted, in a most literal and obvious sense, with the fact of fragmentation, of separation, of non-unity, and he must somehow come to terms with this fact.

¹Mrs Woolf wrote an introduction for the Modern Library edition of the novel (New York, 1928), in which she says of Septimus and Clarissa that the former "is intended to be her double" (quoted by Isabel Gamble in "The Secret Sharer in Mrs Dalloway", which is reprinted in part in Critics on Virginia Woolf, ed. Latham, p. 52).

²Richter, p. 120.

The best way of doing so is to turn to the Romantic myth of man's fall from an original identity into self-consciousness and "egotism". In the particular mythic structure of William Blake, Urizen was the first "faculty" to separate from the Divine Man, and Urizen, in one of his major aspects, is little more than a monstrous Ego. His desire is to subdue all other creatures through the power of his will, and to make them forget the eternal birthright which they still bear within them. And, granted the "fallen" state of the world, the task is not a very difficult one; for where there are egotistical tyrants, there must necessarily be slaves -- often acquiescent ones. Hence Mr Bowley, "sealed with wax over the deeper sources of life", but weeping at the sight of a symbol of the power which is responsible for all those "poor women, nice little children, orphans, widows, the War -- tut-tut".³ Rumours of the car, in the opening pages of the novel, move

like a cloud, swift, veil-like upon hills, falling indeed with something of a cloud's sudden sobriety and stillness upon faces which a second before had been utterly disorderly. But now mystery had brushed them with her wing; they had heard the voice of authority; the spirit of religion was abroad with her eyes bandaged tight and her lips gaping wide.

(p. 17)

³That I do not thus overstate the case may be verified by consulting any of Virginia Woolf's more outspoken "feminist" writings, such as Three Guineas.

Every image, every abstract noun in this passage is a Blakean pejorative and -- whether the influence of Blake is direct or not -- carries the force of a moral indictment. And Mrs Dalloway, as a whole, is firmly entrenched in the Romantic tradition of Blake and Shelley⁴ -- especially, insofar as the latter is concerned, Prometheus Unbound -- and derives from this line of tradition a powerful sense of moral integrity. Its principal theme is the corruption bred of egotism, in all of its forms -- from Sir William Bradshaw to the heroine herself, who is one of those who, like Mr Bowley, "[care] to hold themselves upright" (p. 186). Therefore it must be my unpopular task to take up the lonely cross of A. D. Moody⁵ and cast a few aspersions upon "the perfect hostess" (p. 10). It is time that criticism of this novel abandoned for a while the industry of elucidating Clarissa's qualifications as an alter ego, a "better half" (useful though the endeavour may be), and attempted to show her true place within the book's larger framework of ideas, a framework which is built around a pre-eminently moral touchstone. The social criticism in Mrs Dalloway is sometimes blatant, and sometimes subtle -- apparently too subtle for many critics -- but always constant; there is a controlled bitterness in the authorial

⁴ Bernard Blackstone has remarked upon the Blakean thrust of the novel. See Virginia Woolf: A Commentary, p. 90.

⁵ See Virginia Woolf, pp. 18-28.

voice which far surpasses anything in Night and Day or The Years.

The Romantic conception of tragedy is based upon the contrast between the present corrupt and fragmented state of society, which may arouse the author's criticism or outrage or lamentation (hence the above-mentioned "bitterness" in Mrs Dalloway), and some pseudo-legendary time or place, analogous to the garden-state of Eden in Christian myth, in which man was "whole" and at one with himself and nature. It is a characteristic of this genre that either the poet or his principal character yearns back toward an original identity which "emerges nostalgically when certainty and simplicity of self are lost",⁶ and tries to "come to grips with the fact of self-alienation."⁷ Perhaps the most famous modern literary formulation of this theme is "Proust's account of a growing consciousness which, like Wordsworth's, has intermittent flashes of paradisaical vision, but finally realizes that there are no paradises except lost ones".⁸ There is a genuine similarity between Proust's use of memory and Virginia Woolf's in Mrs Dalloway -- not only in the techniques used to portray its operation, with

⁶Hartman, "Romanticism and Antiself-consciousness", in Romanticism: Points of View, p. 292.

⁷Ibid., p. 291.

⁸Frye, A Study of English Romanticism, p. 43.

which critics have mainly concerned themselves,⁹ but also in the very significance of the whole obsession with the past.

For it does indeed amount to an obsession; Bourton could almost be called the main character of the novel. It is a place which has more than a touch of the unreal: "There was a garden where they used to walk, a walled-in place, with rose-bushes and giant cauliflowers" (p. 84). Much of the effect of "unreality" is due to the fact that the past is not described in one narrative sequence, as is the Ramsays' vacation in the Hebrides in "The Window" (To the Lighthouse). There is consequently an aura of mist and legend surrounding Bourton as there is not, for example, around Mrs Ramsay when Lily remembers her in "The Lighthouse". Furthermore, Mrs Ramsay is, before all else, a creator, a deliberate shaper of particular moments that will survive the years and live to vitally affect other human beings. There is no such figure in the fairy-tale atmosphere of Bourton -- only a kind of diffuse and intangible bliss, which made it possible for emotions to be freely shown (for Clarissa, "the most exquisite moment of her whole life" was Sally's kiss, burning through with "the revelation, the religious feeling", p. 40) and communication to be perfectly achieved ("they went in and out of each other's minds without any effort", p. 70). But,

⁹E.g. Guiguet, pp. 245-47; Richter, pp. 163-65.

as the saying goes, things are not now as they once were. "Intermittent flashes" are vouchsafed many characters, but no one has the ability to recreate the past into an ever-living present, as Lily does in To the Lighthouse. There is even an ominous hint from Peter Walsh that the Golden Age may be only an idealized illusion superimposed upon the past in retrospection:

You were given a sharp, acute, uncomfortable grain -- the actual meeting; horribly painful as often as not; yet in absence, in the most unlikely places, it would flower out, open, shed its scent, let you touch, taste, look about you, get the whole feel of it and understanding, after years of lying lost.¹⁰
(p. 169)

Being a novel about people who are "sealed with wax over the deeper sources of life", Mrs Dalloway does not feature any portrayals of genuine depth-meditations in which characters experience feelings of intense communion with their true selves or any ultimate reality. The form of such an experience is sometimes maintained, but the substance is usually mere reverie about the past or some idyllic country setting. For example, Clarissa's opening reminiscence of Bourton is couched in water imagery, which often characterizes the emotional depths of the self in Virginia Woolf, but here betokens only the memory of a moment of girlish anticipation. It is interrupted by Peter

¹⁰ Cf. CE, IV, 164: "It is only when we look at the past and take from it the element of uncertainty that we can enjoy perfect peace."

Walsh's sardonic question, which brings the young Clarissa back to "surface" reality and the older Clarissa back to the present. In this reverie, as in the one which occurs as she gazes into Hatchards' window, Clarissa is "trying to recover" an image of primordial innocence, "of white dawn in the country" (p. 12). Her most lyrically effusive "flight of sensibility" (Naremore's phrase¹¹) takes place in Miss Pym's flower-shop:

. . . how fresh, like frilled linen clean from a laundry laid in wicker trays, the roses looked; and dark and prim the red carnations, holding their heads up; . . . as if it were the evening and girls in muslin frocks came out to pick sweet peas and roses after the superb summer's day . . . every flower seems to burn by itself, softly, purely in the misty beds; and how she loved the grey white moths spinning in and out, over the cherry pie, over the evening primroses! (p. 16)

Again we find the image of the "wave" of beauty, and again an interruption by "something hard" and real: a car backfiring. But the point must be stressed that such "flights" do not qualify Clarissa as a mystical habituée of the visionary depths, like Mrs Ramsay. She does not see any "emblematic pattern in the landscape";¹² she sees "prim" flowers who hold their heads up like perfect little hostesses. This passage reveals no insight into "reality"; but it does give the reader an insight into Clarissa Dalloway's personality. It is replete with an

¹¹The World Without a Self, p. 81.

¹²Ibid.

obvious pastoral preciousness and sentimental naïveté -- pie and primroses, indeed -- which is totally alien to the standard Woolfian experience of the unfathomable deep. These lines merely signify a child-like idealization of some ancient memory of the country. For, as Clarissa later thinks at her party, "she had never been so happy" as when she walked the terrace at Bourton; and now, "no pleasure could equal" her "shock of delight" at finding those memories again (p. 205). However, she then makes the mistake of expecting to find a Bourton sky, a "solemn" sky ("solemn" is one of Clarissa's favourite words) in London, and sees instead one that is "ashen pale" (p. 205). No, Mrs Dalloway is definitely not one of the select few who can recreate the past.

Other characters have their own ideas, not very dissimilar to hers, about where paradise lies. For the mad Septimus, it is "the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk" (p. 28). For Rezia, it is "Italy and the white houses and the room where her sisters sat making hats" (p. 27). But later, as she drifts off to sleep after her husband's suicide, her reverie falls into line with a more peculiarly northern pattern of mythical imagery: she seems to be "opening long windows, stepping out into some garden" (p. 166). Peter Walsh, that professional Byronic poseur, finds his Eden in an image of the Clarissa of days gone by, "ravishing, romantic, recalling some field or English harvest. He saw her most often in the country, not in London. One scene after another at

Bourton . . ." (p. 170). But what he most loves about the past and Bourton is the exquisite suffering which he then endured; his grief over his unrequited love "rose like a moon looked at from a terrace, ghastly beautiful with light from the sunken day" (p. 47); "the sunken day" refers to that pre-historic era when his love was requited. He, like Clarissa, visualizes the past by means of the sea-depths metaphor: it seemed to him "as if she drew up to the surface something which positively hurt him as it rose" (p. 48).

Fortunately for the reader's sensibilities, the reminiscences of other characters are less self-consciously pathetic. The old woman by the tube station sings of the lover who walked with her centuries ago on an "ancient May day", and who is now "only a looming shape, a shadow shape" (p. 91): this is one of those memories which approaches closest to the realm of pure mythic significance. Lady Bruton dreams of her childhood and the clover fields of Devonshire (pp. 123-24). Richard Dalloway dreams of a haymaking scene in Norfolk (p. 125). Elizabeth dreams of being in the country with her father and the dogs (p. 149); even at the supposed high point of the party (and the novel), she is worrying about "her poor dog" in the country (p. 215). Ellie Henderson notices that Elizabeth is dressed in pink and that "girls when they first came out didn't seem to wear white as they used"¹³ (p. 187).

¹³Cf. the "image of white dawn in the country" which Clarissa is trying to recover, Rezia's "white houses" in Italy, etc.

As the party proceeds, Sally and Peter settle back to "discuss the past" (p. 201). The ancient Miss Helena Parry "in her white shawl", a living embodiment of the past, meditates upon botanical excursions in the Indian mountains in the 'sixties (p. 197). Mrs Hilberry brings tears to Clarissa's eyes by saying that she looks "so like her mother as she first saw her walking in a garden" (p. 194). Sally Seton "still saw Clarissa all in white going about the house with her hands full of flowers" (p. 208). And finally, to close with a rather exciting hint of allegory, there is Mrs Hilberry, who "could not find her way" out of this little microcosmic gathering, and who innocently asks the Dalloways whether they know "that they were surrounded by an enchanted garden" (p. 211). All the evidence suggests that they do indeed know, but such knowledge is of the sort that fills one's eyes with tears, for one can never walk in that garden again.

It is this reader's opinion that Mrs Hilberry demonstrates great sagacity in her determined if muddled search for the door. For Clarissa's party is most certainly not "the mythical center of the universe";¹⁴ nor is it "a magical or supernatural event".¹⁵ It is a congregation of "prisoners", as Sally Seton melodramatically exclaims, who are "despairing of human relationships" and scratching vainly on the walls of

¹⁴Love, Worlds in Consciousness, p. 150.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 157.

their ego-cells (p. 213). It is a group of people who have lost access to the deep reservoirs of emotion -- which, we remember, always comes first for Virginia Woolf, whether in reading, writing, or living -- and whose "feelings" are little more than pure sham. After Mrs Hilberry's exit, Peter and Sally, those two doddering old "radicals", have a discussion about feelings. Sally opines: "One must say simply what one felt. 'But I do not know,' said Peter Walsh, 'what I feel' . . ." (p. 212). However, he finds some consolation in the fact that "at least" he "[knows] everything" else.¹⁶

. . . [Now] that one was mature then, said Peter, one could watch, one could understand, and one did not lose the power of feeling, he said. No, that is true, said Sally. She felt more deeply, more passionately, every year. It increased, he said, alas, perhaps, but one should be glad of it -- it went on increasing in his experience . . .

"There's Elizabeth," he said, "she feels not half what we feel, not yet." "But," said Sally, watching Elizabeth go to her father, "one can see they are devoted to each other." She could feel it by the way Elizabeth went to her father.
(p. 214)

It is hard to understand how the sarcasm in this passage can have gone unnoticed by so many critics: indeed, Richard is so devoted to his daughter that he does not even recognize her at first. For the sake of the integrity of Lady Rosseter's "feelings", one may rejoice that she is not privy to the secret workings of Mr Dalloway's consciousness.

¹⁶This is a parody of Septimus's omniscience (p. 74).

And then, what are we to make of Peter's "terror", his "ecstasy", his "extraordinary excitement" (p. 215) as Clarissa reveals her glorious presence to the assembly? First of all, there is no need to dispute the obvious suggestion that Mrs Dalloway does indeed possess "that woman's gift, of making a world of her own wherever she happened to be" (p. 85). But this does not necessarily imply any "transcendental" power; Jinny, the ultimately pathetic little socialite in The Waves, has the same ability -- and Clarissa does in fact resemble her in several ways. The final explanation for Peter's strange reaction, however, surely lies in the portrayal of his own rather strange character throughout the novel. Former administrator of an Indian province "twice as big as Ireland" (p. 55), battler of cholera epidemics and expert mechanic, Peter Walsh is typical of modern man, who, "having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave."¹⁷ Peter's enslavement is of a rather complex, psychological-sexual nature. Like Mr Bowley, he desires to prostrate himself before an abstract symbol, before "someone raised up in the dark so that you could not touch her but must lay your garland down on the grass in the dark" (p. 50). After his meeting with Clarissa, Peter seems to have an involuntary depth-experience ("down his mind went flat as a marsh"; he feels "an inexpressible, an exquisite delight"; he

¹⁷ Shelley, A Defence of Poetry, in English Romantic Writers, p. 1084.

escapes "from being precisely what he was", pp. 58-59), the effect of which is to send him in pursuit of a mysterious lady, whose arms, he thinks, "would open and take the tired" (p. 59). Of course, his "romantic" expedition fails, for a mystery that is accessible to man would no longer be a mystery, and what is more, it would remove the delicious necessity of stoicism, suffering, and all manner of meretricious emotion such as "terror" and "ecstasy". Peter's dream of the Solitary Traveller transforms the woman in the street into a "spectral presence" (p. 63) which also represents "a desire for solace, for relief" (p. 64) -- "an adorable emblem which only the recollection of cold human contacts forbids us to embrace" (p. 65).

Here we arrive at the threshold of a key truth: visionary failure or frustration is intimately connected to social or interpersonal failure. Those who worship at the altar of abstract, unapproachable and "unreal" ideals -- such as a ghostly, consoling landlady, or Clarissa Dalloway standing "ravishing" in a harvest field, or "the Prime Minister's kyar" (p. 17), or a sky-writing aeroplane, or the Union Jack -- do so because they are incapable of achieving any "real" human contact. Those who choose to be subservient to symbols of Authority, of any kind, delight in making their fellows subservient to themselves. Thus Miss Kilman, having felt "the hand of God", wishes to subdue Mrs Dalloway, "ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to her knees crying, You are right!" (p. 138).

Similarly, Peter Walsh, humble idolater of the elusive Eternal-Feminine, of the Victorian Matriarch (pp. 179-80), and of "all the exalted statues, Nelson, Gordon, Havelock" (p. 58), does not particularly care about "people"; he is, on the whole, "sufficient to himself" (p. 175). He does not want to marry Daisy, but only "to prevent her from marrying anybody else" (p. 89), for "it would make him furious if Daisy loved anybody else, furious! for he was jealous, uncontrollably jealous by temperament" (pp. 175-76). He, therefore, like Killman, manages to be both slave and tyrant -- in short, an egotist,¹⁸ and one of the most odious specimens of that breed that Mrs Woolf ever created.

For Mrs Dalloway, to repeat, is a novel about egotists. There exists a rarely-quoted statement of intention by the author, which reads as follows:

I want to bring in the despicableness of people like Ott. I want to give the slipperiness of the soul. I have been too tolerant often. The truth is people scarcely care for each other. They have this insane instinct for life. But they never become attached to anything outside themselves.
(AWD, p. 55)

The first reference is to Ottoline Morrell, the notorious hostess of Garsington, and it is therefore directly pertinent to our fictional hostess in Westminster. Clarissa has this

¹⁸If Peter's chronic habit of fingering the blade of his pocket-knife has a primarily sexual significance, as many commentators seem to think, then the logical insinuation is that, in the most literal sense as well, he is a practitioner of the art of self-love.

instinct, and also this detachment from what is outside herself; and the two find a common bulwark in "her world". We have seen that it is a prime characteristic of the egotist to feel not only separated from but menaced by that which is external to him.¹⁹ Thus, when Peter visits Clarissa, he is "the enemy" (p. 50) -- as is Miss Kilman in a more extreme manner. In each case it is the duty of the "indomitable egotism" to "ride down the hosts opposed to it" (p. 51), to refuse to be sympathetic, to refuse to forgive. Clarissa's hatred of Miss Kilman is so painful because it allows her world to be invaded from without; and when that world is seen from an external perspective, it seems "as if the whole panoply of content were nothing but self love" (p. 15). Conversely, when she herself leaves her world, it is "as if she had left a party, where now this friend now that had flashed back her face, her voice; had shut the door and gone out and stood alone, a single figure against the appalling night" (p. 35).²⁰ Among other things, "the appalling night" is death, and Clarissa, like all egotists, has a "horror of death" (p. 169), and consequently invents transcendental theories of the diffused self. Early in the novel, replenished by memories of Bourton, she walks

¹⁹See the discussion of The Voyage Out in Ch. I, especially p. 21.

²⁰The stance is similar to that of another egotist, Mr Ramsay.

in the park and sports "on waves of . . . divine vitality" (p. 9), but when she returns home and finds she has not been invited to lunch, she immediately becomes separated from the flowering of the June morning, which is now "out of doors, out of the window, out of her body and brain which now failed, since Lady Bruton, whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing, had not asked her" (p. 35). She then withdraws into the tower of her self, into the "attic room" which is the centre of her world, and finds there "an emptiness about the heart of life" (p. 35). Clarissa Dalloway is a cold and solitary virgin²¹ who realizes that she lacks "something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together" (p. 36). This point is absolutely crucial. Despite momentary illuminations, Clarissa remains a stranger to the "central" emotional depths,²² and is therefore incapable of "breaking up surfaces" as a hostess. Indeed, Peter Walsh comments that "her emotions were all on the surface. Beneath, she was very shrewd" (p. 84) -- and, in the Woolfian scheme of things, this constitutes a monstrous inversion of priorities,

²¹"[She] could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet" (p. 36).

²²Cf. Blackstone on Clarissa: "she does not look below the surface" (Virginia Woolf: A Commentary, p. 85); and Elizabeth Hardwick: "one of her limitations is lack of curiosity and another is a charming, almost hysterical attachment to surfaces" (Seduction and Betrayal, p. 134).

especially for a woman.²³

It should be the task of the hostess as "diver" to plunge into the waves which "roll and conceal and encrust" the "pearl" at the bottom (pp. 34-35), but Clarissa doubts whether she is "capable any longer" of doing this as time shreds her life away. The easier alternative is to gaze into the looking-glass and thus supposedly compose the many sides of the self "into one centre, one diamond" (p. 42). But this is mere "egotistical" hypocrisy,²⁴ mere playing with surfaces. Social triumphs may be achieved in this way, but they are only "semblances", betrayed by a critical "hollowness" (p. 193). They eschew genuine emotion, even as the hostess does. This is in fact the key to the Dalloway world, and has been neatly pinpointed as such by Josephine Schaefer:

. . . Richard is part of Clarissa's defence against the continually threatening forces of life. By never upsetting Clarissa, by helping to create for her a world in which she can be

²³Clarissa at times demonstrates a rather shocking disrespect for the intuitive gift which is woman's sexual birthright: witness her desire to be "interested in politics like a man" (p. 13) -- also "like" that displaced male, Lady Bruton.

²⁴Orlando, on the other hand, comes upon her "true self" only after much soul-searching and some desperation; finally it was only "when she had ceased to call 'Orlando' and was deep in thoughts of something else that the Orlando whom she had called came of its own accord . . ." (O, p. 221). This self is "compact of all the selves we have it in us to be" (O, p. 219); whereas Clarissa's "diamond" self has the useful social merit of "never showing a sign of all the other sides of her" (D, p. 42).

the sort of person she wants to be, Richard has had to deny certain of his own needs. When he comes home to communicate an emotion, therefore, he communicates instead protection against emotion.²⁵

Clarissa's theory about the necessary "gulf" between people -- even husband and wife -- as something which is essential to the preservation of "one's self-respect" is but a mask for her fear of real emotional contact.²⁶ Similarly, when Mrs Dalloway looks into the separate room across the way, the old lady's movements seem "extraordinary", "strange", "touching", "the supreme mystery" (p. 141); "there was something solemn in it -- . . . the privacy of the soul" (p. 140). And yet the sight makes her want to cry -- because that "independence", that "dignity", is in fact nothing but loneliness; and Clarissa has known loneliness.

Nonetheless, she fearfully refuses to break out of the deathly egotistical circle which forms "her world". Hence her moral corruption and hence too her tragedy. She realizes, but will do nothing.²⁷ Like Peter Walsh, who is so flamboyantly (as he likes to think) "careless of all these damned proprieties" (p. 60) and yet so unquestionably a product of them, Clarissa can see the dangers of (idealized) Love and Religion,

²⁵The Three-Fold Nature of Reality, p. 97.

²⁶Ibid., p. 90.

²⁷Blackstone, on the other hand, feels that the mere fact that "Clarissa sees" is sufficient to assure "her triumph, her justification for us in the book" (Virginia Woolf: A Commentary, p. 93).

she can divine the evil of Bradshaw, she can understand that "somehow it was her disaster -- her disgrace" that Septimus should die and "her punishment" that her party should "sink and disappear . . . in profound darkness" (pp. 204-05), but all this does not prevent her from fawning over Lady Bruton and the Prime Minister, or looking down her nose at Ellie Henderson. Therefore she warrants moral censure far more than, let us say, that blissfully oblivious toady, Hugh Whitbread.

The implication underlying this discussion, namely, that Clarissa to a large extent is "her world", has been brought forth and developed by Moody, who calls her "something of an animated mirror, having a life made up of the world she reflects."²⁸ Therefore the "steady judgment of her deep inadequacy", the "grave insistence upon the dissipation and death of her spirit in glittering triviality",²⁹ redounds upon her society as well. But it is especially her hatred of Miss Kilman, of which she has a vivid feeling both early in the day and later at the party³⁰ (it thus "frames" the novel, in a way),

²⁸Virginia Woolf, p. 20.

²⁹Ibid., p. 19.

³⁰See pp. 15, 193. In the latter passage, we read: "She hated her: she loved her. It was enemies one wanted, not friends . . .". This clearly suggests that Clarissa "loves" Kilman because she hates her; she loves her because Kilman provides her with what she wants -- an enemy, an object of hatred.

which shows the true degree of her moral corruption. As Moody says, it

shows her state to be worse than mere superficiality: her cultivated surface has masked something evil. For, as her reaction here reveals, when the life of feeling and inward understanding is denied, it does not simply wither away, but becomes the enemy of life; the soul that is dead and yet in life, lives to be the agent of death.³¹

There is a high Romantic ethic involved here, which has its origins in Blake's doctrine of "the forgiveness of sin",³² and in Shelley's opinion, as it is expressed in the Preface to The Cenci, that "undoubtedly, no person can be truly dishonoured by the act of another; and the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love."³³ So, one might comment, does Mrs Ramsay momentarily convert her egotist, Charles Tansley, and ultimately her husband too. Virginia Woolf has categorically stated in an essay that "the emotion of fear and of hate" is "sterile, unfertile" (CE, IV, 176). It may be objected that this statement appears in the context of a discussion of war; the answer to this objection is that Mrs Woolf, like Blake and Shelley, sees all manifestations of egotism, from Peter Walsh's easy masculine condescen-

³¹Virginia Woolf, p. 24.

³²See Blake: Complete Writings, ed. Keynes, p. 616.

³³Complete Poetical Works of Shelley, ed. Hutchinson, p. 276.

sion to Clarissa's hatred to Hitler's blood-lust, as growths of one malignant tumour. She has no difficulty, for example, combining feminism and pacifism within one essay -- nay, within one sentence. She speaks of sexual prejudice and physical tyranny in the same breath:

Let us drag up into consciousness the subconscious Hitlerism that holds us down. It is the desire for aggression; the desire to dominate and enslave . . . If we could free ourselves from slavery we should free men from tyranny. Hitlers are bred by slaves. (CE, IV, 174)

And, as already suggested, her notion as to how one frees oneself is quintessentially Shelleyan. During the prelude to the Second War, she felt that the "true answer to all this horror and violence lay in an improvement of one's own moral state; somehow one had to banish anger and the unreason that is bred of anger."³⁴

This is a lesson which Lily, James and Mr Ramsay³⁵ finally learn in To the Lighthouse. Outside of Septimus's uncommunicated "messages", it is absent from Mrs Dalloway, where subconscious Hitlerism clearly wins the day. Slaves are not fastidious as to which particular tyrant they may wish to subject themselves to: the Queen's car, toffee-advertising aeroplanes, the house of God -- anything that will effectively

³⁴Bell, Virginia Woolf: A Biography, II, 187.

³⁵Cam has less need of being "converted" than the other three; despite her "compact" with James, she still passes on to her father "a private token of the love she felt for him" (L, p. 192).

lay to rest "that plaguy spirit of truth seeking" (p. 32) will serve the purpose. However, one of the disadvantages of worshipping Authority is that it tends to lead to petrification, to a kind of frozen Urizenic wasteland. Thus the young soldiers marching up Whitehall have managed to bury life "under a pavement of monuments and wreaths" and drug it "into a stiff yet staring corpse by discipline" (p. 58).³⁵ Clarissa, casting off Peter, "seemed contracted, petrified . . . physically hard . . . like iron, like flint, rigid up the backbone" (p. 72). At the dead centre of the day, Richard Dalloway halts in the middle of the street, "stark with the lethargy of the old, stiff with the rigidity of the old" (p. 125).

The further we proceed into examination of the metaphorical and mythical significance of "tyranny" in Mrs Dalloway, the more Romantic parallels come to light. In his study of Blake, for example, Frye writes:

Satan in the Bible is called "diabolos" or accuser because he is forever reminding man of his own insufficiency and causing him to despair of deliverance, and his henchmen spread throughout society the state of mind called by Blake the "accusation of sin", the final triumph of the death-impulse, the complete torpor and paralysis of the mind.³⁶

This is quite similar to Moody's judgment on the significance of Clarissa's hatred. Mrs Dalloway is, in fact, full of

³⁵"One had to respect it" all the same, thinks Peter Walsh (p. 58).

³⁶Fearful Symmetry, p. 65.

hypocritical accusers of sin. Clarissa accuses Peter of not knowing what others are feeling (p. 52); Peter "[tickets a] moment" and accuses Clarissa of "the death of the soul" (p. 67). "Human nature", "the repulsive brute with the blood-red nostrils" (p. 102), accuses Septimus of having ceased to feel. And human nature, of course, is personified in the composite figure of Holmes-Bradshaw, which is this novel's major approximation of Satan/Urizen/Jupiter. Holmes eerily intimates his mythical identity with those gigantic oppressors of man when Rezia, slipping into unconsciousness after Septimus's death, sees "the large outline of his body dark against the window"³⁷ (p. 167). Virginia Woolf's description of Bradshaw is one of the greatest virtuoso passages in all her work. Behind his doctrine of "Proportion", Bradshaw lusts for power, upholds class prejudice, and feasts on the human will. He is the personification of what Shelley calls "an excess of the selfish and calculating principle": the "Mammon of the world."³⁸ By condemning "these prophetic Christs and Christesses" (p. 110), he assumes the role of Pilate, of Caiaphas -- the accuser. His position is

³⁷Because Moody regards the portrayal of Bradshaw as an unsuccessful attempt at Jonsonian moral caricature, he dismisses the psychiatrist as a "mere villain of melodrama" (Virginia Woolf, p. 27). I do not believe that Bradshaw was ever intended to be "of the race of Volpone", however, just as the novel as a whole does not seem to own any essential allegiance to the mode of comedy. Bradshaw is indeed a "villain", but his roots are elsewhere.

³⁸A Defence of Poetry, in English Romantic Writers, p. 1084.

supported by the deadening mechanism of the clocks which chime from one end to the other of Mrs Dalloway, and which "counselled submission, upheld authority" (p. 113). He would bring about a "unity" through the imposition of his ego which is the absolute antithesis of that which is to be experienced in the depths of the self -- the very "unity" which is manifested by the mesmerized crowd in the opening pages.

The function of Septimus Warren Smith is largely to play the victim to Bradshaw's tyrant. He appears in many guises throughout the novel. On the most basic level, he is "fallen" man, cut off from the source of his true being and therefore subjected to "eternal suffering", "eternal loneliness" (p. 29). Like the old woman by the tube station, he is "the giant mourner", a Prometheus "who has lamented the fate of man for ages" (p. 78). Septimus is also Christ, "the greatest of mankind", "the Lord who had come to renew society", "lately taken from life to death" (that is, from eternity to this world, p. 29). Like Christ, he knows "the meaning of the world" and "the truth . . . which now at last . . . was to be given whole . . . 'To whom?'" (p. 75). Ultimately, to no one, for no one in this world cares to hear the truth. During the interview with Bradshaw, Septimus is obsessed with the idea of communicating this truth, for "communication is health" (p. 103). But then, Septimus can hardly be said to be "healthy". As a fragmented identity, he exists solely in the realm of the unconscious, of "insanity", and communication is finally possible only on the

conscious or "sane" level of life. As John Graham says, "the true terror of his vision is that it destroys him as a creature of the time-world".³⁹ Like Rhoda in The Waves, Septimus is mercilessly buffeted about in the depths, which are, characteristically, of an ambivalent nature: he experiences both ineffable beauty and flames of torment, and is both "the happiest man in the world and the most miserable" (p. 93). Again like Rhoda, he feels the need for "something hard" to prevent him from "falling. Oh for the scissors and the lamp-light and the buckram shapes!" (p. 97). But it seems almost impossible for Septimus to escape from the depths -- as it is impossible for Clarissa, his "alter ego", to escape from the surface. Each of these situations is untenable and perilous.⁴⁰

Clarissa would appear to successfully avoid the dangers of compulsive "sanity", however, by her mysterious identification with Septimus at the moment of his death. Does she thereby retrieve her soul from desiccation by vicariously plunging into the depths of the unconscious?

³⁹"Time in the Novels of Virginia Woolf", reprinted in Critics on Virginia Woolf, ed. Latham, p. 30.

⁴⁰Cf. Bodkin, pointing out "Jung's insistence that extraversion and introversion -- the outward and inward turning of the libido -- are both, as attitudes exclusively maintained, dangerous to mental health, while both are necessary as alternations within a vital rhythm . . ." (Archetypal Patterns in Poetry, p. 71).

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

(p. 204)

To judge from her feeling that she is "glad that he had done it" (p. 206), Clarissa apparently believes that she, like Septimus, has reached the "mystical centre" through his suicide. As on so many other occasions throughout the novel, however, she is fooling herself. She has also managed to fool almost every critic who has ever written on Mrs Dalloway.⁴¹ Septimus does not die to embrace any mystical centre. That would be an act worthy only of either a madman or a sentimental, melodramatic society lady who is so obtuse as to see a lonely old woman in her room as "the supreme mystery". And Septimus is not mad when he jumps. Let us allow the author to put both Clarissa and her apologists in their place:

It was their idea of tragedy, not his or Rezia's (for she was with him). Holmes and Bradshaw liked that sort of thing. (He sat on the sill.) But he would wait till the very last moment. He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings? Coming down the staircase opposite, an old man stopped and stared at him. Holmes was at the door. "I'll give it you!" he cried . . .

(p. 165)

⁴¹ Exceptions are Moody, p. 26, and Richter, pp. 119-20.

Septimus had finally surfaced, thanks largely to Rezia, "for she was with him". He had safely arrived at the edge of that wood of which Peter had dreamed -- "this warm place, this pocket of still air" (p. 159) -- and found there not a visionary landlady whom one could not embrace, but his wife, with whom communication was at last achieved. They had been happy, and made a hat together. The visions had stopped. But even Rezia could not keep off Holmes, who easily forced his way past her, being "a powerfully built man" (p. 164). The old man across the way is not a sympathetic bystander, as some have argued, but a surrogate of Holmes, a "human being", a "brute", an accuser of sin. Septimus's suicide is the great tragedy of the novel, because he is the only character to attain any kind of "wholeness". But he finds that there is one "insane" truth which holds true in "sane" life as well -- namely, that Holmes, or human nature, is evil. And this is the final moral judgment passed upon the world of Mrs Dalloway. As it was the War which drove Septimus mad and taught him not to feel (p. 96), so it is Holmes and Bradshaw, the egotistical tyrants who create wars, who force him to die. And Clarissa Dalloway, who is of their breed and obscurely realizes it ("Somehow it was her disaster", p. 204), is directly implicated in this judgment.

Her opinion that "there was an embrace in death" requires explanation, for it is the kind of thing which can lead misguided sensationalists like James Naremore to write books about how Virginia Woolf created art "out of a death

wish" and committed suicide to "embrace the world beyond".⁴²

Mrs Dalloway is a novel about egotists, about people who live on the surface of life, "on the ebb and flow of things" (p. 11). And, as "ebb and flow" suggests, there is a rhythm in their lives, a rhythm which is marked by the calendar ("that one day should follow another; Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, . . . it was enough", p. 135) and the clock ("the sound of Big Ben flooded Clarissa's drawing-room . . . with its melancholy wave; which receded, and gathered itself together to fall once more", p. 130). Reminders of time are everywhere: like Big Ben's leaden circles which dissolve in the air (p. 54), Peter Walsh's cigar-smoke rings, "blue, circular", "wobble into hourglass shapes and taper away" (p. 63). The tolling of St Margaret's is "like a hostess who comes into her drawing-room on the very stroke of the hour"; of course, it reminds Peter of Clarissa, of the dearly beloved but unsalvageable past, of her mysterious "illness", and of "death that surprised in the midst of life" (p. 56) -- "the death of the soul", perhaps? Clarissa herself appears to believe that

⁴²The World Without a Self, pp. 142 and 106 respectively. Moody has some apt words on this matter: "It seems sometimes that the fallacy which identifies Virginia Woolf with the character she least condones -- Clarissa Dalloway is the prime example, but Rhoda is another -- has become established as a commonplace in contemporary criticism. The reading error is so basic that one can hardly do more than stare, and point at facts that should be obvious" (Virginia Woolf, p. 55).

the sound of a clock, with its "solemn stroke which lay flat like a bar of gold on the sea" (p. 141), can reduce the flux of experience to order. Perhaps so, but we have seen from Dr Bradshaw's dependence upon the clocks of Harley Street exactly what kind of order that is (p. 113). Clock or "linear time", as opposed to what John Graham calls "mind time, an inner world of thought and imagination",⁴³ is a surface phenomenon; it is at the service of egotists who have no access to that "inner world". And like Dr Bradshaw -- and Lady Bruton, whose face is once likened to a menacing sundial (p. 34) -- it exerts a little tyranny of its own. As Big Ben chimes, Peter Walsh finds that he is "speaking to himself rhythmically, in time with the flow of the sound" (p. 54). Similarly, the "regular thudding sound" of the marching soldiers "drummed his thoughts, strict in step, up Whitehall, without his doing" (p. 57). As long as she is subsumed in "this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street" (p. 13), Clarissa is at peace. But might death not halt this lovely, mindless "progress"?⁴⁴ Then one must invent a theory which will allow one to survive on the "ebb and flow" even

⁴³"Time in the Novels of Virginia Woolf", in Critics on Virginia Woolf, ed. Latham, p. 28.

⁴⁴Cf. Brower, "Something Central Which Permeated: Virginia Woolf and Mrs Dalloway", reprinted in Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Sprague, pp. 53-56.

after death (p. 11). Mrs Bradshaw worships the rhythm of time: "if there was a church building, or a church decaying", she takes photographs of it (p. 105). Clarissa is submitting to time as "process" as she greets her guests ("it was odd how standing there one felt them going on, going on", p. 189) and again as she thinks of Septimus ("with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him, with all this going on . . .", p. 206).

The point is, that there is a great mesmeric satisfaction to be achieved by subjecting oneself to the tyranny of time, and it is precisely the satisfaction of the slave -- of Mr Bowley with tears in his eyes as he watches the royal car. One becomes part of the "consolatory, indifferent" voice, which, "pouring endlessly, year in, year out, would take whatever it might be; this vow; this van; this life; this procession; would wrap them all about and carry them on . . ." (p. 153). But to submit to this rhythm, which is the rhythm of time, is the act of an egotist, of one who is spiritually or "inwardly" dead. (Remember that "egotism" subsumes the whole slave/tyrant syndrome.) Hence Clarissa Dalloway's famous meditation:

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

It is well known by now that "fear no more" is from the dirge in Cymbeline, IV, ii: one need "fear no more" because one is dead. Like Peter in his dream, Clarissa wishes only to be "[blown] to nothingness with the rest" (p. 65). Such is the final terminus of egotism, of life lived solely on the surface -- the desire to resign oneself absolutely, abjectly, to the "consolation" of death, "death" being the metaphorical equivalent of "time".

It is also true, however, that Clarissa's "fear no more" meditation corresponds to one of Septimus's, in which he too feels the sense of a powerful rhythmic movement:

Going and coming, beckoning, signalling, so the light and shadow, which now made the wall grey, now the bananas bright yellow, now made the Strand grey, now made the omnibuses bright yellow, seemed to 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. (p. 154)

Does this too, then, imply a passive and resigned "embrace" of death? Hardly. Josephine Schaefer has pointed out that Clarissa's reverie is like a drugged, soporific, "green monotone", whereas Septimus's is vibrantly alive and full of strong "contrasts, both of objects (the wall, the bananas, the Strand, the omnibuses) and of colors (grey, yellow)."⁴⁵ We appear to

⁴⁵The Three-Fold Nature of Reality, pp. 104-05.

be dealing with two different kinds of "rhythm".⁴⁶ Clarissa knows the deathly rhythm of the surface, but Septimus has visited the "insane" depths, and found there something that is capable of transforming the world around him. He calls it "beauty":

Up in the sky swallows swooping, swerving, flinging themselves in and out, round and round, yet always with perfect control as if elastics held them; and the flies rising and falling; and the sun spotting now this leaf, now that, in mockery, dazzling it with soft gold in pure good temper; and now and again some chime (it might be a motor horn) tinkling divinely on the grass stalks -- all of this, calm and reasonable as it was, made out of ordinary things as it was, was the truth now; beauty, that was the truth now. Beauty was everywhere. (pp. 77-78)

Both Clarissa's rhythm and Septimus's rhythm play prominent parts in Virginia Woolf's next novel, To the Lighthouse, but the latter begins to take on increasing importance and significance. It ultimately becomes the vehicle for conveying what Mrs Woolf saw as a central truth about human life: the necessary and perpetually exhilarating alternation of two contrasting orders of experience.

⁴⁶Cf. McLaurin on the distinction between "repetition" and "rhythm" in Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved, especially Chapter 10. His conclusion is that "the basis of Virginia Woolf's art" is the "problem of transmuting repetition into rhythm" (p. 161). While it is critically useful to employ two different words, as he does, to do so is unfortunately to stray from Mrs Woolf's own practice in the novels. The phenomenon of the "double aspect" is common in her work: witness the dual nature of the image of the sea, and the dual nature of "death" -- there is the death-in-time which is courted by the ego, and the more metaphorical death of the conscious self as one descends to the timeless depths of the centre.

III

TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

The co-ordinates of Virginia Woolf's universe -- consciousness and unconsciousness, fact and vision, surface and depths -- are as fully represented in Mrs Dalloway as in any of the other novels, but they are in no way related to each other. True, Septimus does regain his sanity and a new communion with his wife, but he then decides that the fragmented Dalloway world, with all its multiple tyrannies, is no place for a man who is truly sane. Clarissa, whose "sanity" is of a different order, tries to make contact with the unconscious depths by fancifully -- and mistakenly -- recreating the scenario of Septimus's plunge to the "mystical centre". This is by no means the first exercise of her theatrical imagination that the reader has been allowed to behold; when Peter visited earlier in the day, she had eloped with him, gone on "some great voyage", and generally lived through "five acts of a play that had been very exciting and moving" (D, p. 53) -- all in the space of one moment. The hostess leads a hectic life, and periodically requires refreshment.

The same is true of Mrs Ramsay, of course, but her refreshment is not of the sort to be found in the pages of "True Romances". Because she has access to that "something central" of the depths, unlike Clarissa, Mrs Ramsay is able to "break up surfaces" (D, p. 36). Therefore that thick black line which seems to be always separating the two orders of experience in Mrs Dalloway is often at the point of dissolution in To the Lighthouse. For this is a novel which is primarily about the fruitful relationships which can exist between the two correlative worlds.

The most perceptive critics -- and To the Lighthouse, unlike its predecessor, has been blessed with a considerable number of them -- have recognized the centrality of this theme and explored its ramifications with insight. One of the very best short studies of the novel is the fifth chapter of Josephine Schaefer's The Three-Fold Nature of Reality in the Novels of Virginia Woolf. Nancy Bazin, using discussion of the masculine-feminine relationships in To the Lighthouse as a focal point, has treated of Mrs Woolf's "dual vision" in all her work in the light of the androgyny theme;¹ Miss Bazin even attempts the perilous but not completely unrewarding task of tracing this "vision" back to the manic-depressive character of the novelist's illnesses. John Graham has examined the Ramsays and the symbolism of the lighthouse with regard

¹In Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision.

to the relationship between time and eternity.²

A. D. Moody shows agreement with this line of criticism in his analysis of how the novel embodies a co-operation of two realities, but he has some reservations. The relationship is "established almost entirely from the point of view of the intuitive imagination, and on the terms most to its advantage";³ consequently "the limiting world of actuality is too thinly realised."⁴ The worlds of fact and vision, though interdependent, "remain divided off still, and appear irreconcilably different in kind."⁵ Miss Bazin, for one, would not quarrel with the first charge, for she claims that Virginia Woolf "believed that her vision, though ideally bisexual, should on the whole be distinctly feminine, that is, 'womanly' as opposed to 'man-womanly'".⁶ Virginia Woolf was surely not alone in this belief. Every great artist depends more upon the depths ("femininity") than the surface ("masculinity"),⁷ which latter is always a necessary but patently secondary

²In "Time in the Novels of Virginia Woolf".

³Virginia Woolf, p. 42.

⁴Ibid., p. 36.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision, p. 5.

⁷On the metaphorical proximity of the depths and femininity, see Ch. I of this study, pp. 5, 10, 17.

consideration. The perfectly androgynous work has never and will never be realized. In The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Blake says that contraries are necessary to human existence, but he is not ready to give the Angels more than a passing nod. The artist belongs with the Devils of Imagination, pushing back the bounding circumference of Reason and rejoicing in the creative tension between two realities which are indeed "different in kind". But the difference is no cause for despair, because from that tension and interaction is produced great art like To the Lighthouse.

For the most part, then, I accept the arguments of those critics who have explored the implications of James's final discovery that "nothing was simply one thing" (p. 211) and who have, to a great extent, clarified the symbolism of the two worlds. I propose now to undertake a fairly close textual analysis of certain passages in the novel in order to show how the two "ways of seeing" work together on the simplest level of diction and imagery. It will be seen that they often fall into a fundamental rhythm or pattern which has striking similarities to the Rebirth archetype. Because of the formative rhythmic impulse behind not only isolated passages but lengthy stretches of narrative, it will be best to approach the text in its linear "plot" sequence.

Clarissa Dalloway is at peace as long as she feels herself included within the general rhythm of the sea of time, as in her main reverie (D, p. 45). This rhythm is "indifferent";

it is like a glacier which indiscriminately carries forward whatever is in its path (D, p. 153). It has nothing especially to do with human beings. Early in To the Lighthouse, Mrs Ramsay looks up from the catalogue which she is showing her son "with an impulse of terror" (p. 20) when she is suddenly made aware of the breaking of the waves, which "like a ghostly roll of drums beat the measure of life" and "made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea" (pp. 19-20). Therein lies a crucial difference between the two women: Mrs Dalloway fears the cessation of the rhythm of time (which might come about, for example, with her death), while Mrs Ramsay fears the rhythm itself, for she knows that it is death. Human rhythms, on the other hand -- the sound of men taking out and putting in pipes, the children shouting and playing cricket, and, later, Mr Ramsay habitually chanting poetry -- are of a different nature, and serve, as Allen McLaurin puts it, to "modify 'the monotonous fall of the waves'."⁸ While Mrs Ramsay may not here seem to be directly responsible for the creation of these rhythms, such is not the case as the party gets under way: then she must very deliberately coax "the old familiar pulse" (p. 96) into motion. However, the fact that this pulse is likened to a watch ticking (p. 96), and that Mr Ramsay's chanting is a "regular mechanical sound" (p. 20) deftly implies the limitations and inadequacy of the

⁸Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved, p. 178.

"social" rhythm as well: it is but a surface phenomenon -- only the prelude to more serious "creation". But because it is an achievement of man and not the collective sighing of the waves of some general "sea", it is reassuring to Mrs Ramsay. Clarissa, on the other hand, is never depicted as a creator of social rhythms; she prefers to be reassured by the ebb and flow of the anonymous and nondescript life of the streets.

To speak of "rhythm" in this context is perhaps inadvisable, however. If we understand by "rhythm" a movement from one point to a second, different point, and then back again, then this would seem to be something qualitatively different from the breaking of waves, the ticking of clocks, or the beating of hearts. All of these are mere accidents of the surface, examples of "repetition" rather than "rhythm".⁹ Rhythm should involve the alternation of strong contrasts, as in Septimus's visions of nature's "beauty" -- contrasts such as that which exists between the surface and the depths. These are not the specific co-ordinates of Lily Briscoe's and William Bankes's vision as they stand in the break in the hedge which overlooks the bay, but their experience is undeniably one which is grounded in sharp contrast. The water seems to set their thoughts sailing, and even gives their bodies "some sort of

⁹See Ch. II, p. 70, n. 46.

physical relief."

First, the pulse of colour flooded the bay with blue, and the heart expanded with it and the body swam, only the next instant to be checked and chilled by the prickly blackness on the ruffled waves. Then, up behind the great black rock, almost every evening spurted regularly, so that one had to watch for it and it was a delight when it came, a fountain of white water . . . (p. 24).

There is a definite expansion-contraction-expansion movement in these characters' reactions to the water, which is then immediately repeated and amplified within a wider natural perspective. Lily and Bankes watch with exhilaration "the swift cutting race of a sailing boat",¹⁰ but then it stops and drops sail; "and then, with a natural instinct to complete the picture, after this swift movement, both of them looked at the dunes far away" (pp. 24-25) and feel a sadness which contrasts with their earlier "hilarity". What is of prime interest here is the structural function of contrast, especially between the nearness of one view and the distance of the other; the fact that the transition is accomplished with "a natural instinct"; and, finally, the metaphor from painting. This last, as we later discover, is most appropriate in its relevance to Lily's artistic effort to achieve a "razor edge of balance between

¹⁰ Cf. p. 228, where, just prior to Lily's climactic vision of Mrs Ramsay, her faculties are "moving underneath with extreme speed".

two opposite forces"¹¹ (p. 219) and to create a picture which is beautiful, bright, feathery and evanescent on the surface, and "clamped together with bolts of iron" underneath (p. 194).

As we follow Lily and Bankes on the lawn, we move from an almost overt allegory of aesthetics to the science of interpersonal relations. And again the presence of the surface/depths schema may be discovered in the background. Lily has been thinking about Mr Bankes.

Suddenly, as if the movement of his hand had released it, the load of her accumulated impressions of him tilted up, and down poured in a ponderous avalanche all she felt about him. That was one sensation. Then up rose in a fume the essence of his being. That was another.
(pp. 28-29)

In the "intensity" of this second sensation, Bankes becomes "entirely impersonal" (p. 29). Lily then goes on to qualify somewhat her ardent admiration for the man standing beside her with a few more prosaic reminders of his character. Strangely enough, we have seen a variation on this pattern in Coleridge's discussion of the creative process: first, the absorbing of surface impressions, then the knowing-in-essence, then the

¹¹The "two opposite forces" are named on p. 219 as "Mr Ramsay and the picture". While the main subject of "the picture" is "Mrs Ramsay reading to James" (p. 61), Lily nonetheless finds in Part Three that Mr Ramsay -- that is, the "masculine" viewpoint -- must somehow be brought into account as well if the painting is to be finished. Similarly here, one must look at the far-off dunes "to complete the picture". The "sadness" (p. 25) inspired by this view corresponds to the melancholy characteristic of Mr Ramsay's metaphysical speculations (pp. 51-52).

return to a renewed and modified awareness of reality. Next Lily thinks of Mr Ramsay in comparison; now her impressions of him dance up and down, "each separate, but all marvellously controlled in an invisible elastic net" (p. 30), and they dance faster and faster until they explode -- a more violent, and certainly more sexual,¹² knowing-in-essence than that signified by the wispy, insubstantial image which represented Mr Bankes's spirit. After the experience of depth-release, one looks to "distance" for form, outline and perspective if one is an artist; if one is primarily a social creature (as Lily now is), one looks to identify with the "other". Lily and Bankes have "stepped through the gap in the high hedge" (p. 30): communication should now be possible. Mr Ramsay suddenly appears. But although his eyes "met theirs for a second, and trembled on the verge of recognition", he turns away, revelling in the "impure rhapsody" (p. 31) of the egotist.

His vanity having been shattered by this confrontation (p. 36), which may in turn account for his subsequent feeling that he is incapable of reaching R (the first letter of his own name),¹³ Mr Ramsay demands sympathy from his wife -- an ironic situation, surely, for Lily had been ready to give sympathy at the very moment when he least wanted it. However, it is Mrs Ramsay who is given the opportunity to go out of herself, to

¹²See Naremore, p. 127.

¹³Ibid., p. 130.

identify with the other, and she does so "until there was scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by; all was so lavished and spent" (p. 45). Nevertheless, after satisfying her husband, she does fall back upon her central self, and with a perfect rhythmic instinct:

Immediately, Mrs Ramsay seemed to fold herself together, one petal closed in another, and the whole fabric fell in exhaustion upon itself . . . while there throbbed through her, like the pulse in a spring which has expanded to its full width and now gently ceases to beat, the rapture of successful creation. (pp. 45-46)

This is pure rhythm, for it gives form to the relationship between the self and the other, feminine and masculine, depths and surface: "Every throb of this pulse seemed, as he walked away, to enclose her and her husband, and to give to each that solace which two different notes, one high, one low, struck together, seem to give each other as they combine" (p. 46). What this mutual interdependence "successfully creates" is a new world, "the world seen through the eyes of love" (p. 55).¹⁴ It renews man's awareness that his spirit is one with nature's ("The sky stuck to them; the birds sang through them", p. 55); it reminds him that the ultimate meaning of the image of the wave is not that the sea of time inexorably corrodes human life, but rather that ebb and flow is analogous to the masculine-feminine interaction whereby life is continually redeemed and

¹⁴Cf. the corresponding phenomenon in the realm of art, Ch. I, pp. 33-35.

made "whole like a wave" (p. 55). Naremore notes that lovers are said to have an ability which is much like "a kind of secondary imagination":¹⁵

There might be lovers whose gift it was to choose out the elements of things and place them together and so, giving them a wholeness not theirs in life, make of some scene, or meeting of people (all now gone and separate), one of those globed compacted things over which thought lingers, and love plays.

(pp. 218-19)

There is little doubt that the "globed compacted thing" is both the work of art and the recreated world of the lover, and that both are essentially the same, even as artist and lover are united in the figure of Mrs Ramsay. The rest of "The Window" expands upon the manner in which she goes about making her world anew.

Mrs Ramsay does not, of course, always feel at one with nature and part of a recreated world. When the children's voices cease and the hollow sound of the waves thunders through, then life is something "terrible, hostile, and quick to pounce on you if you gave it a chance" (p. 70). But there are also "great reconciliation scenes", when she and life "parleyed (when she sat alone)" (p. 69). The reconciliation is negotiated, of course, in the depths of the self, beneath the surface flow of time.

¹⁵The World Without a Self, p. 134.

To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others . . . When life sank down for a moment, the range of experience seemed limitless. And to everybody there was always this sense of unlimited resources, she supposed; one after another, she, Lily, Augustus Carmichael, must feel, 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 . . . Not as oneself did one find rest ever, in her experience (she accomplished here something dexterous with her needles), but as a wedge of darkness. Losing personality, one lost the fret, the hurry, the stir; and there rose to her lips always some exclamation of triumph over life when things came together in this peace, this rest, this eternity . . . (pp. 72-73)

After the abandonment of the conscious self, or "personality", comes identification with the non-self.

Often she found herself sitting and looking, sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at -- that light for example . . . It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone, one leant to things, inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one; felt an irrational tenderness thus (she looked at that long steady light) as for oneself. There rose, and she looked and looked with her needles suspended, there curled up off the floor of the mind, rose from the lake of one's being, a mist, a bride to meet her lover.
(pp. 73, 74)

We may note here the characteristic reciprocity of the relationship established with nature: Mrs Ramsay "became" the light; the "trees, streams, flowers" "became" her. Her own eyes meet her own eyes; bride and lover are, in effect, one. The "mist" is comparable to the "fume" which signified Lily's depth-

knowledge of Mr Bankes.

The thought of "suffering, death, the poor" (p. 74), all monstrous facts of the surface, encroaches upon the meditation and forces Mrs Ramsay to acquiesce in coming "out of solitude reluctantly by laying hold of some little odd or end, some sound, some sight" (p. 75). "[Whenever] one woke at all, one's relations changed": this is immediately verified by the lighthouse beam, which is now "the pitiless, the remorseless" (p. 75). Like the breaking waves earlier, the beam has now become merely a part of the repetitious pulse of time,¹⁶ something which is "so much her, yet so little her" -- depending upon whether her point of perception is the surface or the depths. But she is then once again "hypnotized" by the light, "as if it were stroking with its silver fingers some sealed vessel in her brain whose bursting would flood her with delight"¹⁷ (p. 75); and she knows

happiness, exquisite happiness, intense happiness, and it silvered the rough waves a little more brightly, as daylight faded, and the blue went out of the sea and it rolled in waves of pure lemon which curved and swelled and broke upon the beach and the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind and she felt, It is enough! It is enough! (pp. 75-76)

This experience is similar to the "explosive" release which

¹⁶Cf. Graham in Critics on Virginia Woolf, p. 33.

¹⁷Cf. Clarissa Dalloway's memory of "some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores" (D, p. 36).

Lily felt when she thought about Mr Ramsay (p. 30). At that time he had spurned the opportunity for communication. Now, however, he seeks his wife (for the second time), and at exactly the right moment. For after the "I" has taken shape in its initial punctuality, it must expand in the circle of the "not I"¹⁸ -- which circle includes not only tree, stream and flower, but human society as well. Self-communion is the necessary prelude to communion with others; Mrs Ramsay is now ready to go to her husband, in deference to his wish "to protect her" (p. 76).¹⁹

¹⁸Poulet, p. 99.

¹⁹My argument that a pattern exists which involves first a "private" descent to the depths of the self and then a "social" ascent toward identification with the other might at first seem to bear some similarity to Norman Friedman's theory in "Double Vision in To the Lighthouse" (reprinted in Virginia Woolf: "To the Lighthouse", a Casebook edited by Morris Beja, pp. 149-68). His concept, however, is trinitarian: he claims to see a pattern in the novel whereby the viewpoint from which one regards life (thesis), "whether it be that of objective detachment or subjective involvement" (p. 164), is given up "in favor of the other (antithesis)", the character meanwhile "becoming immersed in the waters of transition, and emerging with a double perspective (synthesis)" (p. 151). As an example, he proposes Mrs Ramsay's sinking-down as thesis, her recognition of the unpleasant facts of life as antithesis, and her "exquisite happiness" as a "harmonious balance" of subjective involvement and objective detachment (p. 155). The problem is that there is absolutely no textual justification for considering the "burst vessel" passage in itself to embody any such "synthesis". On the contrary, the only "synthesis" would seem to lie in Friedman's "thesis", where Mrs Ramsay becomes the light and the light becomes her. Most of his other examples appear equally dubious.

As the Ramsays walk off together, there begins what one might call "the redemption of the surface", or the conquering of the sea of time. Just as the pulse of successful creation had earlier enclosed husband and wife, so now, on the lawn, a "meaning" descends on them, "making them symbolical, making them representative" (p. 84) -- that is, removing them for a moment from the ordinary world of the surface. This brings an extraordinary sense of heightened reality, which extends as well to the children who are playing ball: "for one moment, there was a sense of things having been blown apart, of space, of irresponsibility . . . In the falling light they all looked sharp-edged and ethereal and divided by great distances" (pp. 84-85). The tableau is described with an artistic precision which is natural not only to Lily, who witnesses it, but also, as Virginia Woolf would have us believe, to the "formal" refinement of the art of Spenser and De Quincey.²⁰ The sense of sharp-edged outline and of distance is the "surface" or "outward" correlative of the soft intermingling which goes on in the depths, and which Mrs Ramsay has just experienced.

The "spell" (p. 85) of the symbolical scene is broken when Prue runs into her mother, who asks if the others have come back from the beach, and if Nancy went with them. The interruption is significant, for Nancy has meanwhile fallen prey to the "unredeemed" surface -- the deathly flow of the sea.

²⁰See Ch. I, p. 36.

Like her mother, Nancy shows herself capable of creating a world, but it is not the world of love: it does not subsume sky and birds. Looking up from her little pool-world, she is conscious of separation, as Terence Hewet was conscious of the menacing vastness of the universe as opposed to the liteness of men and women:

. . . she became with all that power sweeping savagely in and inevitably withdrawing, hypnotized, and the two senses of that vastness and this tininess (the pool had diminished again) flowering within it made her feel that she was bound hand and foot and unable to move by the intensity of feelings which reduced her own body, her own life, and the lives of all the people in the world, for ever, to nothingness. So listening to the waves, crouched over the pool, she brooded. (pp. 87-88)

This is a nihilistic experience precisely because a distinction is made between "that vastness and this tininess"; and the distinction is made because Nancy, unlike her mother, is trapped within the world of the surface.

The deathly spirit of Nancy's encounter with the sea seems to hover over the opening of the dinner-party, where Mrs Ramsay "had a sense of being past everything, through everything, out of everything" (p. 96). She "saw things truly", that is, like her husband -- as bald, disconnected facts. "Nothing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate. And the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her" (p. 96). Nonetheless, she bravely shakes the social pulse into life, "as a sailor not without weariness sees the wind fill his sail and yet hardly wants to be off again and

thinks how, had the ship sunk, he would have whirled round and round and found rest on the floor of the sea" (p. 97). This is without doubt a longing for the restful "embrace" of death which is altogether worthy of Clarissa Dalloway. Because Mrs Ramsay is acutely conscious of herself and of her difficult task as "creator", she is in effect prey to all the ills of egotism, and yearns to submit her being absolutely to the sea of time and oblivion.²¹ That she does not, of course, is all the more to her credit.

The social pulse then beats successfully through several pages of "trivial" but necessary conversational pleasantries; Tansley is won over; and finally the lighting of the candles marks a change, a "sudden exhilaration", like "that moment on the tennis lawn, when solidity suddenly vanished, and such vast spaces lay between them" (p. 113). Faces seen by candle-light look "mask-like", as the group on the lawn had looked "sharp-edged" (p. 85). The implication is plain: the surface has once more been redeemed; it has become "symbolical". The party is still conscious of separation, of the difference between "order and dry land" inside and "that fluidity out there" beyond the glass panes (p. 112), but this is an inevitable consequence of living on the surface, "redeemed" or not; only the solitary individual, submerged in the depths of the self,

²¹The passage is worth quoting if only to dispel the false impression, which may have been inadvertently suggested in the course of this discussion, that Mrs Ramsay is somehow perfect or superhuman.

can truly feel at one with all nature. What is centrally important, however, is the fact that this coherence, this stability, this immunity from change (p. 121) is directly dependent upon just such a submergence -- that of Mrs Ramsay earlier in the day. This is quietly suggested by Rose's skillfully arranged dish of fruit, which is "a trophy fetched from the bottom of the sea" (p. 112). It is suggested by the similarity between the "element of joy" (p. 120) which hangs above the party at the moment of consummation "like a smoke, like a fume rising upwards" (p. 121) and the "mist" which "rose from the lake" of Mrs Ramsay's being (p. 74). It is suggested by the mention of something which "shines out . . . in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral" (p. 121) -- very like the lighthouse beam with which Mrs Ramsay identified. And finally, the correlation is plainly stated by the hostess herself: "It partook, she felt . . . of eternity; as she had already felt about something different once before that afternoon" (p. 121). The "difference" lies in the fact that the eternity of the depths is literally timeless, whereas the "transcendent moment" is paradoxically eternal-within-time, that is, everlasting, but also part of the flux of the surface. ^{and} But the key point is that, as Mrs Ramsay's spirit became one with the lighthouse beam, so the eternity of the depths has become one with a moment in time.

In other words, surface and depths are intimately related, connected in a pattern which is implicit even in the

sound of Mr Ramsay's chanting voice: "she knew it was poetry from the rhythm and the ring of exaltation and melancholy in his voice" (p. 127) -- an exaltation and melancholy comparable to what was felt by Lily and Bankes as they looked first at the fast-moving sea and then at the distant dunes (pp. 24-25). Those two realities have now been enclosed again in "the rapture of successful creation" (p. 46); the world has been re-created, and it speaks in a voice of its own words which are "like flowers on water out there, cut off from them all, as if no one said them, but they had come into existence of themselves" (p. 127). Yet although no one says them, everyone says them: it seemed at last as if "this were their own voice speaking" (p. 128). The inference surely is that this group of people, once separate but now a "community of feeling"²² (p. 131), are bearing witness to the manifestation within time of the impersonal Self of the depths, the Self which has been restored to its original identity and become "one Life".

After the party, Paul, Minta and Prue go down to the beach to watch the waves (an ominous hint of Part Two), but Mrs Ramsay, as after her earlier depth-meditation, goes to her husband.

She had complete trust in him. And dismissing all this, as one passes in diving now a weed, now a straw, now a bubble, she felt again, sinking deeper, as she had felt in the hall when

²²Cf. Carlyle's definition of the ideal society as "a new collective individual" etc., Ch. I, p. 12.

the others were talking, There is something I want -- something I have come to get, and she fell deeper and deeper without knowing quite what it was, with her eyes closed. (p. 136)

The words of Mr Ramsay's poem "[wash] from side to side of her mind rhythmically" (p. 136). The ascent outward from the depths begins as she starts to read -- reading being one of the most obvious examples of identification with the other: "she opened the book and began reading . . . and as she did so she felt that she was climbing backwards, upwards, shoving her way up under petals that curved over her" (p. 137). Mr Ramsay slapping his thighs brings her back to the surface and to an instantaneous flash of communication with him. But he does not now wish to be interrupted, for -- astonishingly -- he too has entered into communion with another: the spirit of Scott. Notwithstanding a few mitigating qualifications whereby his masculine respect for "fact" is still maintained, Mr Ramsay "forgot himself completely" in his absorption in Steenie and Mucklebackit "and the astonishing delight and feeling of vigour that it gave him" (p. 138). The scene almost develops into light comedy as Mr Ramsay, finishing his book, sees that his wife has returned to the depths, "and like a person in a light sleep seemed to say that if he wanted her to wake she would, she really would, but otherwise, might she go on sleeping, just a little longer, just a little longer?" (p. 139). As she reads, she is again "ascending . . . to the summit . . .

And then there it was, suddenly entire shaped in her hands, beautiful and reasonable, clear and complete, the essence sucked out of life and held rounded here -- the sonnet" (p. 139). The experience is identical to that of the sleeper in "Reading" who "wakes, after Heaven knows what internal process, with a sense of mastery" (CE, II, 25). Having surfaced, one is acutely conscious of shape and form, of the perfect embodiment of the "essence" which is encountered in the depths.

Now that Mrs Ramsay is "awake", she is "conscious of her husband looking at her" (p. 139). When he finally comments that she will not finish her stocking tonight, she is suddenly aware of "what she wanted" in the first place: "the asperity in his voice reproving her" (p. 141).²³ This is what she sought by sinking deep and could find only by surfacing. The

²³ "What she seems to want most of all, like Clarissa Dalloway and Rachel Vinrace, is a kind of peace and rapture that is associated with a unity so complete it entails the yielding up of life" (The World Without a Self, pp. 136-37). This passage epitomizes the peculiar perversities of James Naremore's critical method: first, his flagrant misreading of the text; second, his simple-minded habit of regarding all Virginia Woolf's female protagonists as variations on one type; third, his persistent incapability of accepting metaphor as metaphor. It is this last which is the most serious. True, there is a "yielding up of life" in the depths, but it is a yielding up of conscious life only. Naremore writes like a student of the Arnold Bennett school of prose: for him, "the destruction of individuality" (p. 142) and literal, physical death are one and the same. Because he does not really speak or understand the Woolfian language, he is usually at cross-purposes with his material; hence the ugly and incongruous tone of moral judgment which often lurks behind his words, as here for example: "even death itself becomes for her a source of delight" (p. 142).

explorer of the unfathomable deep longs for her correlative, for the limiting and ordering "asperity" of the masculine reality.²⁴ It is only by submitting to the influence of that other world that Mrs Ramsay finally "triumphs" (p. 142).

It is time that triumphs in the middle part of the novel. It triumphs because there now exists no human consciousness and therefore no opportunity of descending to the timeless depths of the self. It is even possible to see in "Time Passes", as a whole, a parody of the Rebirth archetype: in the first few chapters there is some reference to the occupants of the house, but then nature takes over, until the building is at the point of "sinking, falling . . . downwards to the depths of darkness" (p. 158); it is then saved by Mrs McNab, and some of the former occupants return in the last chapter. The core of Part Two of To the Lighthouse presents a vision of the inevitable culmination of the unredeemed life of the surface. Every meaningful rhythm, even the alternation of darkness and daylight, has been abolished ("for night and day, month and year ran shapelessly together", p. 154), and life, as in the world of the Dalloways, has become petrified:

. . . the stillness and the brightness of the day were as strange as the chaos and tumult of night, with the trees standing there, and the flowers standing there, looking before them, looking up, yet beholding nothing, eyeless, and so terrible. (p. 154)

²⁴Cf. Schaefer, p. 119.

The stillness is interrupted only by the deathly repetition of bombs exploding in the distance, "ominous sounds like the measured blows of hammers dulled on felt . . . there seemed to drop into this silence this indifference, this integrity, the thud of something falling" (p. 152). On the rare occasions that nature puts forth an amenable countenance, men flatter themselves that "the scattered parts of the vision within" are "outwardly" assembled (p. 150). But this is an optical illusion of the surface, for external nature merely reflects man's mood indifferently. The man who looks in the sky and not in himself sees "but the surface glassiness which forms in quiescence when the nobler powers sleep beneath" (p. 153).

"[That] half-heard melody, that intermittent music" which the ear "is always on the verge of harmonizing" (p. 161) but never quite manages to harmonize, is the illusory song of nature. The listener thinks that it hints at meaning and pattern, but no "meaning" per se can exist in the surface flux of life -- other than death-in-time. This is the hidden import of the "messages of peace" which the treacherous sea deceptively breathes to land-dwellers (p. 162). It bids them "come down to the beach" to listen to the waves breaking. ~~It~~ It asks the sleepers, as "they lay with several folds of blackness on their eyes, why not accept this, be content with this, acquiesce and resign? The sigh of all the seas breaking in measure round the isles soothed them; the night wrapped them; nothing broke their sleep . . ." (p. 163). This is the force to which

Clarissa Dalloway is so eager to surrender. But Lily Briscoe, waking from this "natural" nightmare in panic, "clutched at her blankets as a faller clutches at the turf on the edge of a cliff" (p. 163). Like the house, she is saved at the last instant from descent into the "depths" of temporal oblivion.

Lily's task at the opening of "The Lighthouse" is comparable to Mrs Ramsay's at the start of the dinner-party. In the aftermath of the rule of nature, all is disorder and chaos: "the link that usually bound things together had been cut, and they floated up here, down there, off, anyhow" (p. 166), and Lily asks herself, "how bring them together?" (p. 167). And the answer? "She would paint that picture now." Like Mrs Ramsay, who, as she descends to the depths, puts off "all the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal" (p. 72), Lily as artist must forget "the impertinences and irrelevances" of surface life which "made her remember how she was such and such a person, had such and such relations to people" (p. 179). Then she becomes a worker in depths and "redeemed" surfaces. Here again, this was also true of Mrs Ramsay; but the painter cannot afford the hostess's indulgence in leisure. Mrs Ramsay could enter into communion with the unfathomable deep and then, almost at her own will, ascend to give sympathy to her husband, or, later, preside over the triumph of the dinner. The artist, however, must keep both perspectives, depths and surface, "vision" and "expression", constantly before him -- even to

the point that they may seem to be blended together.²⁵ Lily realizes the difficulty of such a task: "All that in idea seemed simple became in practice immediately complex; as the waves shape themselves symmetrically from the cliff top, but to the swimmer among them are divided by steep gulfs, and foaming crests" (p. 179). The solution to this problem is to see from both above and below, to fall into the rhythm of gulf and crest and thus become "whole like a wave" (p. 55):²⁶ "And so pausing and so flickering, she attained a dancing rhythmical movement, as if the pauses were one part of the rhythm and the strokes another, and all were related" (p. 179). Eventually Lily's brush seems to have "fallen in with 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" (p. 181). The "dictation" comes not so much from "what she saw" as from what is behind what she saw, "this other thing, this truth, this reality, which suddenly laid hands on her, emerged stark at the back of appearances, and commanded her attention" (p. 180). It seems that Lily, by attending to the crucial rhythm of depths and sur-

²⁵Cf. CE, II, 126: "consider the Princesse de Clèves. There is vision and there is expression. The two blend so perfectly . . .".

²⁶Cf. McLaurin, p. 182.

faces,²⁷ has been swept up into the artist's "vehicular form", and come into contact with a reality very like that embodied in the impersonal voice which speaks at the close of the party.

The text then moves from consideration of Lily's aesthetic concerns as artist to her emotional concerns as human being.²⁸ Because Mrs Ramsay is "in the fullest sense her inspiration",²⁹ those passages in which Lily thinks of her, and visualizes her, amount to re-enactments of her depth-experiences. When Lily first sees her, "through William's eyes" (p. 201), she is impressed first of all by the perfection of her beauty, but then begins to ponder its little incongruities. It is this focusing upon specific detail, upon "some little odd or end" (p. 75), that brings her reluctantly to the surface ("Against her will she had come to the surface, and found herself half out of the picture", p. 202), just as it brought Mrs Ramsay herself. At this point, again like Mrs Ramsay when she goes to her husband, Lily feels the need to communicate, to "express in words these emotions of the body" (p. 202). But the Ramsays, for the most part, communicated

²⁷"[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 it with greens and blues" (p. 181).

²⁸Cf. a similar narrative sequence in "The Window", mentioned on p. 78 of this chapter.

²⁹Moody, p. 39.

without words, whose inadequacy Lily then realizes; the impulse to "say . . . everything" (p. 202) to Mr Carmichael consequently falls flat. Her vision of Mrs Ramsay dissolved, Lily is left alone on the surface, desperately asking ultimate questions. In the pain of her loss, she steps off "into the waters of annihilation" (p. 205), and experiences the ignominious anguish of the depths when they are entered via the medium of sorrow.³⁰ Then, slowly and miraculously like the return of the sun, comes "a relief that was balm in itself, and also, but more mysteriously, a sense of someone there, of Mrs Ramsay . . ." (p. 205). The depths have exhibited their ambivalent nature; we also have here a vivid illustration of Miss Bodkin's death-to-rebirth pattern. Immediately Lily begins to paint, to give form to her renewed vision ("It was strange how clearly she saw her", p. 206). In her earlier encounters with the spirit of Mrs Ramsay, Lily had always "sought something to base her vision on" (p. 206) from the surface world of appearances; so "[now] again," she has "some instinctive need of distance and blue", for, with the perspective of distance, the artist achieves form, outline and shape, all of which are deliberate, "objective" concerns of the surface. "Distance" signifies "the natural instinct to complete the picture" (p. 24).

³⁰"Sorrow will have the power to effect this sudden arrest of the fluidity of life, and joy will have the same power" (CE, II, 25).

Lily's picture may not yet be completed, but the seascape, of which Mr Ramsay's boat forms a part, most certainly is. For it shows forth that blending and interaction of opposites which Virginia Woolf felt to be necessary in both life and art:

. . . the sea and sky looked all one fabric, as if sails were stuck high up in the sky, or the clouds had dropped down into the sea. A steamer far out at sea had drawn in the air a great scroll of smoke which stayed there curving and circling decoratively, as if the air were a fine gauze which held things and kept them softly in its mesh, only gently swaying them this way and that [the imaginary smoke which rose above the dinner-party was "holding them safe together . . . There it was, all round them", p. 121]. And as happens sometimes when the weather is very fine, the cliffs looked as if they were conscious of the ships, and the ships looked as if they were conscious of the cliffs, as if they signalled to each other some secret message of their own. For sometimes quite close to shore, the Lighthouse looked this morning in the haze an enormous distance away. (p. 207)

Meanwhile, out on that sea, the boat is becalmed -- a most significant incident, for it can very easily be interpreted as a symbolic manifestation of the descent into the "meditative immobility"³¹ of the depths of the self. During the halt, the narrative centres exclusively upon James's mind and feelings. Although it both opens and closes with his hatred of his father's "tyranny", the central section severely qualifies this animosity, even to the point of contradicting it. (Therefore it might be said that even the "depths" of

³¹Poulet, p. 93.

this meditation are ambivalent.) In that central section, James first envisages a wasteland scene where there "were two pairs of footprints only; his own and his father's. They alone knew each other" (p. 210). Then, within the "garden" setting of ten years ago, he sees a wheel "ignorantly" crushing someone's foot, and decides that "the wheel was innocent" (p. 210). His realization that the lighthouse has two sides follows, and, having already identified with one side -- his father -- he thinks again of his mother and his love for her, whereat all his hatred for his father immediately floods back. The implications of the structure of this meditation are these: James's hatred is merely a vulgar deformity of the unredeemed surface of life; at bottom, it is amended by his desire to forgive his father and his recognition of the essential duality of life. Once this knowledge has been attained, his surfacing impulse to stab Mr Ramsay is dramatically interrupted as "the boat seemed to shake herself, and then to move off half conscious in her sleep, and then she woke and shot through the waves. The relief was extraordinary. They all seemed to fall away from each other again and to be at their ease"³² (p. 213).

³²This is to be opposed to the closeness and discomfort of the calming (p. 208). The contrast between the general mood of gloom and hostility in the boat before it is becalmed and the sense of relief and joy when it moves again is paralleled by Lily's and Bankes's earlier "dual response" to sea and land (pp. 24-25); there too the contrasting elements are centred and linked by the stilling of a boat.

That this whole scene bears a remarkable likeness to the middle part of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is beyond question. James's hatred is the "crime" which must be absolved, and, during the halt on the sea, it is. The parallels do not end here. In both the poem and the novel, the depths of the sea metaphorically contain the "'germs of new possibilities of life'".³³ This is made quite clear when Cam looks into the water just before the calming:

Her hand cut a trail in the sea, as her mind made the green swirls and streaks into patterns and, numbed and shrouded, wandered in imagination in that underworld of waters where the pearls stuck in clusters to white sprays, where in the green light a change came over one's entire mind and one's body shone half transparent enveloped in a green cloak. (pp. 207-08)

In a passage which is as the counterpart to this, after the "waking" of the boat, the "change" has already been partially effected:

From her hand, ice cold, held deep in the sea, there spurted up a fountain of joy at the change, at the escape, at the adventure . . . And the drops falling from this sudden and unthinking fountain of joy fell here and there on the dark, the slumbrous shapes in her mind; shapes of a world not realized but turning in their darkness, catching here and there, a spark of light . . .
(p. 214)

Furthermore, directly after the passage describing the moving of the boat, Lily looks out over the bay and thinks, "The sea without a stain on it" (p. 213). This refers us back to the

³³Bodkin (quoting Jung), p. 52.

sixth chapter of "Time Passes", which tells of "the silent apparition of an ashen-coloured ship . . . come, gone; there was a purplish stain upon the bland surface of the sea as if something had boiled and bled, invisibly, beneath" (p. 152). "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", of course, also features a "spectre-bark",³⁴ and around the Mariner's own becalmed ship the "charmed water burnt away/ A still and awful red."³⁵

Lily's comment about the stainless sea, placed where it is in the text and recalling as it does the previous part of the novel, seems to indicate that the eradication of James's hatred, in some profound and elemental way, has brought about a human triumph over the deathly and destructive aspect of nature. In short, the surface has once again been "redeemed". For not only is communication finally established between father and son, but the sea, man's treacherous enemy in "Time Passes", is conquered. This is surely one of the several possible meanings of the trip to the lighthouse. Just before Mr Ramsay compliments James, he thinks: "Naturally men are drowned in a storm, but it is a perfectly straightforward affair, and the depths of the sea (he sprinkled the crumbs from his sandwich paper over them) are only water after all" (p. 234). And then, almost as if responding to a cue, the sea is described as providing an exuberant escort service for

³⁴English Romantic Writers, p. 408, l. 202.

³⁵Ibid., p. 409, ll. 270-71.

the humans: "they were sailing swiftly, buoyantly, on the long rocking waves which handed them on from one to another with an extraordinary lilt and exhilaration"; the waves are "rolling and gambolling and slapping the rocks as if they were wild creatures who were perfectly free and tossed and tumbled and sported like this for ever" (p. 235). Mr Carmichael, as a comic Neptune, confirms the assimilation of the sea into human control: he stands "looking like an old pagan God, shaggy, with weeds in his hair and the trident (it was only a French novel) in his hand" (p. 236).

As the stilling of the boat and James's subsequent descent into the "garden" (p. 210) of his boyhood ultimately effect a "triumph over life" (p. 73) which is also a triumph in life, so Lily Briscoe, before she can triumph over life in art, must descend into the depths of the past.

She seemed to be standing up to the lips in some substance, to move and float and sink in it, yes, for these waters were unfathomably deep. Into them had spilled so many lives. The Ramsays'; the children's . . . some common feeling which held the whole together. (p. 218)

All the while she does not touch her picture, for "all her faculties" are "in a trance, frozen over superficially but moving underneath with extreme speed" (p. 228). Suddenly a white flash in the window throws "an odd-shaped triangular shadow over the step"³⁶ (p. 229). Now Lily has "something

³⁶McLaurin offers an interesting explanation for

to base her vision on" (p. 206), and, as we saw earlier, she must keep both this "something" and the vision itself (that is, the present state of her emotions) close at hand:

One must keep on looking without for a second relaxing the intensity of emotion . . . One wanted, she thought, dipping her brush deliberately, to be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that's a chair, that's a table, and yet at the same time, it's a miracle, it's an ecstasy. The problem might be solved after all. (p. 229)

"The problem" was one which continually fascinated Virginia Woolf: is it possible for an artist to consistently render fact and vision, reason and emotion, surface and depths, "coinstantaneous and one",³⁷ as Coleridge said? Can the high ideal of Romantic epistemology be realized, and the internal be made external and the external internal? Can the upper and under minds be fused? (CE, II, 177) To these questions the conclusion of To the Lighthouse unabashedly replies in the affirmative. For the spirit of Mrs Ramsay does indeed appear as "part of ordinary experience" (pp. 229-30); in the boat, Cam thinks that "they were doing two things at once; they were eating their lunch here in the sun and they were also making for safety in a great storm after a shipwreck"

the triangle, which appears both in this vision and in the painting (p. 61): he suggests that it represents Mrs Ramsay's "wedge-shaped core of darkness" (Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved, p. 200). This would then be yet another indication of the artist's ability to give shape to the shapeless depths.

³⁷Quoted by Wasserman, in Romanticism: Points of View, p. 341. For a negative answer, see CE, IV, 233-34.

(p. 233); and the reader is apparently meant to understand that the completion of Lily's picture and the completion of the trip to the lighthouse occur at the same moment. Thus the novel closes with several rather breath-taking gestures toward the paradise of the Romantics -- the absolute elimination of all dualities. This accounts in part for the fact that the reader may feel the ending to be too neat, too perfect, too "artificial". In The Waves, Virginia Woolf denies herself the luxury of another such resolution, and expands upon the central insight of To the Lighthouse: that the very stuff of life, as of art, lies in the constant alternation and interaction between the surface and the depths -- that is to say, not in their "fusion", but in their "combination".³⁸

³⁸In A Writer's Diary, the author refers to her "theory of the different levels in writing and how to combine them: for I begin to think the combination necessary" (p. 216). See also AWD, pp. 139, 237; and CE, I, 249.

IV

CONCLUSION: BERNARD'S SUMMING UP

1.

In his biography of Virginia Woolf, Quentin Bell makes the following statement directly after recording the birth of his subject: "As soon as she was able to consider such things, Virginia believed that she was the heiress to two very different and in fact opposed traditions; indeed she went further and held that these two streams dashed together and flowed confused but not harmonized in her blood."¹ Jean Guiguet similarly emphasizes that "the reality that became part of her childish being" was constituted of the contrary influences of the families of her mother and father, that is, "the tension between sensibility and intelligence, or to speak even more precisely between feeling and being on the one hand, understanding and expressing on the other".² He

¹Virginia Woolf: A Biography, I, 18.

²Virginia Woolf and Her Works, p. 61.

goes on to suggest that, as a remedy for this confusion or disharmony, Virginia Woolf "gave herself up entirely to these two currents, equally, according to a rhythm or a balance which enabled her to follow them both without their neutralizing one another."³ The effect of this situation upon her art inevitably follows: "the two complementary modes of existence . . . are the rhythms of Virginia Woolf's books as they are of her life."⁴

We have examined the various and intricate ways in which these rhythms work within one novel, To the Lighthouse; an overview of the author's entire corpus reveals the operation of the same rhythmic principle. Books like Night and Day, A Room of One's Own, Flush and Orlando were all written "on the rebound", as it were, from more serious works; they satisfied a need of which Mrs Woolf was very conscious:

My notion is that there are offices to be discharged by talent for the relief of genius: meaning that one has the play side; the gift when it is mere gift, unapplied gift; and the gift when it is serious, going to business. And one relieves the other . . . I rather think the upshot will be books that relieve other books . . . (AWD, pp. 136-37)

She has the same approach to the art of reading:

. . . we are incapable of living wholly in the intense world of the imagination. The imagination is a faculty that soon tires and needs rest and refreshment. But for a tired imagination the proper food is not inferior poetry or minor fiction -- indeed

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 404.

they blunt and debauch it -- but sober fact
 . . . "authentic information" . . .
 (CE, IV, 227)

Her many volumes of literary criticism testify to her own need as an imaginative writer for "sober fact". Yet it is abundantly clear to any reader that, even in the essays -- a genre which is theoretically the sole domain of the critical faculty -- an interplay of the "two currents" is always going on; as Mark Goldman says, there is "a creative tension in her criticism between the emotional response, the impression, the experience of the work, and its rational explanation and evaluation -- on formal grounds and in terms of traditional standards."⁵ The "creative tension" here manifested is analogous to that entailed by Virginia Woolf's commitment as a novelist "to the 'unconscious' self, as she describes the creative source, as well as to the equally essential tool for the writer, the critical intelligence."⁶

Throughout this paper I have examined this double commitment in Mrs Woolf's work in the light of her own metaphors of "the depths" and "the surface". I have stressed the importance of the sequence of descent away from the surface into the depths and ascent from the depths back to the surface as a pattern of rebirth, whereby the world may be recreated

⁵"Virginia Woolf and the Critic as Reader", reprinted in Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Sprague, p. 157.

⁶Ibid. Cf. Virginia Woolf on the achievement of Roger Fry in CE, IV, 92.

either in art (as in Lily Briscoe's painting) or in life (as in Mrs Ramsay's dinner-party). In both cases the recreated world is an approximation of eternity, because, insofar as it is the product of both dualities, it hints at their ultimate identification. They are not yet identified, however: the artist must first seek the "essence" and then embody it in the appropriate form; the individual must first know the unity of the depths and then create a "community of feeling" (L, p. 131) at the surface level of society -- a community which is imagined as "a new collective individual".⁷ An interesting comment made by Virginia Woolf during the writing of The Years indicates that she regarded the artistic and the social or existential facets of the upward movement in the Rebirth archetype as essentially the same; of her book, she said: "a kind of form is, I hope, imposing itself, corresponding to the dimensions of the human being" (AWD, p. 258). It is this kind of statement which suddenly impresses one with her kinship to a Romantic such as Blake, who considered his art an attempt to recreate the universe in the shape of the Human Form Divine.

The critic who has best recognized the relationship between inner and outer, depths and surface, solitude and society in the art of Virginia Woolf is probably A. D. Moody. The conclusion of his study remains one of the finest summaries available of the novelist's "creative endeavour":

⁷Carlyle, p. 11.

Her end is both to achieve an ordered wholeness in the individual life, and to project that order into the decadence and disintegration of her world; in short, to recreate her society and its culture in the image of the complete human person. The full meaning of her preoccupation with the inner life of the individual is that she sees that life to be inseparable from the life of society and civilisation, and to be, moreover, their vital centre -- both that which creates them and that which they exist to serve. Her withdrawal from the conventional "realities" of her world was compelled by the sense that they no longer served human needs, but had enslaved man in his own machinery. But her consequent concentration upon man in himself is directed by the recognition that his innermost need is for a social order in which he may be whole.⁸

There is no "withdrawal from the conventional 'realities' of her world" in Mrs Dalloway precisely because the novel is primarily an analysis of the diseased surface of that world. It depicts no "ordered wholeness in the individual life" (that is, in the depths of the self) and therefore no projection of any such order into the decadence of society; this is so because of the dramatic divorce of the depths and the surface as represented respectively by the figures of Septimus and Clarissa. To the Lighthouse, on the other hand, which is in every major respect the antithesis of Mrs Dalloway, literally portrays the achievement of those goals which Moody ascribes to Virginia Woolf as artist -- first by Mrs Ramsay, and later by Lily Briscoe. Bernard's story, as he recounts it in the last chapter of The Waves, has some interesting resemblances to those of Mrs Dalloway and Mrs Ramsay -- and also, as we might expect, to Romantic myth.

⁸Virginia Woolf, p. 112.

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"In the beginning, there was the nursery, with windows opening on to a garden, and beyond that the sea" (W, p. 205). This sets the symbolic stage upon which man's life unfolds. The garden, with its "'canopy of currant leaves which seemed to enclose everything'" (p. 205), is comparable to Blake's protected world of Innocence. It is in this world, as we have seen in Mrs Dalloway (the garden at Bourton is also a "walled-in place", D, p. 84), that "'things happen in one second and last forever'" in memory (p. 205). Beyond it is the Sea of Time and Space, the world of Experience. As the children enter that world, the white "'virginal wax that coats the spine'" (p. 207) melts in different patches as each of them reacts differently to what is around him. However, the suggestion that the "'wax'", in its "'virginal'" purity, was once the common possession of all the children indicates that they once "adhered" together, as if made of one substance. And Bernard's comment, "'We suffered terribly as we became separate bodies'" (p. 207), confirms this implication: at one time, they in fact were one body. It can be a most fruitful exercise to speculate, along with Frank D. McConnell, that Percival, who does not exist except in the other characters' perceptions of him, is that one body (or a manifestation of it) and is therefore analogous to Blake's Albion. McConnell conjectures that Percival represents a unity which is "the

impossible . . . full transaction between subject and object", between the inner and outer worlds -- in short, the unity of all "post-lapsarian" dualities: a state "whose loss is the creative trauma of the Romantic imagination."⁹

Bernard becomes aware of his own "separate body", that is, he becomes self-conscious, when he distinguishes his own reaction to Susan's tears from Neville's (p. 206). This incident brings in its train another revelation: "'I then first became aware of the presence of those enemies who change, but are always there; the forces we fight against'" (p. 206). The nature of "'those enemies'" is adumbrated by the roots "'hard as skeletons'" on which Bernard sits (p. 206). They are suffering, pain, death -- all the surface ills of the world of Experience, of being-within-time. Bernard decides at this point that to "'let oneself be carried on passively is unthinkable'" (p. 206) -- a decision which, in itself, is certainly praiseworthy, and directly pertinent to the chief failings of a character like Clarissa Dalloway. Bernard has the unhappy habit, however, of taking such action as finally ends by denying or incapacitating his determination not to be carried on passively. The Elvedon adventure, conceived as an alternative to the course of the world, results in a symbolic vision of the terminus of the course of the world. Beyond the wall

⁹"'Death Among the Apple Trees'", reprinted in Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Sprague, pp. 122-23.

which encloses "'the ringed wood'" (p. 13) are gardeners inexorably sweeping "'with great brooms'" and "'the fixity'" of a woman writing (p. 206). Elvedon is Death. In the repetition of the movement of the brooms, it may be associated with "'that little piece of dramatization'" in which Bernard indulges, in the midst of his "'anguish'" over Susan: he visualizes, in the attic room of Susan's country house, "'some witless servant . . . laughing . . . as she whirred the wheel of the sewing-machine round and round'" (p. 213). This image, which most probably represents the repetitious flux of time and the locked cyclism of nature, may not seem directly relevant to Susan's pain, but it is nonetheless, as Bernard says, "'symbolic'" of it (p. 213).

As Bernard grows older, he increasingly shows his willingness to be "'carried on passively'". He is "'drawn irresistibly to the sound of the chorus chanting its old, chanting its almost wordless, almost senseless song'": "'I like the copious, shapeless, warm, not so very clever, but extremely easy and rather coarse aspect of things . . . that which is without great hopes, ideals, or anything of that kind'" (p. 211). He enjoys the "'confusion'" of life when it is "'not yet formed into one whole'" (p. 212).¹⁰ And so time lets fall its "'drops'", and Bernard's identity, his "'I'", is "'formed'" as he moves

¹⁰The attitude is very similar to Clarissa Dalloway's, but it does not imply any underlying moral comment on the author's part -- mainly because The Waves is not a work grounded in social criticism, but a poetic chronicle of man.

from one "'completed experience'" to another (p. 217). Social activity nourishes this budding egotism: "'A shell forms upon the soft soul, nacreous, shiny, upon which sensations tap their beaks in vain'" (p. 219); and his egotism itself is wholly consonant with an acceptance of the "'tolerable'" repetitions of surface life: "'Tuesday follows Monday; then comes Wednesday. The mind grows rings; the identity becomes robust . . . We are swept on by the torrent of things grown so familiar that they cast no shadow'" (p. 221). Bernard's "'being'" becomes simply a machine, an "'engine'"; "'the whole mechanism seemed to expand, to contract, like the mainspring of a clock'" (p. 224). Marriage heightens and amplifies this pulse; it gives the "'beat'" of his mind, as he thinks, "'a more majestic rhythm'" (p. 222).

Only once in Bernard's early history is there the suggestion that "'this orderly and military progress'" may be "'a lie'", for there is "'always deep below it . . . a rushing stream of broken dreams, nursery rhymes, street cries, half-finished sentences . . .'" (p. 219). This marks his first intimation of the unconscious depths. When he is "'immersed'" in this stream, he is often struck by "'a sudden revelation . . . after which on I trotted taking stock with renewed delight of ties and things in shop-windows'" (p. 220). The evidence of the operation of the Rebirth archetype here is unmistakable.

The first real unmasking, however, of the "'lie'" which is Bernard's life follows hard upon the news of Percival's

death, an event which, significantly, occurs during the period when Bernard is most "separate", most "egotistical". The initial effect of this news is to jar him out of the comfortably repetitious rhythm of his existence and to make him see the world again, as if for the first time:

"To see things without attachment, from the outside, and to realize their beauty in itself -- how strange! And then the sense that a burden has been removed; pretence and make-believe and unreality are gone, and lightness has come with a kind of transparency, making oneself invisible and things seen through as one walks -- how strange." (p. 226)

This hearkens back to Bernard's childish poem about the wood-pigeon, made when "'a hole had been knocked in my mind, one of those sudden transparencies through which one sees everything'" (p. 206); it also looks ahead to the climactic transformation of his self and his world. But the state of "'freedom'", "'immunity'" and "'exaltation'" (p. 227) does not last, of course; and as it passes, surface life is exposed in all its absurdity and "'despicable nonentity'" (p. 228):

"Was there no sword, nothing with which to batter down these walls, this protection, this begetting of children and living behind curtains, and becoming daily more involved and committed . . .".
(pp. 228-29)

Like Clarissa Dalloway, Bernard has built a world whose main purpose is to keep off the hosts opposed to "the indomitable egotism" (D, p. 51), and whose ultimate effect is only to make him "'so unspeakably lonely'" (W, p. 229). The answer to

this massive disillusionment is defiance:¹¹ to "'pound on the shore'" like the unconfined wave (p. 230). Defiance for Bernard is putting on his hat, going out to earn his living, and surrendering once again to the flow of days.

But now the doubt is irrevocably planted in his mind. He now has the insight to associate the mindless pattern of Susan's life, "'rhythmical'", "'half-conscious'" and "'cramping'" (p. 230), with man's submission "'to the stupidity of nature'" (p. 231), and to realize that both are symbolized by Elvedon, that is, "'what is unescapable in our lot; death'" (p. 231). The impulse to fight would seem to be better satisfied by the tactic of ordering formlessness with words than by subjecting oneself to the deathly process of time (p. 232). Furthermore, when one has "'despatched the enemy for a moment'" with a phrase, the surface of life is temporarily redeemed; it again becomes bearable, satisfactory (p. 232).¹²

Another such moment, and a greater, occurs during the assembly of the six which is held at Hampton Court in honour of Percival's memory. "'We saw for a moment laid out among us the body of the complete human being whom we have failed to be, but at the same time, cannot forget'" (p. 238).

¹¹Cf. AWD, p. 162: "the theme effort, effort, dominates: not the waves: and personality: and defiance".

¹²In a similar manner, Bernard's "'poem about a wood-pigeon'" served to banish "'these enemies, these presences'" after the eery childhood experience at Elvedon (p. 206).

This poignant acknowledgement of failure to regain the original identity of man is followed by a horrifying vision of his present separation from the universe around him, a universe which, as in Terence Hewet's nightmarish vision, is threatening and destructive: "'we felt enlarge itself round us the huge blackness of what is outside us, of what we are not'" (p. 238). For a moment, they are extinguished in this abyss, but Bernard's pugnacious spoon-banging and phrase-making once again succeeds in despatching the enemy. Then, in an instant of intensity, the "'identity'" of the six blazes bright (p. 239). But the perfection of the communion is very short-lived, for only four walk off to an "'immersion'" (p. 239) in the tide of reality; Rhoda and Louis, the solitary conspirators, remain behind. And as Bernard surfaces, he immediately feels "'that old impulse, which has moved me all my life . . . to be tossed up and down on the roar of almost senseless merriments, sentiment, triumph, desire'" (p. 240). Like Mrs Ramsay at the start of the dinner-party, however, he refuses to yield to what is essentially a death-urge, for, as he says, "'I could not recover myself from that endless throwing away, dissipation, flooding forth without our willing it and rushing soundlessly away out there . . . to become waves in the sea'" (p. 240). The self, as Bernard has just learned at the Hampton Court gathering, is "that central reality" which one must never "lose sight of" (CE, II, 190), for even though it is an imperfect reality, it is the only road back to "wholeness" of identity. To "'[stream] away'" on the

surface flow of life, therefore, is indeed "'a sort of death'" (p. 240): it is to be "'extinguished'" in "'the roar of time'" (p. 238).

This would appear to be the meaning of a rather unpleasant depth-experience which Bernard undergoes directly thereafter. Making his way through just such an anonymous, rushing flood of people who "'went past like a river in spate'", he "'dived down a dark passage and entered the shop where they cut my hair'" (p. 240). Looking-glasses confront him with his own little body and those of the passing herd, while the hairdresser methodically and omnipotently cuts those bodies and lays them in swaths. All men have now "'become part of that unfeeling universe'" (here is the ironic depth-identification) which is not only non-human but actively anti-human (p. 241). Bernard's curiosity about an expression in the hairdresser's eye brings him back "'to the surface'". His evocation of Rhoda, who had cut herself down, "'to serve as opposite to myself'" (p. 241), shows Bernard attempting to exorcise his morbid vision and to persuade himself that this one life, which is also many lives, is something worth preserving (pp. 241-42).

This experience is followed by another which is the same in kind, and which marks the first stage of Bernard's climactic rebirth. It is self-evident that, in order to be reborn, one must first die; and we have seen that, for Virginia Woolf, this death is always a death to the conscious awareness of life. One day, "'the rhythm stopped'" for Bernard, and he

"saw through the thick leaves of habit" all the imperfections of his life (p. 243). In order to counteract his despair, he calls on his resolute, spoon-banging self, that "defiant" personality which had recently learned to live on the surface without being seduced by it. But this personality does not answer, and Bernard then knows something that is "'more truly death than the death of friends, than the death of youth'" (p. 244). Having lost his surface self, he mercilessly condemns its activities, the "'dust dance'" of his life (p. 245). Like Lily Briscoe just prior to her last vision of Mrs Ramsay, he has stepped off into "the waters of annihilation" (L, p. 205), "'the waste of this immeasurable sea'" (W, p. 244).

But then, as miraculously as the return of light to the world after the eclipse of the sun (p. 246), he becomes acquainted with the other side of the ambivalent depths of the self.

"So the landscape returned to me; so I saw fields rolling in waves of colour beneath me, but now with this difference: I saw but was not seen. I walked unshadowed; I came unheralded. From me had dropped the old response; the hollowed hand that beats back sounds. Thin as a ghost, leaving no trace where I trod, perceiving merely, I walked alone in a new world, never trodden . . ." (pp. 246-47).

Now that his "apparition", Mrs Ramsay's "what you see us by" (L, p. 73) has disappeared, the surface appearance of nature vanishes as well, and Bernard has a vision of house, garden and sea -- that is, of the whole history of human life -- and understands its meaning, sees the picture which reveals "'the truth'" (p. 247). He now has the same vantage point upon the

universe as the voice which narrates the cosmic interludes; in fact, Bernard's voice becomes that voice (p. 251). Since the cosmos has therefore been assimilated into human control, the breaking of the waves is no longer a sound to be feared; time is now an irrelevant illusion. "'The shock of the falling wave which has sounded all my life, which woke me so that I saw the gold loop on the cupboard, no longer makes quiver what I hold'" (p. 251). It cannot do so for the simple reason that Bernard now "holds" everything; he has become identical with Percival -- the primal God-man, the source of all life. The fact that there is no obstacle separating himself from the other five characters (p. 248) is but one indication of this. There is also no obstacle separating him from the entire universe:

"Immeasurably receptive, holding everything, trembling with fullness, yet clear, contained -- so my being seems, now that desire urges it no more out and away; now that curiosity no longer dyes it a thousand colours. It lies deep, tideless, immune, now that he is dead, the man I called 'Bernard' . . ." (p. 250).

This is one of those "'moments'" of which Rhoda had dreamed, "'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'" (p. 192).¹³ In such passages, Virginia Woolf is describing what Northrop Frye calls

¹³Cf. CE, I, 18: Reading Spenser, "we live in a great bubble blown from the poet's brain." Quoted in Ch. I, p. 35 of this study.

the "anagogic dream" of man, wherein

nature becomes, not the container, but the thing contained . . . Nature is now inside the mind of an infinite man who builds his cities out of the Milky Way. This is not reality, but it is the conceivable or imaginative limit of desire, which is infinite, eternal, and hence apocalyptic.¹⁴

"Oh, but there is your face. I catch your eye. I, who had been thinking myself so vast, a temple, a church, a whole universe, unconfined and capable of being everywhere on the verge of things and here too, am now nothing but what you see -- an elderly man, rather heavy, grey above the ears, who (I see myself in the glass) leans one elbow on the table, and holds in his left hand a glass of old brandy. That is the blow you have dealt me." (p. 251)

And so the gaze of the other forces Bernard to return to his own personality; now it is the looking-glass that "contains" (as in the hairdresser's shop) and not the God-man.

It is certainly understandable that a man who has just had an apocalyptic vision of total unity shattered should be disgusted by the "'disorder, sordidity and corruption'" (p. 252) of real life; it is understandable that he should curse the waiter who pitilessly demands that he break his solitude and be off. But after reviling his listener for the "'insult'" he has inflicted with his eyes, Bernard continues:

"Listen: a whistle sounds, wheels rush, the door creaks on its hinges. I regain the sense of the complexity and the reality and the struggle, for which I thank you. And with some pity, some envy and much good will, take your hand and bid you good night." (p. 253)

This performance is so astonishing primarily because it is of

¹⁴Anatomy of Criticism, p. 119.

such an unexpectedly heroic stature. Bernard's previous returns to reality had been rather dubious and suspect, but only because he had never really been away from it. Now, however, having seen the world literally transformed before his eyes, he is not only willing but grateful to be once again part of the surface flow of time, "'the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again'" (p. 255), and grateful for the struggles which he must therefore endure, the greatest of which is, of course, the battle against Death. The all-important point here, is that it is the vision of "'the world seen without a self'" (p. 247) which ratifies, ennobles and makes purposeful the fight against the world seen with a self; otherwise, existence on the surface, whether complacent or defiant, would be wholly absurd and pointless, just as it seemed to Bernard after Percival's death.

The Waves marks the achievement of a new philosophical maturity in the work of Virginia Woolf, a maturity which was to receive its finest expression in Between the Acts. Mrs Dalloway presents the reader with an unequivocal condemnation of the life of the surface; To the Lighthouse suggests the necessity of its continual "redemption" through conscientious human creativity. But in The Waves, and especially in Bernard's last words to his auditor, the surface is for the first time accepted on its own terms -- so long as man reminds himself from time to time that it is in the unfathomable depths of the self that his true identity lies. The dialectical rhythm

of the depths-surface alternation remains the central reality of human experience,¹⁵ but any serious attempt to redeem the flux of time is now regarded as an endeavour which is inauspicious at least, and probably futile. Bernard completely loses faith in his phrases. It is this wider acceptance of "life as we know it", this more austerely masculine respect for hard truths,¹⁶ that marks Virginia Woolf's most significant parting with some of the highest ideals of the Romantic poets. William Blake would never for an instant have entertained the idea of closing his masterpiece with the sound of waves breaking on the shore.

¹⁵Cf. Love, Worlds in Consciousness, p. 85.

¹⁶Cf. McConnell's analysis of "the world of things" in The Waves in "'Death Among the Apple Trees'".

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