Virginia Woolf's Silver Globe

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VIRGINIA WOOLF'S SILVER GLOBE

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BELO HORIZONTE
1962

To Antônio,

with my love and the hope that you

may read this dedication some day.

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"I ask myself whether one is not hypnotized, as a child by a silver globe, by life;

. . . . . .

I should like to take the globe in my hands and feel it quietly, round, smooth, heavy, and so hold it, day after day."

VIRGINIA WOOLF, *A Writer's Diary,*

CHAPTER ONE

Introductory

The present age has been witnessing the progress of a long revolution, which, in science, invention and economic knowledge, as in the arts, has shaken the world to its very roots. In the specific field of literature, a batch of Victorian and early twentieth century writers — among whom Butler, Shaw, Wells and Galsworthy — have shown the general restlessness of the period. They have denounced the ideas and dogmas of the nineteenth century, exposed its social and moral flaws and sometimes preached the religion of a generous, instinctive humanism. By so doing, they cleared the ground for a second group of reformers.

These carried the revolution into the mind itself, dared to peer into the mysterious depths of the very soul and bring to light the baffling intrincacies that the authors of the preceding generations had simplified and smoothed over by an external approach. Instead of concentrating on the exteriors of behaviour and incident, they made it their business to convey an inner vision, to capture the elusive flow of the mind, to reproduce the direct impact of life upon the conscious or even the unconscious. To this new approach, a new technique must needs correspond: the stream of consciouness. Long before being so christened, it had occasionally flickered in the works of earlier novelists, Sterne in the eighteenth, Henry

James in the nineteenth century. Only the tweentieth, however, was to see its full bloom, represented, in England, by the second group of revolutionary writers: James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf.

Among them, Virginia Woolf occupies a significant place. She provides the unity of theme Dorothy Richardson lacks and manages to steer safely away from James Joyce's meandering into intelligibility. For that reason alone, she could lay undeniable claims to careful and patient study.

No writer could be born into a more favourable environment. Her early circle, socially that of the upper middle class, fell within the intellectual aristocracy of the day. Many an eminent Victorian left an imprint on her childhood memories. Her father was Sir Leslie Stephen, the journalist, critic, editor and philosopher, who, to his intellectual honesty, added a scrupulous moral integrity. His magnificent library made Virginia Woolf self-educated in the best sense. After his death, always reading widely, she became a reviewer for *The Times Literary Supplement* and other periodicals, later, with her husband, Leonard Woolf, co-founder of the Hogarth Press. Through her criticism she developed her ideas about the novelist's craft, but it was only in her thirty-third year that she felt ready to embark upon the adventure of creative writing.

Her nine novels mark a deliberate, strenuous ascension towards the command of her craft. The first two, *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Night and Day* (1919), show her still struggling with the nineteenth century traditions of fiction writing. These prove too clumsy an apparatus for her vision of life as a whole, no less than for the development of her theme — the subtleties and inner working of personality. In these early novels, structure clashes with content. *Monday and Tuesday*, a collection of eight short sketches, written in 1919 and 1920, records a process of experimentation, the search for a suitable

mould where the novelist could appropriately shape her vision. *Jacob's Room* (1922), the first clumsy cast of the mould, marks a transition. There she forgoes the conventional plot and the traditional narrative technique. By often placing herself within the characters' minds and moving from one to another, she pours out a fragmentary view of human pain, love and death, in a world she sees as no longer endowed with solid beliefs and universally accepted values.

It is only in *Mrs. Dallowvay* (1925) that she first emerges fully master of her craft and displays a firm if subtle pattern that fittingly clothes her meaning. She perfections the stream of consciousness technique, makes away with the conventional plot and limits the time scheme to the waking hours of a single day. By means of the skilful combination of the thoughts, feelings, memories and anticipations of four or five central people and of a few peripheral figures, she contrives to give the reader a piercing insight into their characters' past lives and social backgrounds. The meeting of two characters at the end brings together the two worlds depicted: normality — in a frivolously glittering fashionable society — and insanity — in lower middle class surroundings. The floating threads of the novel are thus tied together and it is smoothly shaped into a whole.

To the Lighthouse (1927) shows the same perfect blending of form and content. Conventional plot is likewise missing. The stream of consciousness technique is again neatly and subtly used to portray character. The poetic tone sometimes found in preceding novels is intensified and a pervading lyrical note substituted for the satirical mood of *Mrs. Dalloway*. An equally perfect ending rounds everything into a whole. The novel closes with two symbols of simultaneous achievement: the arrival of three characters at a lighthouse to which a symbolic meaning is attached and the no less significant completion of a picture by another. In these two novels of

her middle period Virginia Woolf reaches the peak of her achievement as a novelist. She never, however, stops experimenting.

In *Orlando* (1928) she ricochets to a traditional narrative technique. At first, she gives us a brief, stirring love story. Then she throws both plot and character overboard and transforms her hero into a mere recording eye for a satirical presentation — often in delightful imitation of contemporary style — of the succeeding ages. Several recurring themes, as poetry, the flight of time, the complexity of self, the position of women in society, are simultaneously discussed.

The Wawes (1938), a multi-voiced, poetic commentary on life, boldly leaps forward to a form so far unused by Virginia Woolf herself and perhaps unique in all fiction. To divide the several sections of the book, she uses nine pieces descriptive of a seashore scene. Ranging from dawn to sunset, they symbolize and introduce the several periods, from childhood to age, in the lives of seven people. Boiled down to the essentials of broad types, they grapple with life and death, bathed in a cosmic light. To cut these gigantic "statues against the sky" [1], the author, instead of rapidly changing streams of consciousness, uses only markedly characteristic, amazingly beautiful, but set and formalized soliloquies.

The Years (1937) marks her second return to the traditional norms. In a series of scenes skilfully blending narrative and dialogue the book follows the fortunes of an upper middle class family, from 1880 to the publication date. The main theme is that of the flight of time, with its double implication of change and permanence for human personality. The stress lies in no individual characters, but rather in their relation to one another, in the balance they achieve so as together to depict the large canvas of family life ponderously sailing through half a century.

1. *A Writer's Diary,* p. 157.

The last novel, *Between the Acts* (1941), presents traits already present in earlier ones, achieving, however, a general effect to be found in none. To the time scheme, satirical tone and methods of character portrayal found in *Mrs. Dalloway* it adds an imaginative interpretation of historical periods, as in *Orlando,* and poetic touch, as in *To the Lighthouse*. Against all that, the novel projects the harsh picture of the modern world, haunted by the ominous drone of aeroplanes on the eve of the second World War. With this ponderous contemporary finale, the novelist winds up the series of her nine novels.

The subtle quality of Virginia Woolf's art no seldom makes it difficult reading. This has hardly contributed to make her popular. Unsympathetic readers will charge her with an incapacity for story telling. These, one may answer with the initial episode in *Orlando,* that breathless unforgettable love story, which glares red against the Jacobean background, thaws with its radiance the snow of the Great Frost and drowns in disillusion in the yellow waters of the ensuing flood. Critics like E. M. Forster will lay qualifications upon her gift for character portrayal. To these one may hand a string of names, picked up almost at random: Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse;* Clarissa Dalloway and Doris Kilman in *Mrs. Dalloway;* Eleanor, Peggy and Kitty in *The Years*.

What the reader may rightly complain of is that, by her method of character portrayal — a skilful, cumulative combination of people's thoughts, feelings, memories, utterances, reflections on other minds, less typically, of narrative and description — Virgina Woolf lays great demands on his attention. Unlike traditional novelists, who, so to speak, provide character ready-made, she asks for his collaboration in slowly piecing together all dropped hints, until the character stands complete before his eyes. That, however, she amply compensates by the sublety and penetration of her great figures. One may add that, if she thus generally gives up

traditional plot, she does so because her particular artistic vision aims at depth rather than at width and focuses the stamp left on the mind by events more than the events themselves. By filtering it through the crystal of her mind she manages to extract the full glow of the passing moment and to transfigure day to day experience. She also sucessfully contrives to develop her favourite themes: the mystery of self; the flux of experience; the relation of personality, death and time to one another.

CHAPTER TWO

The silver globe

No theme attracts Virginia Woolf more than that of personality. "Who am I, what am I and so on: these questions are always floating about in me",[1] she cries in her diary. The cry rings all through her nine novels, insistently echoed by the creatures of her imagination.

We find her vivid interest mirrored in Rachel's, her first heroine's, exaltation, when the existence of her own personality, "as a real everlasting thing, different from anything else, unmergeable like sea or the wind",[2] first flashes through her mind.

The mystery of self turns out an inexhaustible source of wonder for other characters. To Peter Walsh, "our self ... fish-like inhabits deep seas and plies among obscurities threading her way between the boles and giant weeds, over sun-flickered spaces and on and on into gloom, cold, deep, inscrutable."[3]

In their wish to penetrate the mystery, people constantly try to puzzle out the essence of Mrs. Ramsay's being. They wonder:

"What was there behind it — her beauty, her splendour?"[4]

1. *A Writer's Diary,* p. 86.
2. *The Voyage Out,* p. 95.
3. *Mrs. Dalloway,* p. 177.
4. *To The Lighthouse,* p. 33.

Lily Briscoe asks similar questions about her:

"Was it wisdom? Was it knowledge? Was it, once more, the deceptiveness of beauty, so that all one's perceptions, half-way to truth, were tangled as in a golden mesh?" [5]

In *Orlando,* the novelist uses her own voice to dwell on the complexity of human nature:

"Nature ... has played so many tricks upon us, making us so unequally of clay and diamonds, of rainbow and granite... and has further complicated her task and added to our confusion by providing ... a perfect rag-bag of ends and odds within us." [6]

Personality seems to her a fascinating iridescence, never seen in the same light by different observers, influenced by the closeness of other iridescences, having, besides, to fight its way through time. Lily Briscoe muses on the "many shapes" one person may wear. [7] Bernard often calls our attention to the multiplicity of creatures he feels within himself. "There are many rooms, many Bernards." [8] He repeatedly reminds us of the influence other people exert upon him. His character "is in part made of the stimulus which other people provide." [9] His being "only glitters when all its facets are exposed to many people. "Let them fail" and he is "full of holes, dwindling like burnt paper." [10] He seems deliberately to echo William James's remark on the multiplicity of social selves when he sees personality as a single flower, but displaying seven different aspects, each corresponding to its apprehension by one of the seven central people in *The Waves:*

"There is a red carnation in that vase. A single flower as we sat here waiting, but now a seven-sided flower, many-petalled, red, puce, purple-shaded, stiff with silver-tinted leaves — a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution." [11]

5. Idem, p. 59.
6. *Orlando,* p. 44.
7. *To The Lighthouse,* p. 225.
8. *The Waves,* p. 184. See also, p. 55.
9. Idem, p. 95.
10. Ibid., p. 132. See also p. 83.
11. Ibid., p. 91.

Virginia Woolf never gets tired of the subject of personality. A further aspect — that of its relation to time — makes one of the themes in *Orlando,* almost the dominant one in *The Years*.

The infinitely delicate process, the curious signalling with emotional antennae through which self communicates with self likewise draws her attention and underlies the relationships among her creatures, chiefly in *The Waves* and *Between The Acts*.

Some of the aspects mentioned so far directly or indirectly link up with the inconsistencies, the inner oscillations, the perpetual struggle for unification within the human soul. This many-sidedness and this struggle hold a sort of fascination for Virginia Woolf. Her awareness of them pervades all her novels. This awareness alone would explain her not belonging to the group of traditional novelists, who, building up character chiefly upon the externals of behaviour, can become acquainted mainly with the composed dress that, for social imperatives, usually covers the unavoidable waverings and contradictions of the individual. She deliberately renounces to imitate the comparatively simple and coherent figure their creatures often cut in the reader's mind. Their simplicity seems to her far from true to the psychological reality of actual human beings. Hence her preference for the stream of consciousness technique or approaches to it — which, piercing directly into the character's mind, allows her to dwell on the fluidities and inconsistencies of personality.

The creatures of her novels are accordingly very often portrayed in relation to the possibility of conciliating all contradictory or divergent traits in themselves — feelings, thoughts, attitudes — into an at least provisionally consistent whole. They frequently convey a vision of self much in keeping with that of modern psychologists. According to them, personality is not a static, coherent entity, but a dynamic organization, in unending process of adaptation; "an organism"

"whose evolution answers to the need of an adaptative equilibrium", which, however, "is in constant danger;" a mechanism in constant search for integration, but "always running the risk of breaking to pieces", and therefore characterized rather by the tendency to unity than by unity itself. [12]

The ideal of the integrated personality, of the connected ones of order, security, stability, of a correspondingly harmonious view of life, fascinates most of Virginia Woolf's central figures. They fight to attain it. They frantically hold on to this hope. One of the great characters, Mrs. Ramsay, seems to achieve it. Others find compromising approximations. A few despair of achieving it. In one or two cases the novelist uses her own voice to utter this despair. But fighting, hoping, achieving or despairing they all show their consciousness of the problem.

Once, in *To the Lighthouse,* Virginia Woolf has man find in nature herself a promise of the unity, order and security he seeks within himself and in the universe alike.

"there came to the wakeful, to the hopeful ... imaginations of the strangest kind — ... of cliff, sea, cloud and sky brought purposefully together to assemble outwardly the scattered parts of the vision within. In those mirrors, the minds of men, in those pools of uneasy water, in which clouds for ever turn and shadows form, dreams persisted, and it was impossible to resist the strange intimation which every gull, flower, tree, man and woman, and the white earth itself seemed to declare (but if questioned at once to withdraw) that good triumphs, happiness prevails, order rules; or to resist the extraordinary stimulus to range hither and thither in search of some absolute good, ... something alien to the processes of domestic life, single, hard, bright, ... which would render the possessor secure." [13]

The importance of the theme looms so large to Virginia Woolf that two of her masterpieces, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves,* give it a central position. Only indirectly or most

12. J. C. FILLOUX, *La Personalidad,* p. 49-50.
13. p. 153.

explicitly, by a single phrase or at great length, all her novels refer to it. In a way, they may be read as a series of studies on it. The central love stories in the first two are practically identified with the quest for integration. In *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway* one may hear short but clear cries that express the despair of ever achieving it in life. *To the Lighthouse,* on the contrary, illustrates its attainment by one incomparable being. *Orlando* lightly stitches some remarks and introduces time as the enemy to the continuity of self. *The Waves* turns out a long, poetic echo of both despair and comparative achievement in preceding novels. *The Years* indirectly returns to the subject of time as the enemy integration must conquer. *Between the Acts,* in a single but ringing phrase, adds a last note of dejection.

We have accordingly hoped that the study of the role played by integration in Virginia Woolf's novels may provide a modest but significant contribution to their reading. This hope has presided at its choice as the subject of this thesis.

Virginia Woolf often uses, to represent the two closely linked ideals — the integrated personality and an harmonious vision of life — the image of a circle, or similar ones, a globe, a sphere, a circumference. They appear and reappear in her novels. They recur in her diary. In fact, they aptly symbolize the ideal of integration: just as in the curved line that encloses the circle every point is equidistant from the centre, so also, in the integrated personality, all traits may be said to organize around some centralizing ideal, desire or purpose.

We have therefore thought it fit to keep the author's own symbol for the study of her absorbing theme. This explains the allusion to the silver globe on the title page.

CHAPTER THREE

A scheme of work

The theme of unification within the individual and in his view of man's universe directly or indirectly makes itself felt in all of Virginia Woolf's novels. In a way, with its criss-cross of references, it tightly knits them together, like a varied pattern, where a continuous, bright-coloured thread insistently catches the observer's eye.

The Voyage Out introduces the theme from the standpoint of the fight for integration, embodied by the central lovers. But, in the character of Helen Ambrose, it likewise presents the prototype of the fully balanced and unified personality, which is to grow to its full stature in the Mrs. Ramsay of *To the Lighthouse*. The first and the fifth novel thus refer to each other.

Night and Day takes up the fight for integration, adding, besides, to it a comic note, chiefly represented by William Rodney's character. It likewise starts, in the figure of Mary Datchet, the sub-theme of integration around a vicarious activity — work — for which Lily Briscoe substitutes art in *To the Lighthouse* and Louis power in *The Waves*. The sub-theme thus brings together the second, fifth and seventh novel.

Jacob's Room, by the very method of focusing character — chaotic and fragmentary — seems to hint at the hopelessness of integration within the human soul. To Mrs. Dalloway, nothing but a mere appearrance of integration, worn like a

mask before society, seems possible, except if one paradoxically chooses to seek true harmony in death. *Between the Acts,* in a single ringing remark, smacks of a similar hopelessness — which thus pervades three significant novels, respectively: the one marking the author's rejection of traditional methods, her first mature work and her last, comprehensive vision of life.

Orlando explicity proposes the question of the fight of self to preserve its unity through time, to which *The Years* indirectly returns. Occasional, less easily summarized remarks, and the recurring image of the globe symbolic of integration, equally bind the nine novels together.

One thus sees that, from the standpoint of our theme, they seem to flow naturally one out of the other. Each adds something to the subject, be it to focus, from a different angle, aspects already discussed, to introduce a new one, which a later novel afterwards resumes, or to utter a remark pertinent to the whole field already covered.

On account of this continuity in the treatment of the theme, we have thought it not unsuitable to study it following the novels in the chronological order of their publication. An exception is the treatment of two figures, one from *The Voyage Out* and the other from *To the Lighthouse,* in the same chapter, as well as that of the problem of personality continuity through time in *Orlando* and *The Years,* likewise under the same heading. In either case, both the similarity of theme and the comparative shortness of the respective chapters made the procedure no less possible than desirable.

We are now in a position to sketch out the scheme of our study, which is to develop along the following lines:

1) The fight for integration, represented by the central lovers in *The Voyage Out*.
2) The fight for integration pursued by the chief couple in *Night and Day*.

3) The comic side of the fight, seen in the character of William Rodney *(Night and Day)*.

4) The sub-theme of integration around a vicarious activity — Mary Datchet's ideals of social reform — still in *Night and Day*.

5) The hopelessness of achieving integration suggested by the approach to character in *Jacob's Room*.

6) Mrs. Dalloway's view of integration as no more than a social mask; her belief that true harmony can be found only in death.

7) The resumption of the theme of integration around a vicarious activity — Lily Briscoe's art — in *To the Lighthouse*.

8) The illustration of the attainment of integration by Helen Ambrose *(The Voyage Out)* and Mrs. Ramsay *(To the Lighthouse)*.

9) Remarks dropped by *Orlando* on the manysidedness of self and on its unification.

10) Echoes of aspects already discussed, to be found in *The Waves*.

11) The problem of the continuity of personality through time in *Orlando* and *The Years*.

12) The last remark on the problem of integration in the posthumous novel, *Between the Acts*.

13) Conclusion.

CHAPTER FOUR

The fight for integration in «The Voyage Out»

In her first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), Virginia Woolf presents a number of characters, which we can roughly divide in two groups. In one we find a bunch of peripheral figures, which, seen from the outside, and mostly used as a kind of background, generally illustrate no particular problem. The main characters make the second group, in whom the theme of the quest for personality integration and for a correspondingly harmonious vision of the world clearly emerges.

The plot evolves on quite traditional lines. Only the psychological studies, centred chiefly on the figures of the two lovers, and a great pathetic scene, make the novel in any way noticeable. The story, rather uninteresting, tells of how a couple of intellectuals, Ridley and Helen Ambrose, take their niece, Rachel Vinrace, for a short holiday in a small English colony in South America. Once settled in a relative's villa, the two women make the acquaintance of a party of English people staying at a hotel near by. Two young men, St. John Hirst and Terence Hewet, become their constant companions. After a while, Terence and Rachel fall in love and get engaged, but her abrupt death brings the story to a sudden close. What might turn out no more than a trivial episode of young people meeting and marrying under the decorous wing of their elders' approval is thus given the dignity of great sorrow.

One might wonder at the author's reason for placing her people in the tropics and then making no use of the exotic background, except for a few descriptive pieces and for the cause of Rachel's death — of a tropical fever. The explanation does not seem difficult. Cut away from ordinary occupations, people's lives swing like a pendulum between the villa and the small hotel. In both the few possible social activities — friendly calls, a picnic, an expedition up the river, a dance — are on the whole favourable to the long leisurely talks in which the characters mostly reveal themselves. In other occasions seclusion favours long meditations, which answer the same purpose. Besides, the remoteness from the great centres of civilization allows a few rigid barriers to fall. Terence explicitly talks to Rachel about their release from the Richmond convention against staying out together by eight o'clock in the evening. People make friends, couples settle engagements more quickly. This relaxation of excessive conventional tensions, this greater ease in personal relationships, gives Virginia Woolf the chance to dwell on what mostly interests her: the characters' feelings, moods and thoughts. She does not focus her attention so much on what they do but on the kaleidoscopic movements of their souls. The technique used, chiefly narrative, ill fits this emphasis, but, however clumsily, she manages to say her say.

The theme of the quest for integration proves apparent in the novel and is developed around the figures of the central couple of lovers, who, aware of their inconsistencies, fight for an inner unification, which they hope to achieve through love.

Rachel Vinrace is a shy, unexperienced, stammering twenty-four year old girl. Utterly ignorant of the relations between the sexes, the product of a secluded life between a narrow-minded father and two spinster aunts, she stands for a side commentary on the inept education of women that Virginia Woolf so much resented. She strikes and charms one

as "a live, if informed, experimental being." [1] The affectionate, good-humoured influence of strong-minded Rachel soon begins to tell on her. She slowly awakens to a keener consciousness of life and self. By inches, she moves towards greater assurance. She becomes more attractive. Terence Hewet forwards her education by falling in love with her. An easy, tolerant, self-confident young man, the novelist of an unwritten novel about the things people do not say — and here he heralds the future Virginia Woolf — he owns a safe income but no clear profession. He acts as a kind of mirror for Rachel's feelings. Reflected and duplicated by him, they somehow become clearer and more straightforward.

From the very beginning of their relationship, the reader becomes aware of great emotional instability in the couple. All kinds of rapidly oscillating moods, wavering feelings, goings forth and drawings back, beset them. No seldom they become tiresome and make him long for some stable character to cling to.

Typical of the constant ebb and flood of ther feelings is their long conversation on the edge of the cliff. [2] To follow Terence's emotional wake there proves quite a dizzying experience. First painfully aware of Rachel's desirableness, soon happy and easy, then stirred up by the interest in her account of her life at home and the wish to know more about her, he presently ebbs down to depression. He feels that they draw far apart even if, moments before, they felt so close. Roused again by some satisfaction on speaking about his unwritten novel, spurred by the renewed wish to take her in his arms, all he had so earnestly said seems to him untrue; yet, the relief of being able to talk of his affection for her soothes him down. There follows a sense of intimacy with her, but, on their arrival to her gate, his old discomfort returns.

1. p. 244.
2. p. 149 to 266.

Rachel is a worthy partner in this emotional dance. Similar waves of emotion carry her back and forward: a sensation of comfort and ease, superseded by self-consciousness, soon by a feeling of searching and agony. There comes the wish to kiss him, then to know about his unwritten novel, then depression and an impression of his remoteness. On that we must heap bewilderment at his talk, a sudden rush of delight at calling him by his Christian name, then a sense of intimacy, before they reach her gate and part without a word.

Further instances of such waverings may be easily adduced. The state of Rachel's mind, full of "unformed restless desires"[3], beset by "sensations without names"[4], fluctuating from joy to despair or to fierce bursts of anger,[5] bewilders the sensible Helen. She notices how the girl's view of life changes every day.[6]

The relations between the lovers prove irreproachably in accordance with moral codes of behaviour. But their emotional oscillations make the connexion far from conventional. Rachel herself notices that

> "none of the books she read, from *Wuthering Heights* to *Man and Superman,* and the plays of Ibsen suggested from their analysis of love that what their heroines felt was what she was feeling." [7]

Not even their avowal of mutual love puts an end to the couple's inner waverings. Terence and Rachel feel one moment drawn to each other, the next separate and far away again.[8] The instability of their moods, "the hopelessness of their position",[9] makes them feel as if they clung together on the edge of a precipice.[10] It leads Rachel to the suggestion of

3. p. 299.
4. p. 272.
5. p. 299.
6. p. 191.
7. p. 272.
8. p. 345.
9. p. 371.
10. idem.

breaking off their engagement. Yet, it unites them more than ever, "painful and terrible" [11] though the perpetual oscillation may make their union. Sometimes their future appears to her in the form of a fight.[12] He likewise tells her:

— "There are moments when, if we stood on a rock together, you'd throw me into the sea." [13]

No less unsteady are Terence's feeling during her illness: sordid misery and profound boredom, doubts even about their engagement and former happiness [14], intense joy at being so close to her, followed by deep anxiety, dazed, distant indifference [15], happines at the hope of perfect union in death [16], then, in a great memorable scene, acute pain at the thought of a world where he will never see her again.[17]

The contradictory feelings that perpetually haunt their distracted personalities lead the lovers to the idea of the unreality of all things. In moments of greater confusion, they doubt the existence of this elusive self, which they struggle to shape into a consistent unit, but which constantly evades their grasp. Rachel comes to question the place they are in, their very identities:

"Are we on the deck of a steamer on a river in South America? Am I Rachel, are you Terence?" [18]

"We are asleep and dreaming"[19], she repeats. Sometimes, seemingly involved in a mist, they seem unreal to each other.[20] The mist of unreality once thickens before Terence:

11. ibid.
12. p. 345.
13. p. 365.
14. p. 409.
15. p. 425, 430.
16. p. 431.
17. p. 432.
18. p. 353.
19. p. 316.
20. p. 344.

... "it ... produced a feeling of numbness all over his body. Was it his body? Were these really his own hands?" [21]

Rachel's consciousness of the lack of integration in her personality leads her to a trance-like feeling of dissolution, to doubts about the identity of the people around her, to an awe at the very existence of things:

"Who were the people in the house? ... And life, what was that? It was only a light passing on the surface and vanishing, as in time she herself would vanish ... Her dissolution became so complete that she could not raise her finger any more and sat perfectly still, listening and looking always at the same spot. It became stranger and stranger. She was overcome with awe that things should exist at all ..." [22]

In accordance with a well-known psychological mechanism, the lovers thus project into the exterior world the inner feeling of unreality, from which physical movement may sometimes make the only possible refuge.[23] It is then no longer self alone, but the whole universe that seems unreal "covered ... by a wave of feverish red mist."[24] The vision of the world, once for a moment vivid, becomes dim. "It's a dream",[25] Rachel murmurs. When Terence's hand follows where hers had been, this brings back

"the overpowering sense of unreality. This body of his was unreal. The whole world was unreal." [26]

The feeling mingles with strangeness even at the sight of an ordinary tree [27] and links up with her reveries. In one, she turns into a Persian princess far from civilization, "far from the strife of men and women." [28]

21. p. 427.
22. p. 145.
23. p. 316.
24. Idem
25. p. 315.
26. p. 345.
27. p. 404-5.
28. p. 181.

No wonder that, torn by the contradictory forces in their minds, distressed by the annihilating feeling of unreality, the lovers should yearn for integration. They fight to harmonize all their divergent traits in a single, consistent, harmonious whole. Thus they illustrate man's typical if never completely satisfied desire for the unification of conflicting tendencies, for consistency in conduct and feeling, for unity of purpose, for the polarization of all traits in the mind around an organizing centre. Even more than characters in a love story, they become symbols of man's struggle for this unification and for a consequently harmonious vision of life.

The longing for integration and for the related feelings of security, stability and wholeness symbolically appear in several passages. Terence expresses a wish "to make figures", to combine lights as in the figures made by fireworks,[29] that is, to unify all traits of his personality into a coherent design. Rachel wants "to run all days into one long continuity of sensation",[30] that is, to attain a stable emotional life. Projecting her inner need of integration into the exterior world she longs for a time when the world might be "one and indivisible",[31] i. e., entire, consistent. She gazes longingly upon a newspaper lying directly beneath a clock, a symbol of "stability in a changing world".[32]

Terence and Rachel finally hope to find in love the central point around which to organize all traits of self. Integration, they believe, can be achieved through their mutual attachment. With Karl Jaspers, they see love and the formation of ties in the way to selfhood and "in the path where life will once more become a whole",[33] i. e., integrated.

29. p. 266.
30. p. 272.
31. p. 362.
32. p. 315.
33. KARL JASPERS, *Man in the Modern Age*, p. 203.

Several passages in the novel symbolize this hope. After the engagement Terence thinks the world has "more solidity, more coherence".[34] Merely to be close to each other soothes the couple, "as if the world were once more solid and entire".[35] At this period, Terence later complains, he dared to believe in the stability of life.[36] So also Rachel feels that

> "things formed themselves into a pattern, not only for her, but for them, and in that pattern lay satisfaction and meaning."[37]

Kindred ideas recurrently appear. Love gives certainty to life,[38] intensity to everything.[39] Love concentrates Rachel's youth into "a single spark."[40]

One may notice that the very words symbolically used by the lovers to express their inner struggle bear semantic and sometimes even etymological relations to the word used by psychologists, integration (Lat. *integratum,* "made whole" < *integer,* "intact", "whole"). Terence says he wants to *combine* lights. (To *combine,* Lat. *combinare* < *binare,* "unite", "combine" < *bini, -ae, -a,* distributive of *duo*). Rachel wants to run all the days into one long *continuity* of sensation. (*Continuity* Lat. *continuitat-(em)*, "unbroken series", "cohesion"). She longs for a time when the world way be *one* and *indivisible*. (*One,* cognate with Lat. *unus,* "alone", "single" designating oneness, unity; *indivisible,* < Lat. *indivisili-(is)*, "not capable of being separated or divided", that is, inescapably whole). After the engagement Terence finds the world has more *solidity,* more *coherence*. (Solidity, Lat. *soliditat-(em)*, "quality of being solid, massive", cognate with *solus,* "whole"; *coherence,* Lat.

34. p. 356.
35. p. 371.
36. p. 421.
37. p. 384.
38. p. 386.
39. p. 236.
40. p. 360.

cohere + *ence* < Lat. *co-haerere,* to stick together", therefore "sticking together", "logical consistent"). Being close together makes the lovers feel *solid* and *entire* again. (*Entire,* Lat. *integrum,* nom. *integer,* "intact", "whole"). Love *concentrates* Rachel's youth into a *single* spark. (Concentrare < Lat. *con* + *centrum,* "to bring together to a centre, to unite into one body or force; *single* < M. E. and O. Fr. *sengle* < Lat. *singulus,* distributive of *unus,* "one to each"). All of these words convey the underlying meaning of wholeness, unity, oneness, consistence, coherence or organization around a centre understood in the idea of integration.

Rachel intimates the same when she says that, after her engagement, things form themselves into a *pattern*. In this connexion, the word suggests several threads woven together to form a single design. On the contrary, when she projects her inner feeling of non-integration, she resorts to the word *dissolution* (Lat. *dissolution-*[*em*], "interruption", "disconnexion", which suggests the breaking up of a body into pieces, i.e., the opposite of integration). These or similar words recur in Virginia Woolf's subsequent novels, echoing the pursuit of the same theme.

At the end of *The Vovage Out* the reader then finds himself in possession of a clearly stated theme: the quest for integration, which the central characters hope to achieve through love, but which death too soon baffles.

Helen Ambrose stands somewhere in the boundary between a main and a secondary character. She alternately steps forward to the spolight and draws back to the wings. With her stable, well-balanced, humane, if ironic individuality, she somehow represents the achievement of the ideal of integration that fascinantes the central couple. As she, however, shares several traits with the Mrs. Ramsay of *To the Lighthouse,* who likewise stands for this ideal, it seems convenient to reserve the theme for timely treatment of the two characters in the same chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

The fight for integration in «Night And Day»

The second of Virginia Woolf's novels, *Night and Day* (1919), technically built, as the first, mainly on traditional lines, tells how Katharine Hilbery, a sensitive and intelligent young woman belonging to one of the most distinguished families in England, tries to make up her mind to marry William Rodney, an insipid, long-time suitor, but reluctantly finishes by falling in love with an aggressive new one, Ralph Denham. William's sudden love for Katharine's cousin, Cassandra Otway, makes the dénouement easier. In fact, it looks suspiciously like a resource to cut the Gordian knot. [1] Ralph's friend, Mary Datchet, who had fallen in love with him, is left to drown her grief in work.

The atmosphere in *The Voyage Out* is often poetic. In *Night and Day,* comic situations abound. Katharine and William's unusual expedient of keeping up the appearance of their engagement so that they can have the chance to study the partners they feel really interested in provides one. The library scene in which Katharine's father, Mr. Hilbery, "painfully and angrily obsolete," [2] insists on knowing who is

1. The author herself feared William's change of heart might have been "a little violent" or not "sufficiently prepared for to be credible". *Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey: Letters,* p. 84.

2. p. 498.

engaged to whom, another. [3] The exchange of lovers between the two couples reminds the reader of the similar substitutions in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream,* propitiated by Mrs. Hilbery, that modern version of a romantic fairy, and brought about, not by magic, but by the instability of feelings. Two pairs, Mary-Ralph, Katharine-William, once wander in rustic seclusion near Lincoln, as in a mildly ironic parody of an Arcadian story, where the intricacy of feelings replaces the complexity of plot.

Except for this country interlude, the scene is London in the first years of the century. Katharine's upper middle class family provides the predominant social background, with occasional glimpses of Ralph's shabbily respectable surroundings. Unlike the characters in *The Voyage Out,* those in *Night and Day* must go through their inner struggle in a world of commonplace realities and everyday occupations. Katharine manages the house for her mother, pays bills, settles family affairs. William is a government clerk, Ralph a prominent young lawyer, Mary a militant feminist. The story evolves among a profusion of tea-parties and family celebrations, crowded with elderly aunts and teasing cousins. The central characters' psychological oscillations thus sharply contrast with the stable, conventional background.

Disposed in groups around the four central young people and drawn according to traditional norms, the secondary figures provide a sort of background or occasionally prod the story on. As in the first novel, the technique, mainly narrative, seems hardly suitable for the author's real interest, which centres on the complexities of the mind. The theme of the search for integration, again developed around the figures of the lovers, proves likewise apparent.

In fact, Ralph and Katharine take up the fight so tragically cut short in *The Voyage Out*. As Terence and Rachel, rapidly changing moods and a consequent feeling of unreality, soon

3. p. 495.

projected into the outside world, torture them. Like the first pair, they long for the achievement of inner consistency and an accordingly harmonious vision of life. Like their predecessors, they hope to attain it through love.

Katharine Hilbery combines, with astounding likelihood, qualities seldom to be met with in a single person. On the one hand, strength of character, a capacity for action, independence, self-control, which justify her being said to represent "the manly side of the feminine nature". [4] On the other, "an unblunted and profound sensibility", [5] a vein of passion that will not be satisfied with less than a "magnanimous hero" [6] for a lover and "a superb catastrophe" [7] for love. To such a nature, not to care is the utmost sin — a sin that haunts her all the time that she vainly struggles to return William's love. Ralph Denham, the young solicitor, the "angular and acrid soul" [8], echoes her qualities of sensitiveness and decision. Thus endowed, they pursue Terence and Rachel's dream of being "free together." [9]

Seen from the outside, they seem fairly consistent. Ralph is the hard-working lawyer with a desire to get on in the world, the dutiful son and brother. Katharine, the accomplished, reserved young lady and — so Lady Otway remarks — the perfect daughter. Virginia Woolf's eyes reach, however, deeper than both their families and find them very far from that elusive simplicity. Katharine is the first to throw doubts on the accuracy of the self people make up for her. She tells her cousin Henry:

— "I'm a humbug — I mean, I'm not what you all take me for. I'm not domestic, or very practical, or sensible, really." [10]

4. p. 362.
5. p. 285.
6. p. 108.
7. Idem.
8. p. 10.
9. *The Voyage Out,* p. 298.
10. p. 203.

She is no "flat character" in E. M. Forster's sense of the word, that is, one incapable of surprising the reader. She often does surprise, as actual people will. Her prosaic resignation to a perfectly loveless marriage clashes against her splendid reveries. Her anguish at losing William remains inconsistent with her indifference to him. The long hesitations over her feelings for Ralph seem odd in so decided a character.

The fluidity of Katharine's moods makes Mary feel in her "a curious power of drawing near and receding." [11] The changeability of her feelings can be no better illustrated than by her denial of her love for Ralph [12], so short a while after the moment when, in "a flood of confusion, of relief, of certainty, of humility, of desire no longer to strive and discriminate" [13], she lets herself sink within his arms and confesses her love.

He can, in his turn, also experience "an astonishing variation" [14] of sentiments in so short a period as half an hour. He feels it necessary constantly to reassure her that they are in love, so frequent are their sudden changes of mood, the waves of contradictory feelings that they christen their "lapses".

"What was the cause of these lapses? Either because Katharine looked more beautiful or more strange, because she wore something different or said something unexpected, Ralph's sense of her romance welled up and overcame him, either into silence or into inarticulate expressions, which Katharine, with unintentional, but invariable perversity, interrupted or contradicted with some severity or assertion of prosaic fact. Then the vision disappeared and Ralph expressed vehemently in his turn his conviction that he only loved her shadow and cared nothing for her reality. If the lapse was on her side it took the form of gradual detachment until she became completely absorbed in her own thoughts, which carried her away with such intensity that she sharply resented

11. p. 55, 179, 184.
12. p. 509.
13. p. 479.
14. p. 449-50.

any recall to her companion's side ... The fact remained that she had no need of him and was very loath to be reminded of him. How then could they be in love? The fragmentary nature of their relationship was but too apparent." [15]

It is this emotional instability that gives Katharine the inscrutable character Mary so painfully feels. [16] It also accounts for the lovers' preliminary wish for a free friendship, [17] that is, one in which each is allowed to behave every moment in accordance with his mood. It also probably explains Katharine's unwillingness to let anybody peer into her inner self — whose inconsistency so obviously irks her.

The feeling of unreality comes close on the heels of emotional instability. Katharine's cousin Henry rightly says that "she has not found herself yet. Life isn't real to her yet." [18]

This sense of unreality makes her doubt the existence of the very feelings she so obviously experiences. Love is "only a story one makes up in one's mind about another person", [19] affections are but "the shadow of an idea",[20] she muses. She alludes to "the dream nature of our lives." [21] She herself, Ralph, William, Cassandra, once seem to her "equally unsubstantial."[22] The proceedings of a particular evening appear "marked by a certain unreality." [23] The impressions of her dreams seem to her more "direct, powerful and unimpeded" than those "called forth in real life." [24] She doubts the reality of Ralph's personality such as she sees it. She thinks herself

15. p. 501.
16. p. 181.
17. p. 354.
18. p. 215.
19. p. 265.
20. p. 287.
21. p. 373.
22. p. 424.
23. p. 445.
24. p. 145.

"in love with a vision." [25] Even in their moments of intimacy she abruptly feels the block of unreality drawing them apart.

"Reality — reality ..." "I cease to be real to you. It's the faces in a storm again — the vision in a hurricane. We come together for a moment and we part." [26]

She confides to her mother:

"It seems as if something came to an end suddenly — gave out — faded — an illusion — as if when we think we're in love we make it up — we imagine what doesn't exist. That's why it's impossible that we should ever marry. Always to be finding the other an illusion, and going off and forgetting about them, never to be certain that you cared, or that he wasn't caring for someone not you at all, the horror of changing from one state to the other, being happy one moment and miserable the next." [27]

If thus one is not sure to be in love with a real person and not with an illusion, "intimacy is the worst pretence" [28] and physical closeness only "a bitter comment upon the distance between ... the minds." [29]

Ralph shares Katharine's feeling of unreality. He doubts the truth of his vision of her and painfully wonders whether he loves her or his dream of her. He sometimes thinks he loves merely "a thing he makes up." [30] Speaking to her, he has a sense of loss for, after all, is the Katharine whom he loves the same as the real Katharine?

"How terrible sometimes the pause between the voice of one's dreams and the voice that comes from the object of one's dreams!" [31]

25. p. 449.
26. p. 501.
27. p. 513.
28. p. 284.
29. p. 502.
30. p. 448.
31. p. 319.

He has the impression of being "at the mercy of a phantom Katharine." [32] He desperately thinks of a way to exorcize the phantom:

"The best way of achieving this would be, not to run away from her, but to face her, and, having steeped himself in her qualities, to convince his reason that they were, as she assured him, not those he imagined. She was a practical woman, a domestic wife for and inferior poet, endowed with romantic beauty by some freak of unintelligent Nature." [33]

Katharine herself warns him:

You go home and invent a story about me and now can't separate me from the person you've imagined me to be. You call that, I suppose, being in love, as a matter of fact, it's being in delusion." [34]

His answer to this amounts to a doubt embracing all reality:

"There may be nothing else. Nothing but what we imagine." [35]

He once sees all his reasons for past actions as delusions. Unhappiness is then nothing but the want of "another delusion to go on with." [36]

No wonder that Katharine and Ralph should long for coherence, order, and the closely connected ideas of unity, security, reality. Katharine's love of Mathemàtics, of facts, of Astronomy, clearly indicates a wish to take hold of reality in the study of immutable abstract laws not subject to the dizzying variations of her own self. In her longing for stability she sees the stars "fixed with unusual firmmness in the blue". [37] Her love of "abstract ideas — figures, laws, stars, facts" — comes from the possibility of believing in their reality [38], since, unlike herself, they never seem to vary. For similar reasons,

32. p. 91.
33. p. 408.
34. p. 404.
35. p. 405.
36. p. 232-233.
37. p. 204.
38. p. 299.

she infinitely prefers "the exactitude, the star-like impersonality of figures to the confusion, agitation and vagueness" [39] of literature, which so often deals with emotions. She confides to Henry she wants to work out "something in figures — something that hasn't got to do with human beings" [40] — that is, something safe from the uncertainties of human life. So also Ralph's botanical explanations charm her.

> "A law that might be inscrutable but was certainly omnipotent appealed to her at the moment, because she could find nothing like it in possession of human lives. Circumstances had long forced her, as they force most women in the flower of youth, to consider, painfully and minutely, all that part of life which is conspicuously without order ... moods and wishes, degrees of liking or disliking ..." [41]

It is this fear of dealing with ever-changing emotions and her relief at finding herself among impersonal abstractions that makes William take her for "an abstract-minded person, better fitted to deal with figures than with the feelings of men and women".[42] Even her loveless engagement to William disguises "a desperate attempt to reconcile herself with facts", [43] that is, to find, in so solemn a tie, some kind of stability, some protection against emotional oscillations. But, to her, traditional answers are useless. [44] Her solution must be "to seek a true feeling among the chaos of the unfeelings or half-feelings of life, to recognize it when found and to accept the consequences of the discovery". [45]

Ralph is also haunted by a longing for stability in the "welter of confusion" [46] of a world where he projects his

39. p. 40.
40. p. 203.
41. p. 350.
42. p. 280.
43. p. 254.
44. p. 330.
45. p. 331.
46. p. 418.

own inner chaos. The steady light coming from Katharine's house attracts him because it symbolizes what he lacks:

"All safety, all that stood up above the surge and preserved a consciousness of its own." [47]

At last, like Terence and Rachel, they come to acknowledge their mutual love and hope to find in it "a riveting together of the shattered fragments of the world".[48] Their universe promises to become real, secure and solid. Once Katharine's appearance in the Strand before Ralph imposes "a curious look of order and purpose to the most heteregeneous things".[49] So also she sees in his first offer of friendship a spiritual light "burning steadily and steadfastly behind the erratic disorder and incoherence of life".[50] The time comes when Ralph identifies her with "the reality of everything",[51] just as he had once felt the substantial world slip from him and his thoughts become false at the idea of losing her.[52] After their engagement a drawing Ralph sketches aptly represents their identical vision of the world: a little dot with flames around it, [53] Virginia Woolf's mystical circle, symbolic of life, unified, whole, complete, surrounded by halo.

When walking beside him in the London lights, transfigured by the promise of this dazzling circle, Katharine thinks:

"the immense riddle was answered; the problem had been solved; she held in her hands for one brief moment the globe which we spend our lives in trying to shape, round, whole and entire from the confusion of chaos." [54]

47. p. 419.
48. p. 512.
49. p. 133.
50. p. 398.
51. p. 313.
52. 162-163-325.
53. p. 522.
54. p. 533.

They feel close enough "to be taken even by the malicious eye of Time himself for a united couple, an indivisible unit".[55]

They take, at last Mrs. Hilbery advice to have faith in their vision of each other and launch on the glorious adventure of "trying to piece together in a laborious and elementary fashion, fragments of belief, unsoldered and separate, lacking the unity of phrases fashioned by the old believers".[56]

True, some of the old doubts remain. Well do they know, and some of the quotations show the awareness, that this integration must be fought for and re-conquered every moment. But they feel bold enough to face the old questions about the truth of their individualities, to run all risks, to believe in a forthcoming world of reality and security:

"She might speak to him, but with that tremor in his voice, those eyes blindly adoring, whom did he answer? What woman did he see? And where was she walking, and who was her companion? Moments, fragments, a second of vision, and then the flying waters, the winds dissipating and dissolving; then, too, the recollection from chaos, the return of security, the earth firm, superb and brilliant in the sun. From the heart of his darkness he spoke his thanksgiving; from a region as far, as hidden, she answered him.[57]

55. p. 521.
56. p. 513.
57. p. 538.

CHAPTER SIX

The fight for integration seen from the comic angle

Had the theme of the search for integration been developed only through the characters of Katharine and Ralph, one might say that, from this point of view, *Night and Day* merely echoes *The Voyage Out*. This, however, seems far from true. A third character, William Rodney, Katharine's unsuccessful suitor, contributes a comic angle, completely missing from the first novel, to the illustration of the problem. Reflected by him, the other lovers' hesitations turn the story into a comedy on the instability of feelings.

Half poet and half fop, moving by means of frog-like jerks, martyred by literature — which he can competently dissect but never actively create — he seems ridiculous at first sight. His engagement to Katharine cannot fail to prove unfortunate. Obviously his superior, she cannot help making him feel depressed or ill at ease. Her young cousin Cassandra, on the contrary, with her naïve admiration and typically feminine tact, provides the praise and support his wounded vanity so sorely needs. In fact, she illustrates the kind of mirror-woman Virginia Woolf alludes to elsewhere: one «possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.» [1] On falling in love

1. *A Room of One's Own*, p. 53.

with her, however, while still engaged to Katharine, William faces a situation he proves unable to disentangle.

In order to understand the intensity of his conflict, one has to remember that, unlike any other central character in the story, he is essentially conventional. An old-maidish concern for the proprieties makes the centre around which he organizes the traits of his personality. In his own way, he also fights for integration. Yet, unlike Katharine and Rachel, he does not do so in order to follow a spontaneous urge, inherent in some inner law of his being as an individual. The consistence he covets aims at conforming to the model of the impeccable, faithful lover the conventions set before his eyes. He cannot accept the complexity of human feelings, since they endanger the consistent, decorous outward that society demands from him. Once engaged to Katharine, he feels it his duty to remain in love with her. Cassandra tempts him with the image of a wife he can feel superior to but, under the circumstances, this attraction seems to him utterly improper. He deems the whole situation monstrous and himself a man of incomprehensible confusion. He feels «afloat upon a sea of unknown and tumultuous possibilities». [2] The thousand different feelings of every second appal him. He leaves to Katharine the first hint about his love for the other young woman. One cannot then help feeling sorry for the poor conventional soul: the revelation of a feeling so unbecoming to the situation most fearfully shatters the ideal vision of himself as the solid, respectable, sensible William. In a comic parody of Ralph and Katharine's emotional oscillations, he begins to perform what seems to him a most indecorous dance of hesitations. He accepts Katharine's generous offer to keep the appearance of their engagement so that he can meet Cassandra more easily. He feels convinced of having never experienced any love but this recent one. Yet, in the short interval of time elapsed between the scenes

2. p. 306.

narrated from p. 435 to 439, he first denies his love for Cassandra and offers Katharine his love again, then reverts to his prior position and reaffirms his love for her cousin. On p. 437 we see him kissing one of the girls, on p. 439, the other. His oscillations between the two make him look like a grotesque fat monkey aping the conflicts of Rachel's poetic mind.

His ever increasing ridiculousness arises, however, not from these hesitations in themselves, but from the inescapable conventionality that makes him so resent them. One cannot help laughing at his terror of being found alone with Cassandra by Mr. Hilbery or by any among the tell-tale set of aunts.

He can do nothing but put himself entirely in Katharine's hands and let her «ghastly good sense» [3] find the solution for him. He repays her generosity by making her acknowledge her own love for Ralph. Only after things thus smoothly settle themselves does he muster courage enough to stammer before Katharine's father the confession of his love for Cassandra: a comic hero clumsily drawing his sword before the dragon of conventionality.

3. Idem.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The sub-theme in «Night And Day»: Integration around a vicarious centre

It is not only with the parody sketched through William Rodney that *Night and Day* adds a new note to the theme of the quest for integration started in *The Voyage Out*. A sub-theme likewise shows up: the conquest of integration, not through love, but around a vicarious activity and followed by an attitude of renunciation and withdrawal.

This sub-theme centres on the figure of Mary Datchet, the idealistic, hard-working feminist, to whom Ralph prefers Katharine. Unlike other figures in Virginia Woolf's gallery of feminists, generally presented as one-sided and slightly ridiculous, Mary emerges from the book a clear-sighted, sane, lovable character. No generosity equals hers when, guessing Ralph's latent love for Katharine, she courageously refuses his proposal and helps them find their way to each other. Yet, for all her mixture of gentleness and strength, for all the promise of motherhood implicit in her very looks, one feels in her an unwillingness to give herself up to personal feelings, which early foreshadows her attitude of renunciation.

The perplexities in which her love for Ralph first plunge her once make one expect a repetition, in another key, of Katharine's emotional oscillations. As Mary walks home one

evening after a tea party, her mind is «uncomfortably full of different trains of thought»: [1]

«They seemed even to take their colour from the street she happened to be in. Thus the vision of humanity appeared to be in some way connected with Bloomsbury, and faded distinctly by the time she crossed the main road; then a belated organ-grinder in Holborn set her thoughts dancing incongruously, and by the time she was crossing the great misty square of Lincoln's Inn Field she was cold and depressed again and horribly clear-sighted. The dark removed the stimulus of human companionship and a tear actually sild down her cheek accompanying a sudden conviction within her that she loved Ralph and that he didn't love her... But the lights were submerged in the deep flood of desires, thoughts, perceptions, antagonisms, which washed perpetually at the base of her being»... [2]

From the very beginning she fights her feelings, not only because she obscurely senses his indifference, but also because they turn her thoughts away from work. True, had he requited her love, she would surrender and sacrifice everything «for a share of personal happiness». [3] It is only after her self-respect forces her to refuse him that her renunciation turns rigidly uncompromising. She becomes an almost perfect illustration of one of the adaptative attitudes studied by Karen Horney. [4] It consists in a renunciation of personal feelings, a movement away from other people, a withdrawal into a neuter circle, where no emotional contacts can endanger the inner serenity once shaken by some previous unfortunate relationship.

Katharine never neglects the duties the environment requires from her. But she simultaneously fights also for her fulfillment as an individual. She tries to harmonize her conflicting thoughts not by renouncing her private dreams, but by struggling to weave them into the pattern of everyday

1. p. 177.
2. p. 177-78.
3. p. 271.
4. KAREN HORNEY, *Nuestros Conflictos Internos*, p. 71.

life. Mary, on the contrary, goes so far as to renounce her individuality, «for the good of a world that none of them were ever to know». [5] Her idealized self — that of the generous, objetive social worker she wants to become — acts like an axis around which all of her energies must turn. A psychologist might say that she thus lets her role absorb her whole self.

Her renunciation is quite explicit:

...«having thus renounced everything that made life easy, splendid, individual, there remained a hard reality, unimpaired by one's personal adventures, remote as the stars, unquenchable as they are.» [6]

In moments of returning bitterness or regret, she checks «the desire to be and individual again». [7] When she tells Katharine the truth about her and Ralph's relations, she renounces even what was left her: her loneliness. [8]

She is too sane and too honest not to realize the mutilation that her renunciation implies:

«With a brain working and a body working one could keep step with the crowd and never be found out for the hollow machine, lacking the essential thing, that one was conscious of being.» [9]

As she contemplates the figure of Katharine waiting for Ralph, it rightly seems to her that it is her own ghost she contemplates, the ghost of the individual being she has renounced in favour of the selfless social worker. On that axis she makes her whole being turn. She sees in her receding youth and in her utter renunciation of «all the feminine instincts of pleasing, soothing and charming» [10] the means to become «a serviceable human being». [11] It is this new being,

5. p. 536.
6. p. 275.
7. p. 286.
8. p. 289.
9. p. 272.
10. p. 43.
11. p. 471.

centred on work, that lays out «the lines of her life until death» in a way which satisfies «her sense of harmony». [12] Peace and a sort of triumph reward her:

«She had suffered and relinguished, she had seen her future turned from one of infinite promise to one of barrenness, and yet, somehow, over what she scarcely knew, she had conquered. With Ralph's eyes upon her, smiling straight back at him, serenely and proudly, she knew for the first time that she had conquered». [13]

Mary Datchet stands for a paradox, which somehow brings her close to the mystic: the conquest of integration and the achievement of selfhood through the renunciation of self. This proves a favourite theme of Virginia Woolf's, one she is to broach again in two of her masterpieces: *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*.

12. p. 273.
13. p. 416.

CHAPTER EIGHT

«Jacob's Room»: disintegration in method and in vision

Jacob's Room (1922) shows us a novelist in search of a method. While writing it, Virginia Woolf herself wondered what it was that she was doing, suspected she had not thought out her plan carefully and anticipated criticisms dubbing the book «a clever experiment» or «a disconnected rhapsody» [1]. The novel proves, however, important, since it marks the turning point after which she is at last to emerge with her own voice in *Mrs Dalloway*.

So to speak, Virginia Woolf here breaks the pen used in *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*. She does away with the narrative. She manages to portray no character. The tools she substitutes for the old apparatus prove, however, so far, unsatisfactory. The technique is uncertain. The novelist places herself now within then outside her people's minds, without the clearly indicated transitions found in subsequent works, sometimes even clumsily letting her own remarks encroach upon their audible words or upon their thoughts.

The whole approach often suggests the movements of a camera, haphazardly focusing different people from a perpetually shifting point of view. On the very first page, a young mother, Betty Flanders, goes to the beach with her

1. *A Writer's Diary*, p. 28 and 46.

three sons. The world of the moment splits into several planes. Betty writes a letter. There is a search for her son Jacob. A lighthouse looms at a distance. Different thoughts cross the woman's mind. Tears are shed for an unknown dead man called Seabrook. On the next page a flashback, through a Mrs. Jarvis, tells the reader that Betty is a widow, crying for her dead husband. The scene closes when, having left the beach, she reaches her gate and notices that she has forgotten to buy meat. The book goes on with little flashes like these. One gets snatches of conversation, stray sentences from a letter. Accounts of prosaic outward perceptions intermingle with disconnected thoughts. Sometimes one of the flashes witnesses the sealing of a destiny: Captain Barfoot goes to see Betty and advises her to send Jacob to Cambridge. More often snapshots show trivial everyday scenes: Mrs. Pascoe works in her little scullery or draws water from a well in the garden. People without any significant connexion with the central figures spring up, like men and women incidentally appearing in a street scene of a modern film. The camera surprises them at some unimportant action, takes a snapshot, a few words are jotted down, attempts at interpretation made and that is all: the scene has no sequence. The reader thus gets a fragmentary, chaotic, sometimes poetic vision of life in a perplexing world. The very printed form of the book adds to the impression of fragmentariness, loose paragraphs divided by small blanks often appearing in the several sections.

The only sequence te be found in the novel lies in the loose chronological order according to which people are focused. We see Jacob, the central figure, a little boy on the beach or collecting butterflies. We know he later goes to Cambridge. We watch him read Shakespeare on a boat with his friend Durrant, as they sail to Cornwall. We see him have dinner with his friend's family. A hint of a love affair between him and Clara Durrant shows up. We are later cursorily told that they separate. We hear his talks on Wycherley, on Wagner

or on the ancient Greeks. We know of other love affairs. But all this put together amonunts but too litle and shows not so much the life or feelings of a particular young man but the bodiless feelings and attitudes one might expect from any young man in the same circumstances. One can never amalgate all the data thus gathered into a true to life figure. If drawn at all, it appears in fragments, or sketched in dotted lines. Told that Jacob went to Cambridge in October 1906, we start at the contrast between the precise date and the mistiness of the creature outlined so far. We are made to doubt his fellow traveller's vision of him, as he enters a railway carriage on his way to Cambridge. Is he «nice, handsome, interesting, distinguished, well built»?[2] We never khow. Only virtually in the middle of the book is an attempt made to describe his physique and soon abandoned with the justification: «of all futile occupations this of cataloguing features is the worst».[3] He remains to the end a faceless being, the thin thread running through the beautifully disconnected patches of life stitched into the book. Only on the last page but one do we know that Betty Flander's sons are fighting for their country, Jacob among them. Only four pages before had we realized there was a war at all. Not before the last page do we see he has been killed in action. So many facts having been piled upon the man without capturing his personality, his death becomes that of an anonymous soldier, one of the thousands in the first World War — merely a fact to reckon with. Such a death, only indirectly told about, interrupts no process of spiritual growth, as the case had been with Rachel. It accordingly remains abstract and brings the reader no sense of pain. The confusion of the deceased's room, with his letters, bills and invitations thrown about, its empty creaking chairs, his mother hopelessly wondering what to do with an old pair

2. p. 29.
3. p. 69.

of shoes, may well symbolize the meaninglessness and disorderliness the author detects in life itself.

With whatever qualifications, *The Voyage Out,* no less than *Night and Day,* comes to grant the possibility of partly knowing and even integrating personality. Some full-length central portraits attest to the first admission; the couples' hope in their love, to the second. *Jacob's Room* questions both. Denying the possibilty of getting to the core of people's individualities, the novelist seems to offer the literary counterpart of a psychologist's dry assertion that «nothing really deserving the name of a science of personality exists so far» [4]:

«Nobody sees anyone as he is ... They see a whole — they see all sorts of things — they see themselves ... It's no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor entirely what is done.» [5]

Passengers in a bus make the novelist reflect that nothing can really be known of them, except empty names or meaningless labels:

«Each had his past shut in him like the leaves of a book known to him by heart, and his friends could only read the title, James Spalding, or Charles Budgeon, and the passengers going the opposite way could read nothing at all — save «a man with a red moustache», or «a young man in grey smoking a pipe.» [6]

Thus affirming the uselessness of trying really to know people, Virginia Woolf gives up portraying them. Leonard Woolf once called the figures in *Jacob's Room* «ghosts» [7]. No wonder, since, there, the author's view of human creatures happens to be no other:

«... life is but a procession of shadows, and God knows why it is that we embrace them so eagerly, and see them depart with such anguish, being shadows. And why, if this and much more than this

4. H. J. EYSENCK, *Estudio Científico de la Personalidad,* p. 20.
5. p. 28-29.
6. p. 63.
7. *A Writer's Diary,* p. 47.

is true, why are we yet surprised in the window corner by a sudden vision that the young man in the chair is of all things in the world the most real, the most solid, the best known to us — why indeed? For the moment after we know nothing about him.

Such is the the manner of our seeing. Such the condition of our love». 8

Obviously, among the ghostly party of figures in the novel, no fight for integration may arise. In fact, the view the author presents of people and life — fragmentary, chaotic — suggests hopeless disintegration in exterior events as within the mind. Life seems made up of disconnected episodes, people merely the sum of unrelated feelings, thoughts and attitudes — the one and the others but a bundle of shreds, which can never be sewn into a whole. Thus, though the problem of integration is never mentioned, the novelist, by the very process of focusing her people, suggests scepticism about the possibility of its attainment. We have to wait for the next novel to meet again with both character portrayal and a direct reference — however brief and disenchanted — to the theme of consistency and unity in personality.

8. p. 71.

CHAPTER NINE

«Mrs Dalloway»: death at the centre of the circle

Mrs Dalloway (1925) shows Virginia Woolf at last master of a technique that perfectly matches her vision. On this fourth novel, she no longer, as on the first two, imposes the smooth traditional narrative order that she thinks inexistent in life. Neither does she let it sprawl about into the untidy formlessness of the previous experiment. She manages to find a remarkably disciplined, if pliable design, where her kaleidoscopic view of life and personality harmoniously fits.

The time-frame is compressed into a single day, soon after the end of the first World War. The action consists of Clarissa Dalloway's preparation and giving of a party and of her former lover's, Peter Walsh's, return from India. As she walks through the London streets on her way to the florist's, she passes by Septimus Warren Smith, a former soldier suffering from the deferred effects of shell-shock, and his wife, the little Italian milliner Lucrezia. Two worlds thus silently criss-cross. Clarissa's represents not only the tinselly glitter of fashionable society but also the world of sanity. Septimus adds to his lower middle-class stratum the darker sphere of madness. Late in the evening, Sir William Bradshaw, the nerve specialist, attends Clarissa's party. There he alludes to the unknown madman's suicide a few hours before. He

thus brings the two worlds together, and the novel is rounded off into a neat, compact, closely knit pattern.

Within that spare frame the novelist manages to draw a handful of magnificent characters. Moving unobtrusively from one's stream of consciousness to the other's, she uses their thoughts, feelings, reveries, memories, anticipations and opinions on one another in such a skilful way that, by the end of the day, she has cumulatively depicted not only their personalities and backgrounds but even their past lives.

In this novel Virginia Woolf also comes closer to imagining an interesting story than ever before. Peter Walsh's sudden arrival from India, soon after Clarissa's memories have acquainted the reader with their past relationship, introduces an element of delicate suspense, which lightly hangs on the deftly handled strings of the former lovers' feelings.

These are not, however, the only new elements in *Mrs Dalloway*. Another shows up in the importance that the central characters attach to certain aspects of their social environment.

However conventionally impeccable the outward conduct of the main people in the first two novels may prove, the real stress rests on the inward oscillations of their minds, which by no means correspond to their composed exteriors. Rachel Vinrace seems only too glad to get rid of the Richmond conventions, and allows herself emotional waverings enough to call for a daily scolding from her Victorian-minded aunts. On that Katharine Hilbery heaps a cool neglect of convention that startles even her heedless father. To Terence, Helen, Ralph and Mary, social conventions obviously play no greater part. William Rodney's concern about the proprieties strikes the only conventional note among the whole group. In *Jacob's Room* the echoes from the social environment seldom pierce into the characters' inner world. They ring so faintly that even the war where Jacob meets his death is heard of only in a couple of incidental lines a few pages before the end.

Mrs Dalloway, stands in a completely different position. Here society permeates the very fibres of the characters. Richard Dalloway, the Conservative politician, and his wife Clarissa, perpetually engage in social activites to which, far from Katharine's secretly derisive attitude, they attach great importance. A denial of the worldly values cherished by their fashionable circle occasionally does appear — cool in Peter Walsh, evasive in Elizabeth, enraged in Doris Kilman, defiant in Sally Seton. But the need for their challenge only enhances the reverence generally paid to the same values. Virginia Woolf's obviously sounds among these dissenting voices. She stings with her satire the hollowness and snobbishness of much in the world of politicians and fashionable society. Witness her presentation of the Prime Minister in Clarissa's party: a «poor chap, all rigged up in gold lace» [1], trying to look somebody. But she by no means forces the picture into a deceptive simplicity and does not grudge many a sympathetic glance into the vain hearts that throb under the faultless garments.

This prominent role played by fashionable society in the inner life of several figures must be here emphasized, for it bears an obvious relation to the problem of integration such as it appears in the novel.

In *Mrs Dalloway,* the desire for integration does not make, as in *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day,* the central theme. Most characters in Clarissa's circle prove too frivolous to bother about their inner consistency or about harmony in their view of life. Clarissa herself seems the only one to give the subject a thought.

In Virginia Woolf's first novel, the Dalloways had already made their appearance, for a short time the Ambroses' fellow-voyagers — he pompous, foolish, and vain, she snobbish, lovely, sentimental, her mind a set of clichés. In *Mrs Dalloway* both husband and wife get a far more sympathetic treatment.

1. p. 189.

Besides, seen in a close-up, Clarissa becomes a much more complex figure, no longer sheerly worldly, but shrewd, brooding, mellowed by age, softened in the reader's eyes by the revelation of her early emotional life. She turns out the first full-length portrait among Virginia Woolf's great middle-aged women. A number of subtly suggested traits slowly add up to the portrait: her honesty, her kindness and also occasional hardness to people, her sense of comedy, the feeling of hollowness, of some obscure flaw, which social triumphs no longer make up for, the awful fear gnawing at ther heart, her sense of unreality, the symbolic virginity that condemns her to a «narrower and narrower bed»...[2]

It is through this great complex character that Virginia Woolf voices the only direct references to the theme of integration we can find in the novel.

In order to understand Clarissa Dalloway's attitude to the subject, we have to refer to her philosophy of life. Avowedly, she is a sceptic. Hers is the «atheist's religion of doing good for the sake of goodness». But in the depths of her being she obscurely senses the existence of some transcendental, all-important truth, some mystic communion which, however, she believes one can know only in death. On hearing of the unknown young man's suicide, she muses that, perhaps, he has hit on the sole means of attaining it:

> «A thing there was that mattered, a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death».3

The allusion to a mysterious centre reminds us of Virginia Woolf's mystical circle, symbolic, not only of unification within the self, but also of harmony in one's vision of the

2. p. 35.
3. p. 202.

universe. Despairing of reaching this centre Clarissa also seems to despair of ever achieving, in the narrow bounds of earthly life, the harmony it stands for.

Yet, like Katharine and Rachel, she is aware of the conflicting traits within herself. Like those early heroines, their contradictions irk her. Since she denies, however, the possibility of actually harmoninzing them in a consistent self, she tries at least to pretend to do so.

Her attempt is inextricably connected with the extreme regard she has for her roles and activities in her brilliant circle. This is, no doubt, her most obvious trait. Peter Walsh early detects in her «the makings of the perfect hostess» [4]. All the years of his stay in India he sees her in his mind's eyes, «playing about, going to parties, running to the House and back and all that» [5]. To Sally Seton, she is a «snob at heart» [6]. Even to herself, it sometimes seems that her role in society absorbs the whole of her being. As she once goes up Bond Street, she wonders at her not being Clarissa — the individual woman — any more, but *Mrs Dalloway,* Mrs Richard Dalloway,[7] that is, the politician's wife, known to her peers as the perfect hostess.

Typically enough, what she once calls her own self is not the dynamic organization of the traits that make her an individual, but merely the image of her face in the mirror, the shell directly accessible to the spectactor's eyes.

There is nothing, then, to wonder at that, denying the possibility of actual inner consistency, and attaching such importance to her social role, the only integration she can think of turns out an harmoniously composed and coherent exterior presented to other people's eyes. Her centre of gravity

4. p. 10.
5. p. 47.
6. p. 209.
7. p. 13.

thus lies, not in some ideal of love or work, like Rachel's, Katharine's and Mary's, but in the surrounding world of society.

It is for this world that she tries, disguising all contradictory or undersirable traits within herself, to achieve the appearance of the consistent, unified being she does not hope to become. It is this appearance she delights in, when she looks into the mirror:

«That was her self — pointed; dart-like; definite. That was herself when some effort, some call on her to be herself, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman»... (She) «had tried to be the same always, never showing a sign of all her other sides of her — faults, jealousies, vanities, suspicions...» [8]

Society thus is to her the watchful eye to which she deems it necessary to present an aesthetically unified face. One should notice that she does not mention discarding the features she thinks undesirable, but only not showing them. Integration becomes a composed mask, an outward grace, a decorous make-believe, instead of an interior harmony.

No other character in the novel expresses any concern about the achievenment of integration. The novelist strikes, however, a near-by note, when she hints at the mysterious power some beings possess of creating harmony for those around them. Clarissa Dalloway herself owns it. With her semblance of consistency, she makes «a meeting-point a radiancy no doubt in some dull lives, a refuge for the lonely to come to, perhaps» [9]. To Peter, she has the «woman's gift, of making a world of her own» wherever she happens to be, the gift «to be; to exist; to sum it all up in the moment» [10] as she passes. For a short while, the little milliner Lucrezia

8. p. 42.
9. idem.
10. p. 84-85.

seems to have a similar gift: in a moment of returning sanity it appears to her mad husband that, with her sewing, she buids the world up for him again [11]. In this, both women feebly herald the central figure of the next novel, Mrs. Ramsay. Paramount among all characters in the Woolfian gallery, she wields a mysteriously integrating influence on others' lives. With her love, she hands them their silver globe.

11. p. 160.

CHAPTER TEN

The resumption of the theme of integration around a vicarious centre in «To the Lighthouse»

To the Lighthouse gives us a second masterpiece in Virginia Woolf's series of novels. Like *Mrs. Dalloway* it concentrates what one may call the main action in an extremely short time-span: the waking hours of a single day, to which one morning is sparingly added after an interval of ten years. Again characters are masterfully portrayed through the feelings, thoughts, reveries and conversations simultaneous with the few actions allowed them.

An important distinction arises. In *To the Lighthouse* the pressure of society does not make itself markedly felt. The scene is a remote island with some suggestions of Cornwall, quite safe from Mrs. Dalloway's London hubbub. The characters are largely unconventional, shown in a broad universal light. Fewer details are piled upon them, while the essence of their personality gets more poetically and suggestively revealed. Besides, *Mrs. Dalloway* successfully blends poetry and satire, while *To the Lighthouse* shows the essence of character distilled into pure poetry.

There is no story. People perform wholly unspectacular actions: knitting, reading, talking, eating, going for a walk, painting, rowing. Even a proposal becomes the logical outcome of a long-standing, finally ripe situation, rather than the climax of an exciting love-story. Allowing her characters so few

actions, the novelist so to speak keeps them motionless, as if to be radiographed. She penetrates so amazingly into the very fibres of their beings that no further action proves necessary.

The novel is divided into three sections. The first tells of how a professor of metaphysics, Mr. Ramsay, his wife, eight children and a handful of guests spend a day of their holidays in a large battered house before a lighthouse. The central light focuses two main figures: Mrs. Ramsay, who promises her young boy an excursion to the lighthouse, and one of her guests, Lily Briscoe, who tries to capture an elusive vision by painting in the garden outside. The abrupt unexplained death of Mrs. Ramsay closes this section. In short parentheses interrupting lyrical descriptions of Summer and Spring we are told about the death of two of the Ramsay children and about the publication of a book of poems by another of their guests, Mr. Carmichael. Human life and achievement thus show up as no more than tiny, soon put out flashes in the endless progress of an indifferent cosmos. In the third section we find, after an interval of ten years, Mr. Ramsay, his youngest children James and Cam, his guests Lily and Mr. Carmichael, on the first morning of their return to the old house. Mr. Ramsay, in a sort of mystic rite in memory of his dead wife, takes his children to the expedition she had promised and never been able to undertake: to the lighthouse, which looms as a symbol of fulfilement of life itself. As they reach it, some word of praise from the father erases a resentment long pent-up in James's mind. At the same time, Lily, who has stayed in the garden before the house, at last manages to capture in her picture the vision she had vainly pursued ten years before. Two simultaneous symbols of achievement thus wind up the novel, and give it the same careful bringing together of floating threads, already effected in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

From the point of view of this thesis, *To the Lighthouse* proves particularly important. It bears a definite relation to the theme of integration so obviously present in preceding

works. This relation reveals itself in two main aspects. On one hand the novel poetically depicts the serene, integrated and intergrating personality that earlier characters had already coveted but never attained. On the other it clearly goes on developing the sub-theme of integration through withdrawal and renunciation started by Mary Datchet in *Night and Day.*

Lily Briscoe, the Ramsays's shy, reticent guest, links the second to the fifth novel, by taking up this theme again. No disillusion in love, similar to Mary's, starts her on the road of withdrawal. The key to her attitude lies in some mysterious flaw in her character, some incapacity to give and communicate, explained, perhaps, by the Sapphic intimations in her. One would think that, as in Mrs. Dalloway's case, she has condemned herself to an emotional rigidity, because the channels where her emotions would run prove socially unacceptable. The fact is that Lily's withdrawal seems even more uncompromising than Mary's. The latter renounces only the emotional give and take of erotic love. Otherwise she remains in the thick of the battle for women's rights and keeps to the end an active, busy life. Lily, besides her obvious unwillingness to accept emotional ties, turns out an essentially contemplative being, a spectator among the other characters. Like Mary, she also searches for a vicarious centre, around which to organize her self, but finds it in art rather than in social work.

Lily's attitude of withdrawal becomes apparent from the very beginning. Aloof and self-sufficing, she pleads to be exempt from the general rule of marriage. She shrinks away even from so simple a revelation as showing William Bankes, a fellow-guest, her painting. To her, the picture seems «the deposit of each day's living». [1] Showing it amounts to an exposure of her own self. Therefore, for one who cannot communicate, it is agony. But the very reason for her doing so confirms her fear of emotional contacts. What she actually

1. p. 60.

likes, one suspects, is his impersonality, «the white, scientific coat» that seems to clothe him,[2] since, keeping him safely at a distance, it reassures her that he will not ask for anything but what she can give: the sexless «longing to cherish that loneliness».[3]

She fears emotion as an infectious disease. When the widowed Mr. Ramsay comes to her with a yearning for sympathy that spreads itself «in pools at her feet»,[4] she draws back in panic. All she manages to do is «to draw her skirts a little closer round her ankles, lest she should get wet».[5] Initially, her only response is anger. Anger against him, for his asking an impossible gift, against Mrs. Ramsay, whose death thus left him to prey upon other women's sympathy. But, above all, one feels, against herself, for her utter incapacity to give and communicate: «I am not a woman, but a peevish, ill-tempered, dried up old maid»,[6] she thinks. All she at last manages to gather is a purely symbolic sympathy, devoid of any human warmth. And that, only after he has gone safely away, so that the very distance between them prevents him from asking the real, living thing again.

Lily is not blind to her obvious limitation. She may occasionally rationalize her hopeless position, and think of the «cruelty», the «unscrupulosity of love».[7] She may call it «tedious, «puerile» and «inhuman».[8] She may denounce marriage as a kind of «degradation» and «dilution».[9] But this mood will not prevail. Well does she know how «immensely to her discredit, sexually» it is «to stand dumb» before Mr. Ramsay, unable, «miserable sinner» that she is, to give the

2. p. 51.
3. p. 27.
4. p. 176.
5. Idem.
6. p. 174.
7. p. 119.
8. p. 120.
9. p. 119.

sympathy his self-pity demands. [10] Love puzzles and attracts her. Once, waving her hands at the hedge, at the house, at the children, she rehearses the «impossible», «absurd» words. «I'm in love with this all». [11] She wants to play whatever little part she can in Paul and Minta's engagement. She basks in William Bankes's «distilled», «filtered» [12] love for Mrs. Ramsay. She bathes herself in its reflected radiance.

Like previous Woolfian feminine figures, Lily painfully feels the fragmentariness and want of harmony of her own self. She thinks «everyone cannot be «as helter-skelter, hand to mouth» [13] as she is. She sometimes doubts the possibility of conciliating the incongrouous traits of her being and amalgating them into an harmonious unity:

> ... "it seems impossible... that we should ever compose from... fragments a perfect whole or read in the littered pieces the clear words of truth". [14]

She muses on the way contradictory traits mysteriously combine in a single personality, and thinks of those in Mr. Ramsay as «a company of gnats, each separate, but all marvellously controlled in an invisible elastic net». [15]

In the depths of her being she realizes that the love that so fascinates her but of which she feels so utterly incapable has the unifying power to make the distressingly incoherent elements of the inner life into a smooth, compact whole. Love, where Rachel and Katharine had placed their hope, where, Mrs. Ramsay will find her certainty, may lead one to the mystic silver globe:

> "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

10. p. 176.
11. p. 22.
12. p. 55.
13. p. 59.
14. p. 148.
15. p. 28.

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." [16]

All the same, she knows that this solution floats out of her reach. The unity and fulfillement her flawed nature prevents her from finding in love she then seeks in art. It accordingly represents to her what work does to Mary Datchet: a centralizing core around which the different traits in her may integrate, a persisting and unifying point of reference among the disorderliness she sees in life.

From the very beginning of the novel we see Lily fighting to express in her picture the vision of life that «a thousand forces» do their best «to pluck from her». [17] Later on, amid the clatter and talk of dinner she thinks of how to achieve balance in her painting and avoid an awkward space in it by putting a tree further in the middle. That moving of the figure on the canvas — and to the middle, which faintly reminds one of the symbolic globe — becomes the symbol of her own fulfilement. As Paul's happiness and Minta's charming ways with Mr. Ramsay make her think of her own frustration, she comforts herself with the thought that «she must move the tree rather more to the middle». [18] To their love, she solaces herself, she may answer with her art. Ten years later, she returns to her unfinished picture. The paint-brush appears clearly symbolic of security, order and fulfilement, ideas associated with that of integration. She calls it «the one dependable thing in a world of strife, ruin, chaos»... [19]

The canvas proves the one channel for her latent passion. It even rebukes her for «this folly and waste of emotion», [20]

16. p. 223.
17. p. 22.
18. p. 119.
19. p. 173.
20. p. 181.

her thinking of Mr. Ramsay. Like a jealous lover, art takes her from everything else, pushes her even further back in her withdrawal:

"Here she was again, she thought, .. drawn out of gossip, out of living out of community with people into the presence of this ... other thing, this truth, this reality". [21]

Significantly, she calls the exercise of her art "an exacting form of intercourse". [22] The inclusion of a word often used of sexual connexion, added to other similar hints, clearly points at the substitution of artistic achievement for the normal affections of the individual.

The vicarious character of her aesthetic experience also appears in her complaint:

"Other worshipful objects were content with worship, men, women, God, all let one kneel prostrate; but this form.. roused one to perpetual combat, challenged one to a fight in which one was bound to be worsted." [23]

But this artistic pursuit raises her, in her own eyes, to a level of self-fulfilement in which she need not envy anybody, not even Mrs. Ramsay, that living symbol of harmoniousness:

"She would move the tree to the middle, and need never marry anybody." ... now, she could stand up to Mrs. Ramsay". [24]

In a sudden fit of depression, the tears running down her face, she may cry for the elder woman's return. Actually, she is crying for the unity and coherence she represented, so that "those empty flourishes" of life may "form into shape". [25] Nevertheless Lily has already found unity and stability in her

21. p. 182.
22. p. 183.
23. Idem.
24. p. 204.
25. p. 208-209.

art: "nothing stays, all changes, but not words, not paint". [26] When, "with a sudden intensity", she finally manages to draw the missing line in the centre of the picture, she may think with an exquisite mixture of exhultation and fatigue: "Yes, I have had my vision". [27]

The theme of withdrawal and of integration through a vicarious centralizing activity is a favourite one with Virginia Woolf. One has just seen how Lily Briscoe's resumption of the subject started earlier in Mary Datchet, links together *Night and Day* and *To the Lighthouse,* separated in time by a lapse of eight years. The emphatic recurrence of the theme in The *Waves,* soon to be dealt with, will once again stress its importance within the body of the novelist's work and, with a last poetic echo, wind up the cycle.

26. p. 208.
27. p. 242.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The achievement of integration: Mrs. Ramsay

It has been here held that, in a way, Virginia Woolf's novels can be read as a series of studies on personality integration. We have seen how, if so viewed, *To the Lighthouse* goes on developing, in the character of Lily Briscoe, the sub-theme of integration through renunciation started in *Night and Day*.

But *To the Lighthouse* goes further than that. It presents, in Mrs. Ramsay, the poetic image of the harmonious, integrated and integrating personality that Rachel and Katharine strive to achieve, and that we only partially foresee in Helen Ambrose.

In order to make the connexion clearer, one may briefly review the several aspects of the whole theme such as it stands when we reach the novel now under consideration.

In *The Voyage Out* Rachel Vinrace starts the fight for integration and expresses the hope of attaining it through love. Death, however, cuts the process short.

Standing beside her, Helen Ambrose already presents an instance of the sane, well-balanced, ordered being, in whom all possibly contradictory tendencies amalgate into a stable unity. For all her pessimism, she finds in her happy marriage a point of convergence around which the traits of her personality harmoniously cluster. Since she is, however, not alto-

gether a major character, the theme of achieved integration, which she stands for, receives only partial treatment.

In *Night and Day,* Katharine Hilbery takes up Rachel's fight, and like her, hopes to find its resolution in love. The chief male character, Ralph Denham, echoes his predecessor, Terence Hewet, and plays second fiddle to the same theme, duplicating and complemeting the heroine's struggle. William Rodney, on his turn, likewise illustrates the theme of the search for integration, though from the humorous angle. Representing the clash between the inconsistencies of the human soul and the conventional outward consistency society expects from its members, puzzled William Rodney comically mimics Katharine's and Rachel's emotional advances and retreats.

Mary Datchet stands aside with a sub-theme of her own. No less than the other heroines, she also once sees in love the unifying centre around which one's individuality and interpretation of life reaches wholeness and coherence. The disillusion of her unrequited love for Ralph leads her abruptly to give up this solution. Withdrawing from the everyday world where individual fulfilment so largely comes through the satisfaction of the normal longing for affection, she renounces the self of the ordinary woman to make work the axis of her life. Lily Briscoe adopts a similar attitude in *To the Lighthouse,* though substituting art for work as a centralizing point.

Virginia Woolf peoples her third novel, *Jacob's Room,* with mere shadows, glimpses of creatures whose minds perpetually split into unconnected thoughts and feelings. By this fragmentary presentation of personality she seems, for a moment, to hint at an inescapable discontinuity in the human soul.

Mrs. Dalloway thinks death the only means of achieving true harmony. To her mind, all one can hope for in life is a seemingly harmonious mask to wear before the world's eyes. We must wait for *To the Lighthouse* to find, in Mrs. Ramsay, the crowning of the ideal. No secondary character, but one

who makes the very centre of the novel, placed on the topmost rung of the ladder where her predecessors had struggled to go up or despaired of climbing, she seems, with her universal sympathy, to embrace the whole world into unity.

One soon notices how many traits she shares with the Helen Ambrose of the first novel. In fact, Mrs. Ramsay looks like Helen's direct, but mellowed, perfected descendant. She shares her beauty, even the hints of Greek beauty suggested by the very name Helen, curiously also attributed to Mrs. Ramsay in a poet's dedication. She shares, in spite of the happiness possessed by both, the former heroine's instinctive notion that life is cruel, an old antagonist, «terrible, hostile, ready to pounce on you» [1], whom one must parley and carry transactions with. She echoes Helen in the «faint touch of irony», which makes her «slip through one's fingers» [2], in her masterfulness, positiveness, directness. Like Helen, or, indeed, most Woolfian characters, she has no religious beliefs, for which she substitutes «an unflinching instinct for truth» [3]. The source of Mrs. Ramsay's attraction for her son James, as that of Helen's for Hirst, is that she is a person to whom one can say whatever comes in one's head. Either woman feels it a flaw in her character that, in the painful inadequacy of human relations, each cannot tell her husband the whole truth. Both know how to deal with life, calmly, sensibly, how to shape it into a mould, without a trace of Rachel's and Katharine's hesitations.

They are, the two of them, no longer young (forty and fifty), their creator's seniors by a few years, according to publication dates [4]. They both personify motherhood — in

1. p. 69.
2. p. 203.
3. p. 464.
4. VIRGINIA WOOLF, born in 1882, published *The Voayge Out* in 1919, when she was thirty-three and *To the Lighthouse* in 1927, at forty-five.

whose lack their childless creator once saw a cause for her fits of depression [5].

It would seem that, in these two feminine figures of approximately her own age, Virginia Woolf projected her ideal self, the double image of the woman she would like to have been.

Mrs. Ramsay is the flower whose seed shows in Helen. But she carries much further some traits already present in the latter, while adding others almost exclusively her own. Witness the sense of motherhood that surrounds them. Helen's spiritual education of Rachel, her attitude to hesitant young men, the fecundity hinted at by her very figure, clearly call up the mother in her. Mrs. Ramsay steps beyond that. She proves the quintessence of motherhood, implicit, to begin with, in her very beauty. Charles Stanley, the sour scholar, sees her poetically associated with gestures for the protection of tender defenceless creatures:

«With stars in her eyes and veils in her hair, with cyclamen and wild violets— ... Stepping through fields of flowers and taking to her breast buds that had broken and lambs that had fallen; with the stars in her eyes and the wind in her hair —». [6]

Her motherhood overflows the borders of the family. It appears in her charity to the poor, in her concern about the social problem, in her boundless hospitality, in her extreme courtesy, in her instinctive wish to help, in her wish to guide others' lives, in the protection under which she seems to have taken the whole of the other sex.

For her husband, she represents «the delicious fecundity, the fountain and spray of life», where his fatal male sterility must plunge «like a beak of brass, barren and bare.» [7] Knitting the stockings for the lighthouse keeper's boy, she reminds us

5. *A Writer's Diary*, p. 29.
6. p. 16.
7. p. 43.

of one of the Fates spinning the very thread of life. This all-embracing motherhood places her, for the people in the house, in the centre of the universe:

«They came to her, naturally, since she was a woman, with this, and that, one wanting this, another that; the children were growing up; she often felt she was nothing put a sponge sopped full of human emotions.» [8]

For them she creates the world anew, and girdles it with a steady light. It is she who brings about a sort of analgam for them.

«They all sat separate. And the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her.» [9] This continuous, pelican-like act of giving, may lead her to a feeling of exhaustion. At times she may sorely need to be alone. [10] Yet, so deeply steeped is her being in motherhood that, when she thus ceases to care for others, she has the impression of losing personality. [11] Even her fatigue inextricably links up with her sense of fulfilment, since it springs from her endless gift to others:

«Mrs. Ramsay seemed to fold herself together, one petal closed in another, and the whole fabric fell in exhaustion, so that she had only strength enough to move her finger, in exquisite abandonment to exhaustion, across the page of Grimm's fairy story, 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.» [12]

A poetic mysteriousness hangs about Mrs. Ramsay. We are never told her first name. Contrary to what happens to Mrs. Dalloway or Rachel, or Katharine, even Helen, we know very little of her past. Her reserve keeps us ignorant of most

8. p. 37.
9. p. 97.
10. p. 72.
11. p. 73.
12. p. 44-45.

events in her youth, We do not know whether to believe or not the tale concerning a young lover who reportedly killed himself for her. One wonders whether, like Rachel and Katharine, she has fought for integration. We already find in her the finished product, the serene, composed, well-balanced attitudes of one whose self is harmoniously and consistently organized. All the novelist allows us to watch is some moment of self-communion and silent repose, when Mrs. Ramsay retires from the bustle of the house to recompose the inner harmony disturbed, for a while, by sheer exhaustion. She then allows herself «a summoning together, a rest on a platform of stability,» [13] so that things can come together again: [14]

«There is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out... in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby... She had the feeling... of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that remains for ever.» [15]

She breathes the interior harmony of one for whom «the community of feelings» [16] makes the world one. She has reached the security that follows on this harmony:

«having reached security, she hovered like a hawk suspended; like a flag floated in an element of joy...» [17]

She displays the continuity of those whose present and past melt together in an harmonious whole. Once lived by her, a day, like the one she once spent with the Mannings on the banks of the Thames, remains enshrined in the past, «kept in camphor, stil and beautiful» [18]

Even more than on the interior harmoniousness attained by her central character, Virginia Woolf deems it fit to dwell

13. p. 73.
14. p. 122-23.
15. p. 132.
16. p. 122.
17. p. 123.
18. p. 101-102.

on its fruits: the integrating influence that Mrs. Ramsay exerts on those around her. She does not content herself with grasping the integration former characters had reached for: she makes it the task of her life to spread it around her, to share it with those she loves. For them, husband, children and guests alike, she fuses the incongruities of life into a single harmony.

Seeing her sitting with James by the window, Lily Briscoe reflects on how, through her influence,

«life from being made up of little separate incidents which one lived one by one, became curled and whole like a wave which bore one up with it and threw one down with a dash on the beach.» 19

To Lily, ten years after her death, she remains the woman

«who resolved everything into simplicity... brought together... this and that and then this, and so made out of that miserable silliness and spite... something... which survived, after all these years, complete.» 20

To her son James, she imparts the feelings of reality and security due to her own interior cohesion:

«Flashing her needles, glancing round about her, out of the window, into the room, at James himself, she assured him, beyond a shadow of doubt, by her laugh, her poise, her competence (as a nurse carrying a light across a dark room assures a fractious child), that it was real; the house was full; the garden blowing. It he put implicit faith on her nothing should hurt him.» 21

Lily thinks of the order and permanence seemingly imposed by her on the universe. She remembers:

«Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent»... «In the mildle of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing... was struck into stability.» 22

19. p. 54.
20. p. 185.
21. p. 44.
22. p. 186.

Mrs. Ramsay often decisively handles the strings that move others' lives. Then — witness the occasion of Paul and Minta's engagement — she feels

«as if the wall of partition had become so thin that... it was all one stream.» [23]

Terence and Ralph reflect Rachel's and Katharine's struggle for attainment of harmony and consistency in themselves and in their vision of life. So also Mr. Ramsay complements the portrait of his wife. With his insatiable hunger for reassurance and praise, his constant fret about himself and his books, with his life, which Charles Tansley once sees as «all in scraps and fragments» [24] he gives her the chance to display the subtle unifying influence that proves the most striking characteristic in her. After her death, bereaved of her harmonizing influence, be lives «on top of chaos». Like Lily he feels that, [directly she goest, a sort of disintegration sets in [25]] and that, without her, the house becomes «full of unrelated passions».

Had she lived, one muses, Mrs. Ramsay could perhaps save Minta and Paul's marriage from the wreck it turns into, and compelled that other marriage she had planned, Lily's to William Bankes. Even death, however, fails to efface her influence on those she had loved: ten years later, Lily goes on feeling her power and Mr. Ramsay thinks it necessary to take their son on the expedition she had once promised him.

Virginia Waalf reveals in her diary [26] that, before *To the Lighthouse,* she used to think of her parents daily and was, perhaps, morbidly obcessed by them, but writing the novel laid them to rest in her mind. In fact, Mrs. Ramsay stands for the author's poetic, crystallized memory of her own mother,

23. p. 186.
24. p. 132,105.
25. p. 131.
26. *A Writer's Diary,* p. 138.

the second Mrs. Stephen, of whom George Meredith said that he never reverenced a woman more. Mr. Ramsay, the great metaphysician, sullen, autocratic, «venerable and laughable at the same time»,[27] likewise represents her father. One finds her childhood there, enshrined between these two, as her vision of life, death, personality, and the mysterious communicability of all experience.

That great book, which Leonard Woolf once called «a psychological poem» [28], remains unsurpassed in the author's series of novels. As regards the subject of this thesis, the author never again contrives to portray such a perfect image of the integrated and integrating personality as that attained by Mrs. Ramsay. *Orlando* gives us a few brilliant remarks on the theme of integration. *The Waves,* poetic, abstract echoes of points developed so far. *The Years* brushes the subject of personality grappling with time. *Between the Acts* drops a last sad line on the inevitable fragmentariness of self. But in Mrs. Ramsay the peak has been reached of the painful climb started on by Rachel in *The Voyage Out*. One wonders whether the novelist can add much to that.

27. p. 52.
28. *A Writer's Diary,* p. 103.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Humorous remarks in «Orlando»

Orlando (1928), a novel as fantasy, only incidentally a cryptic biography, is an exotic graft upon Virginia Woolf's fiction. From the point of view of technique, it reverts to traditional moulds. It uses a progressive time scheme and indirect methods of narration, with no glimpses into the central figures' stream of consciousness. Otherwise, it seems far from traditional. It successfully blends romance and satire. It may delightfully mimic the style of the historical period it depicts. It assumes now a half-mocking now a half-serious tone, which enables the author to treat the weightiest themes in the most light-hearted vein.

In its obvious aspect, the novel starts with the story of a young Elizabethan nobleman, cousin to the great queen herself. Under James I, after a disillusion in love, he shuts himself up in the seclusion of his country manor. So far, one might think that Virginia Woolf means to prove that, when she so chooses, she can draw character and weave a traditional story as vividly and thrillingly as any great writer in the stream of English literature. Orlando and the figures about him, sketched with an ever so slightly ironic touch of exaggeration, turn out ardent, glamorous characters, colourfully turned to romantic perfection. His intrigue with Sasha, the mysterious Russian princess, stirs the imagination no less deeply than any great story-teller's episode. But, having made her point, Virginia Woolf allows herself to dispense with both character and

incident and to take the greatest liberties with time and likelihood. Orlando's age mysteriously stops at thirty. He altogether ceases to be a person and becomes a mere excuse, or a sort of connecting link, for the satirical presentation of the succeeding ages. Charles II makes him an Ambassador to Constantinople: Virginia Woolf takes the chance for a delightful piece of satire on the meaningless labyrinth of some sorts of diplomacy. Soon Orlando undergoes a fantastic change of sex. Turned into a woman, but always enjoying the advantages and points of view of both sexes, she supplies the novelist with a kind of spring-board for the subsequent humorous discussion of man's and woman's relative positions in society or for the presentation of the androgynous as the ideal human being. Orlando lives for a short time among gipsies: they in turn mock aristocratic beliefs and contemplative moods. When Orlando returns to England in the eighteenth century, the satire reaches human wit and the glitter of fashionable life. Alternatively enjoying solitude and society, the hero-heroine goes through the nineteenth century: Victorian prudery, hipocrisy, even literature, are not spared. When Orlando finally arrives at our own day, somehow no older than thirty-six, it is a desperate, distracted new age, where the very fabric of life has become entangled, that we must face through her eyes. Throughout this fantastic career, she likewise confronts us with great problems like poetry, man's nature and the puzzle of personality.

The latter point obviously presents the greatest interest for this essay, which focuses the problem of integration.

We have seen how Orlando happens to be for the most part a mere symbol, used for the veiled discussion of various subjects or for a satirical presentation of English society, from the Elizabethan to our own days. Obviously, the progress of such a fantastic figure cannot — as the case had been with previous characters — be identified with a long quest for integration or with its final comparative achievement. None the less, Virginia Woolf manages to drop enough hints on the

theme to evince how constant a preoccupation it is with her — one that runs like a coloured thread through her nine novels and in a way, binds them together.

We are told that Orlando, like some preceding characters, is a being "compounded of many humours"[1], subject to "violent see-saws"[2] in her emotional life. Following the footprints of Rachel and Katharine, she may also sometimes experience a feeling of dissolution.

This is not all. Letting her own presence as a commentator intrude upon the book, the novelist abruptly alludes to what she considers a variety of selves within the same individual.

"A biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may have as many thousand".[3]

Instead of striking the agonized note she uses for Rachel, she casually remarks that Orlando has a number of selves, though the particular one she wants, when tired of the others, may not come directly it is summoned. The author humorously adds that

"these selves of which we are built up, one on top of another, as plates piled on a waiter's hand, have attachments elsewhere, sympathies, little constitutions and rights of their own"... "so that one will only come if it is raining, another in a room with green curtains, another when Mrs. Jones is not here, another when you can promise it a glass of wine — and so on."[4]

Of course, Virginia Woolf is not broaching the problem seriously, as she does elsewhere. One sees her rather in a light humorous vein, which proves characteristic of the book and functions like a kind of counterbalancing anticlimax for the tone in preceding novels.

1. p. 41.
2. p. 23.
3. p. 201.
4. J. C. FILLOUX, *La Personalidad,* p. 200.

One may besides notice that what she here considers different selves are no more than different moods, brought about by processes of association before given stimuli. Elsewhere she may take as different selves the memories of such attitudes or moods in the past, recollections of impulses leading to past actions or the different social roles played by the same person — in the latter case mixing up what a psychologist distinguishes as "personaje" and "persona" [5]

Among Orlando's selves she counts: the boy who once sliced at the mummified head of a Moor, swinging from the rafters; the boy who, with gallant chivalry, fastened it again almost out of reach, so as to make the fencing game all but impossible; the boy who saw the poet; the boy who handed the Queen the bowl of rose water; the young man in love with Sasha; the Courtier; the Ambassador; the Gipsy; the Fine Lady; the Hermit; the girl in love with life; the Patroness of Letters; the woman in the dreamy, amorous mood; the woman in the solitary mood... [6]

She clearly alludes to the problem of integration when she talks of the conscious will to harmonize all such moods, memories and attitudes:

... "the conscious self, which is the uppermost, and has the power to desire, wishes to be nothing but one self. This is what some people call the true self, and it is, they say, compact of all the selves we have it in us to be; commanded and locked up by the Captain self, the Key self, which amalgates and controls them all". [7]

It is by summoning this conscious self, this will to be one, that Orlando sets in order the turmoil of different voices speaking within her as she drives out of London:

"So she was now darkened, stilled, and become, with the addition of this Orlando, what is called, rightly or wrongly, a single self, a real self. And she fell silent. For it is probable that when people talk about

5. Idem, p. 36.
6. p. 201.
7. p. 201.

the selves [they] are conscious of disservement, and are trying to communicate, but when communication is established they fall silent".[8]

The light, humorous tone of these remarks, often made in the novelist's own voice and not, as generally before, through the character's lips, strikes a new note in the treatment of the theme. A similarly new note adds up in the relation Orlando establishes between time and personality. We have, however, decided to reserve this aspect, so that it can be treated in connection with *The Years,* the last but one of the novels, where it makes one of the leading themes.

8. p. 204.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Poetic echoes in «The Waves»

None of Virginia Woolf's works better illustrates the extreme flexibility of the novel than *The Waves* (1931). Without plot, character or narrative, virtually a poem, it is made up of long, amazingly beautiful if rigidly artificial soliloquies, where a group of friends alternately pour out their vision of the pregnant moment, of themselves, of one another and of the world. Nine descriptions of seashore scenes that change frow dawn to sunset symbolically introduce the soliloquies through which one correspondingly follows the seven people from childhood to age. The few facts one learns about them are so general as to become abstract. Their lives thus broaden into gigantic trajectories, symbolical of the fate, not of a few men, but of man.

Childhood blooms, and we watch children wandering about in a garden, skimming the flower-beds. There comes the farewell to home, then school, books, games and holidays. Youth draws near, an unpicked flower offering itself. The group gets together again, around a dining-table, a symbolic ring of friendship and joy. Maturity follows. The seven friends shoulder the burdens of the world, or leap precariously from pleasure to pleasure. Bordering on old age, they meet once again. Hands clasp one another, as in the far off school days, to ward off the fear of the coming darkness. There is the wish for rest; to some, the sense of incompletion and incoherency, to others, the thankfulness that solitude has at

last removed the pressures of life, to one, the final, absurdly bold challenge to impending death.

The novelist uses the realistic details that sometimes find their way into this broad frame with a symbolic force. A handkerchief left on some roots to dry becomes anguish spread out. [1] Screwed up in a child's hand it holds rage and hate knotted in. [2] A railway junction symbolizes a change of direction in life [3], the fall of a drop of water in shaving the irreversible progress of time itself. [4]

No wonder that, in this poetic and symbolical world, true to life characters fail to appear. The seven central people presented in the novel prove mere types or sheer embodiments of peculiar attitudes to life. They even lack surnames, an indication of their universal value, meant to symbolize man at grips with life and time, without the narrowing specific characteristics pinned down to individuals.

Three among the seven central people bear no relation to our subject. Jinny, the pleasure-seeker, perpetually flaunts about the vividly spotted scarf of her physical glory. Susan, the mother and earth-lover, guzzles the milk of natural happiness or lulls the world to sleep with her incessant lullaby. Percival, the hero, the one who never lets his mind flow forth in poetic soliloquies and therefore appears only in those of the others, embodies for them some ideal of truth, goodness, romantic gallantry and straightforward vigour. Among these people the single remark related to the theme of this thesis starts from Jinny. Understandably enough, the only integration she searches for lies in the completeness of the perfect moment of pleasure. She typically calls it a "globe whose walls are made of.... youth and beauty". [5]

1. p. 10.
2. p. 11.
3. p. 50.
4. p. 131.
5. p. 104.

With the exception of these figures, the theme of integration assumes in *The Waves* an almost unparalleled importance. A large part of the book turns out nothing but poetic echoes, uttered by abstract types, of the questions discussed through the characters of preceding novels. Suffice it to say that the soliloquies of the four remaining central people prove simple variations on the subjetct. With or without hope, they all raise their eyes to the idea of integration.

References, more or less explicit, to the symbolic globe show up. Percival, the dead leader, who personifies achievement for the others, is said to have sat "there in the centre".[6] One of his friends sees in him "the centre around which the shrivelled world rounds itself".[7] Another speaks of "the unbroken circle, the complete harmony of the average men's world".[8] A third wants "to pretend that .... life is a solid substance shaped like a globe".[9] All this shows that, in Virginia Woolf's seventh novel, the problem of integration keeps fascinating her. Three of the four people connected with it, Neville, Rhoda and Louis, repeat, as abstract figures, the attitudes of withdrawal illustrated by Mary Datchet in *The Voyage Out* and her mistier descendant, Lily Briscoe, in *To The Lighthouse*. A fourth, Bernard, stands for the idea of self solidly anchored on the affections and fulfilment of the family, yet unable to view itself as an harmonious whole.

Neville, one of the friends marked by inner withdrawal, is a worthy inheritor of Rachel's and Katharine's emotional oscillations. He detects in himself "some fatal hesitancy", which, passed over, "turns to foam and falsity".[10] He floats among the others "like a piece of thistledown"[11], and swings between contradictory views. To his exasperated sensibility,

6. p. 109.
7. p. 98.
8. p. 67-68.
9. p. 178.
10. p. 60.
11. p. 173.

the world may seem now a formless mass lighted only by human love, then a beautiful creation stained by man's lust. [12] He may be filled with "a mystic sense of completeness triumphing over chaos" [13], or "feel knotted and torn apart by love". [14] He projects his own changeability into the whole of life: "nothing should be named, lest by so doing we change it". [15]

In his better moments, he detects "an order in this world", comparable to the precision of Latin tenses [16] and desires to find for himself this order and permanence in love. [17]

The hints of homosexuality about him — witness his "violent and absurd passion" [18] for Percival — explain the sorrowful question: "tell me whether I am doomed always to cause repulsion in those I love? [19]

It also explains his withdrawal from the ordinary world, his becoming "a renegade", "who sets up a separate existence [20], however much he may long for intimacy, for "some whispered word alone". [21]

Unlike Mary and Lily Briscoe, he does not find, in this private world, some vicarious activity to make up for his renunciation and around which organize his self. Hence the envy, intrigue and bitterness that make him denounce the "trifling, self-satisfied, piffling world" [22] and wish to destroy its successful men, symbolized by the complacent horse-dealers

12. p. 160.
13. p. 37.
14. p. 152.
15. p. 59.
16. p. 15.
17. p. 65.
18. p. 37.
19. p. 63.
20. p. 174.
21. p. 44.
22. p. 51.

in the railway carriage seats.[23] Hence his general grudge against life and his hatred of authority. It is typical of him that, among the friendly group, he alone points out the flaws in the figure of Percival, the beloved leader.

Rhoda's attitude of withdrawal proves even clearer than Neville's. A mere type, she carries, to the extremest and most abstract degree, the position that Mary and Lily, as complex, true to life characters, stand for. Her isolation from the community of human beings appears in one of her earliest soliloquies:

"I begin to draw a figure and the world is looped in it, and I myself am outside the loop... The world is entire, and I am outside of it, crying. Oh, save me from being blown for ever outside the loop of time".[24]

This feeling of isolation reappears in a number of other passages. It is she who remains shut up in the school room, she who likewise flies to "some far groove"[25] where she can look for statues, to replace the human creatures she avoids. She hides even from the small group to which she belongs. In a millinery, among laces and coloured ribbons, she sees "alcoves of silence where we can shelter under the wing of beauty".[26] In sharp contrast to Jinny's love of daylight, she implores day to break into night, so that she can glide unseen into the security of her bed. She may fear, hate, love, envy and despise others but never join them happily.

A cause for her deliberate isolation lies in her feeling of her own inadequacy:

«I am afraid of the shock sensation that leaps upon me, because I cannot deal with it as you do."[27]

23. p. 51.
24. p. 15.
25. p. 141.
26. p. 114.
27. p. 93.

This clearly links up with her diffuse, all-embracing fear: fear of figures, fear of imaginary people pursuing, of a mere door opening, since it heralds the coming of the dreaded creatures. Fear accounts for her renunciation of love:

«I left Louis. I feared embraces.» [28]

Fear explains her attitude of submission, her servile imitation of Susan and Jinny, her standing aside and refraining from action, while the one sews and the other dances. Her difficulty in conducting herself symbolically appears in the tentative manner in which she finds her may about, in sharp contrast to Susan, who finds hers by instinct, with the "stealthy yet assured movements... of a wild beast." [29]

Rhoda sums it all up in a harrowing cry:

"Oh, life, how I have dreaded you", "oh, human beings, how I have hated you» [30]

No wonder that, in order to spare herself all that, only in solitude should she put her trust. She withdraws to a private world of dreams. As a child, she plays on the path, rocking petals to and fro in a brown basin. The petals become ships, which ride the waves, founder, or dash themselves against rocks. The basin turns into a personal world that, unlike that of daily realities, she can safely handle. Later on, she will resort to a similar dream-world:

"So terrible was life that I held up shade after shade... Let there be vine leaves and rose leaves — ... I covered the whole street, Oxford Street, Picadilly Circus, with the blaze and ripple of my mind, with vine leaves and rose leaves. I stole secretly to read the labels and dream of names and faces." [31]

28. p. 146.
29. p. 145.
30. p. 86.
31. p. 145.

In this dream-world she finds comparative solace for her failures in real life. She may become the very opposite of what she really is, a "conqueror" [32] a fearless Russian Empress, and even assume an attitude of defiance.

But, by shutting herself up away from the community of her fellow creatures, she deprives herself of two paramount factors, both formative and expressive of personality: conduct and social intercourse.

Hence her idea, not only of non-integration, but even of her lack of self, expressed in various symbolic ways. She feels "unconsolidated, incapable of composing any ... continuity." [33] Jinny finds her vague, her face vacant. [34] Louis thinks her bodyless.[35] She herself says: «I am nobody. I have no face. This great company has robbed me out of my identity».[36] To make up for this missing identity, she will compose a counterfeit self to wear among others: «I will seek out a face, a composed, a monumental face, and will endow it with omniscience, and wear it under my dress like a talisman." [37]

Dreams make a poor compensation for all this: the isolation, the dread of life, the incapacity to act, the incapacity to love, the utter insecurity, which reaches its climax in the negation of the very existence of self. Rhoda cannot, like previous characters, find in art or work a vicarious centre around which to organize her inner life. Neither does she take her cue from Neville, and retaliate with a general grudge and bitterness against the world. She prefers to turn against herself, in the very reverse of Mrs. Ramsay's achievement of integration: by leaping off a pillar, she reaffirms her utter disintegration. She may thus be echoing Mrs. Dalloway's belief

32. p. 40.
33. p. 87.
34. p. 30.
35. p. 16.
36. p. 24.
37. p. 24.

in death as the only means of "reaching the centre". She also foreshadows her own creator's tragic end.

Louis is the only one of the thre friends that, besides echoing, as a poetic type, the attitudes of withdrawal represented by the previous, true to life characters of Mary Datchet and Lily Briscoe, also finds, like them, a vicarious centre around which to integrate himself.

From the beginning, one sees him stamped out by a basic insecurity, symbolized by his constantly alluded to anxiety about his Australian accent and about his banker father. His fear of ridicule, his immeasurable desire for women's sympathy, the effusiveness in cerimony with which he tries to coax his way to acceptance, keep hammering the idea into the reader's mind. A few significant actions work the same effect: he gives too large tips and takes a vulgar mistress with a Cockney accent, who accordingly makes him feel at his ease.

This pervading insecurity obviously supplies the key to his attitude of withdrawal and sense of isolation. He feels "alien, external," [38] "not included" in the "unbroken circle," the complete harmony of the average men's world.[39] In the early morning of childhood we already see him alone, "left standing by the wall among the flowers"[40], hiding among the leaves or on the other side of the hedge. And an alien he remains. Human contact threatens the safety of his secluded world. Jinny's kiss breaks a thread in him. Bernard sees him "disgusted by the nature of human flesh"[41], "unfriended, in exile", "suspicious", "aloof, enigmatic." [42] His consciousness of inner inconsistency and fragmentariness soon becomes apparent. He thinks himself "not single and entire" [43] like the

38. p. 68.
39. p. 67-8.
40. p. 8.
41. p. 171.
42. p. 173.
43. p. 91.

others. He refers to the streamers of his consciousness, "which waver out and are perpetually torn and distressed by their disorder." [44] He detects in himself fragments of an Arab prince, of an Elizabethan poet, of a Duke at the Court of Louis XIV.[45] He avows an awareness of «flux, of disorder, of anihilation and despair».[46] He fears never to attain «even that continuity and permanence of death».[47] Projecting his own sense of incoherence into the outside world, he talks of "hats bobbing up and down in perpetual disorder". [48]

Another symptom of his concern about integration is his obcessive preoccupation with the ideas of order and wholeness, his constant longing for consistency, permanence and solidity.

Because of the associations with orderliness, he loves discipline, assiduity and punctuality, obedience, fixed dates, the neatness of Latin cases and genders, tradition, the sight of his school-fellows lining into chapel or marching in troops to play tennis...

He perpetually muses on how to "reduce these dazzling, these dancing apparitions to one line capable of linking all in one." [49] He sees it as his destiny "to weave together ... plait into one cable the many threads, the thin, the thick, the broken, the enduring of our long history." [50] He loves the telephone and the typewriter, which help to bring the world together. He revels in the ideal of "spreading commerce where there was chaos in the parts of the world." [51] He asserts his determination to achieve "some gigantic amalgation

44. p. 67.
45. p. 91.
46. p. 67.
47. p. 144.
48. p. 68.
49. p. 155.
50. p. 144.
51. p. 110.

between ... discrepancies". He contemplates an idealized vision of himself "clear cut, unequivocal" [52] "compact, gathered together." [53]

Several of his images, referring to some centralizing point around which scattered parts may gather into cohesion, remind one of the silver globe symbolic of integration. He wants "to draw from the living flesh the stone that lodges at the centre" [54] The headmaster's sonorous reading in chapel makes him recover his continuity, feel his roots "wrap themselves round some hardness at the centre." [55] So also scholarly knowledge, which is so large a part of him, suggests roots threaded "like fibres in a flower pot, round and around about the world." [56]

Louis's attainment of riches and respectability, symbolized by the waistcoat, the mahogany chair and the gold-headed cane, which his solilloquies curiously manage to poetize, represent both the conquest of the order and solidity he longs for and the "ironical manner" [57] in which he hopes to distract others from his "shivering", "tender", "infinitely young and unprotected soul" [58]

Around this conquest, and in spite of his emotional withdrawal, he contrives to organize his self and to regard life as an harmonious whole. He exclaims:

«I have fused many lines into one... I have helped... to score those lines on the map there by which the different parts of the world are laced together." [59]

The early cry of a moment of elation seems at last, to some extent, justified:

52. p. 118.
53. p. 119.
54. p. 143.
55. p. 25.
56. p. 14.
57. p. 55.
58. p. 155.
59. p. 119-20.

"From discord, from hatred ... my shattered mind is pieced together by some sudden perception. I take the trees, the clouds, to be witnesses of my complete integration. I, Louis ... am born entire, out of hatred, out of discord." [60]

We may now turn to Bernard, the last of the people that stand for the theme of integration, so markedly present in *The Waves*. He proves a complex figure, whose general effect equals none of its predecessors. On one hand he seems to have found, in the haven of the family, a centre of gravity to cling to. On the other, he fails to shape, around this fulfilment, the consistent self he longs for. So also he never achieves the harmonious view of life that he so eagerly seeks.

Very clearly, he acknowledges that only the idea of family and children serves to explain his confidence, his "central stability, otherwise so monstrously absurd". [61] On the foundation of requited affection he struggles to achieve a stable self:

"I am inclined to pin myself down most firmly there before the loaf at breakfast with my wife." [62]

He grants that then "one feels complete, entire." [63]

But this in no way precludes the feeling, prevailing at other times, of multiplicity and disseverance within himself, of many co-existent selves, which never amalgate in the desired unity:

"I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am." [64]

"I am not one and simple, but complex and many ... I have to effect different transitions; have to cover the entrances and exits of several different men who alternatively act their parts as Bernard..." [65]

60. p. 28.
61. p. 82.
62. p. 184.
63. p. 185.
64. p. 196.
65. p. 55.

To this, he must still add the "shadows of people one might have been — unborn selves", among which "the savage, the hairy man who dabbles with fingers in ropes of entrails" [66] and who contributes his part to Bernard's individuality.

No wonder this variety of unconnected traits, which fail to merge in a resulting single being, may lead him to feel "without a self, weightless",[67] or doubt, as he projects his feeling of unreality, the fixidity of the outside world, "the reality of here and now". [68]

To his inner inconsistency corresponds a constantly expressed longing for wholeness and unity, "impossible desires to embrace the whole world with the arms of understanding." [69]

His monotonously repeated wish to tell stories, to spin the whole of life into a continuous narrative, echoes his yearning for the sequence, the orderliness he so much misses in himself, as in the world. He seeks "among phrases and fragments, something unbroken". [70] In "linked phrases" he runs together" whatever happens, so that instead of incoherence there is perceived a wandering thread, lightly joining one thing to another." [71] Thinking of his death, he alludes to an imaginary biographer, who, "tacking together torn bits of stuff" [72], may make his life into a story. He wants to pretend that "life is a solid substance, shaped like a globe" [73], that "we can make out a plain and logical story, so that, when one thing is dispatched — love, for instance — we go on, in an orderly manner, to the next." [74]

66. p. 205.
67. p. 203.
68. p. 204.
69. p. 82.
70. p. 189.
71. p. 35.
72. p. 184.
73. p. 179.
74. p. 179.

In fact, like Louis and so many others, he represents the quest for Virginia Woolf's symbolic globe. Whereas Louis, however, seems to find it in the conquest of power, Bernard, though telling the perpetual story with which he tries to lull himself into acquiescence, never grasps it. Even when, "solid with middle-aged content" [75], he has for a long time crooned the soothing song of children, wife, home and dog, he avows he has never "found the true story, the one story to which all phrases refer." [76] The notes he had made in the margin of his mind for some final statement remain unused. [77] Unlike Louis, who "has formed unalterable conclusions about the true nature of what is to be known", he has only a philosophy that "runs like quicksilver a dozen ways at once." [78] There is no such thing as solidity and coherence, he thinks: if one presses the crystal, the globe of life", "all will burst." [79]

This conclusion clothes Bernard's figure in inescapable disillusionment, in a disenchantment that taints the whole of life. He has attained the fulfilment of requited affection, the love in which the central characters of the first two novels have placed their hope and where Mrs. Ramsay has found her trust. Yet, not even in it does he reach the integration he searches for. His private happiness amounts to a sheer fortunate accident in a meaningless universe. In his last, breathlessly beautiful soliloquy, he has nothing to oppose against death, the enemy, but the wild song of an absurd challenge.

One may ask whether, according to Virginia Woolf's philosophy, Rachel and Katharine have dreamed in vain, and whether Mrs. Ramsay represents an unattainable ideal, the mere poetic crystallization of transfigured childhood memories.

75. p. 159.
76. p. 154.
77. p. 135.
78. p. 155.
79. p. 182.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Personality fights ist way through time

In *The Years* Virginia Woolf reverts to the continuous pattern and the factual design of the beaten fiction tracks. Through a series of scenes, skilfully blending narrative and dialogue, we follow the fortunes of an upper middle class family, the Pargiters, in the half century between 1880 and 1937. From this point of view, the novel turns on three axes: the 1880 head of the family, old Colonel Abel Pargiter, and his descendants; his younger brother, Sir Digby, and his small family group; their cousins, the Malones and, chiefly, their daughter Kitty — all duly attended by a retinue of in-laws, friends, acquaintances and servants, who contribute their share to the large canvas. The 1937 party that closes the book provides an ingenious device to bring most characters together, give each a finishing touch, survey the results of the passing of time, and contrast the outlooks of the two surviving generations.

Society plays a significant part in the novel. One finds the characters chearly plunged in the social milieu. They may almost all be placed within two large groups, represented by rebels on one side and conformists on the other — though they all ultimately gather round the family hearth. In a way, the book unfolds like an album, where a section of the social life in the England of the late eighties and the early nineties finds its way. A certain class consciousness occasionally makes itself felt. The satiric note struck in *Mrs Dalloway*

remains, however, unheard, perhaps because the world focused generally proves, rather than fashionable society, the inner circle of the family, presented on the whole as a protective, though sometimes irksome screen.

One must stress that, however unimportant their function within the whole, neither family nor society chronicle makes the main theme of *The Years*. This is the one implied in the title: the passing of time, with its twofold implication of change and permanence for human life. In fact, it would almost seem that Virginia Woolf here intends to illustrate Frank O'Connor's saying that, in any novel, the main character is time.[1] The characters show a virtual obsession with the idea of time. They talk insistently about their past. They anxiously try to convey to one another the personal, untransferable imprint it has left on their minds. They sometimes use it as a bond to fasten together again souls long grown strangers to one another.

A feeling of the finality, the sadness, the irreversibility of the changes brought about by time permeates the whole novel. In order to achieve this effect, the novelist resorts among others, to what one might call the technique of the accomplished fact. She confronts the reader with definite situations, not with processes leading to crises and then to dénouements. When he first hears of them, he finds all important events — marriages, births, deaths, even the break of the first World War, already consummated.

He gets hints about exciting or moving episodes, but he never watches their progress, nor does he come to know them in any detail.

He thus experiences the painful feeling that there is nothing the characters can do, except plod on through the trivia of their daily round.

1. MARIANO BAQUERO GOYANES, *Qué es la Novela,* p. 46.

The landmarks in people's lives must simply be accepted, since they prove so desperately final and, when heard about, belong already to the past. Time is also focalized as the great impact in spite of which personality must attain and keep its integration — an aspect most relevant to the subject of this essay and soon to be discussed below.

Character portrayal in *The Years* follows mainly traditional methods, the stream of consciousness technique being for once left aside. People appear and disappear, the novelist suggestively sketches their psysique, records their conversation and, in the course of the years, piles fact upon fact on them. We see them from the outside, as a family friend might do. Much in their lives, in their feelings and thoughts, remains obscure. We never know the exact story of Delia's elopement, of Rose's many passions or of Lady Pargiter's love affairs. The characters are given importance chiefly in function of the family group, of the balance they achieve together, so as to contribute their part to the large canvas of family life. Virtually all people accordingly seem, so to speak, secondary characters. If a central figure exists — Eleanor, the old Colonel's eldest daughter, the Victorian spinster still brightly open-eyed to the realities of the twentieth century — she typically represents the link between the generations, the very continuity of the family.

Owing to the external approach to character adopted in *The Years,* to the fact that the novelist generally shows us only the composed face that her creatures present to their family, we cannot follow in them the inner conflicts, the struggle for integration, or the glory in its achievement so markedly present in earlier characters. Yet, here and there, a few scattered allusions to fragmentariness within the self, to the wholeness one would have it achieve, or an image connected with the symbolic globe, make us feel that, even in this factual book, the theme of integration still haunts the author's mind.

Understandably enough, these scattered hints show up chiefly in connection with the three people whose thoughts the novelist is often forced to reveal, in order effectively to stamp them out as meditative characters: Sara, Peggy and her brother North. Sara, one of the old rebels, whose slight physical deformity for a while compels her to remain aside and to solace herself with reading and thinking, asks the question that puzzles so many of the preceding characters:

"Are we one, or are we separate?" [2]

Peggy and North, lhe younger rebels, add a few pertinent allusious. Witnessing Sara's excitement under the affect of wine, he muses on how to harmonize this new image of her with the one he had previously formed:

"... the excitement... had created yet another person; another semblance, which one must solidify into one whole." [3]

In a moment of relaxation, when she glimpses a state of being in which real laughter and happiness may exist, Peggy projects her inner completeness, and thinks that "this fractured world" becomes whole, "whole and free." [4] Pondering over the mystery of personality, she uses an image that reminds one of the symbolic globe of integration:

"What makes up a person —, (she hollowed her hand), the circumference —" ? [5]

We may now proceed to a few other allusions, also connected white the theme of integration though from a completely different angle: its struggle to achieve or preserve unity through time.

2. p. 150.
3. p. 368.
4. p. 420.
5. p. 380.

In previous novels, we have studied the theme of the fight for integration, the hope of its achievement and the several solutions suggested for it. We may now remark that the enemy the characters had to fight in order to attain inner consistency, when there clearly indicated, seemed to be an amalgam of oscillating feelings, thoughts and reactions, which they tried to conciliate into a harmonius whole. Of course, such oscillations must needs be connected with the passing of time, but time and memory were not then explicitly considered, from this standpoint, except in one preceding novel: *Orlando*.

There were find passages on the changes personality must face through the years, or on its conscious effort harmoniously to incorporate all past experiences and to preserve its own unity through time. As the years go by, Orlando notices that she never stops changing:

"for all her travels and adventures and profound thinkings and turnings this way and that, she was only in process of fabrication. What the future might bring, Heaven only knew. Change was incessant, and change perhaps would never cease. High battlements of thought, habits that had seemed durable as stone, went down like shadows at the touch of another mind and left a naked sky and fresh stars twinkling in it" [6]

A clock striking may symbolize to her the assault of time,[7] which threatens the continuity of self. By a conscious effort of the will, she subdues the discordant voices within, in order to oppose an harmonious, compact self to the inevitable onslaught.[8] Once we see her resolutely trying to resist the impact:

... "she kept ... complete composure (for she was one and entire and presented, it may be, a larger surface to the shock of time)." [9]

6. p. 111.
7. p. 198.
8. p. 204.
9. p. 208.

She tries to comfort herself with the thought that, in spite of unavoidable adaptations, she has remained fundamentally the same:

"She had the same brooding meditative temper, the same love of animals and nature, the same passion for the country and the seasons." [10]

An ironic passage mocks at her confidence. Just as she muses on the permanence of things, the arrival of servants disturbs her, a blot of ink spreads on the poem she had been writing and, to her astonishment, she begins to write verse in which she can no longer recognize her own hand. [11] Later on she recollects this moment when, having been about to say that nothing changes, she was soon to see her life undergo a profund alteration. [12]

If Orlando can boast any persisting trait, the chief is her love of poetry, symbolized by the one poem, *The Oak Tree,* which she keeps writing through the three hundred years of her fantastic life. But even this symbol of continuity paradoxically also stands for change, since it suffers unending alterations in order to follow the literary fashions it witnesses.

Elsewhere Orlando marvels at the number of unconnected memories piled on the mind, all of which the self must strive to weave into a consistent being. Looking as the relics amassed through the centuries, a lock of hair, a crumble of pastry, a prayer book, she exclaims:

"What a phantasmagoria the mind is and meeting place of dissemblables!" [13]

The novelist comments on what seems to her the capricious way memory keeps together the jumble of recollections:

10. p. 151.
11. p. 152.
12. p. 170.
13. p. 111.

"[Nature] has contrived that the whole assortment shall be lighty stitched together by a single thread. Memory is the seamstress, and a capricious one at that. Memory runs her needle in and out, up and down, hither an thither. We know not what comes next or what follows after." [14]

The assortment of accumulated experiences and recollections, each inextricably associated with the time of the corresponding events, appears to the novelist as so many different selves, all co-existing within the individual:

"if there are (at a venture) seventy-six different times all ticking together in the mind at once, how many different people are there not — Heaven help us — all having lodgement at one time or another in the human spirit?" [15]

It requires the skill of an artist to amalgate all this into a single harmonious personality, which misses neither past nor present experiences:

... "the most successful practitioners of the art of life ... somehow contrive to synchronize the sixty or seventy different times which beat simultaneously in every normal human system so that when eleven strikes all the rest chime in unison, and the present is neither a violent disruption nor completely forgotten in the past. Of them we can justly say that they live precisely the sixty-eight or seventy-two years allotted them on the tombstone. Of the rest we know to be dead though they walk among us; some are not yet born though they go through the forms of life; others are hundreds of years old though they call themselves thirty-six." [16]

Having thus glimpsed back at the allusions sprinkled in Orlando, we may now turn to the problem of the relation between personality and time as it appears in *The Years*. One does not find there many explicit remarks on the theme.

14. p. 44-45.
15. p. 199.
16. p. 198.

But this seems amply compensated by the general effect of the continuity of personality through time conveyed by several characters, no less than by a series of symbols that emphasize the contrast between persisting memories and inelutable eventual changes in the outward circumstances.

The pressure of time and the changes it brings to weigh on the human mind once appear in Kitty's relief and exhilaration, when the undisturbed continuity of the stretch of land near her castle for a moment gives her the illusion of time brought to a stop.[17]

Peggy refers to what she calls the criss-cross of lines laid down in the mind,[18] that is, the imprint of past experiences, which contribute to form personality. Making the gesture once associated with the symbolic circumference, she thinks of the disired amalgation of memories, present experiences and anticipations within the integrated self:

"She held her hands hollowed; she felt that she wanted to enclose the present moment; to make it stay; to fill it fuller and fuller, with the past, the present and the future, until it shone, whole, bright, deep with understanding." [19]

Eleanor also muses on the relation of her own personality to time. She may well think that she has only the present moment, but, even while she does so, a long stream of memories floods her mind. Then she visualizes personality as a centre of attraction amalgating recollections and present experiences:

"Millions of things came back to her. Atoms danced apart and massed themselves. But how did they compose what people called a life? ... Perhaps there is "I" at the middle of it, she thought; a knot; a centre." [20]

17. p. 300.
18. p. 386.
19. p. 461, 462.
20. p. 395.

Past experiences repeated in the present make her think of a comparative reiteration, to be found in life and self alike:

> "Does everything then come over again a little differently? She thought. If so, is there a pattern, a theme, recurring, like music; half remembered, half foreseen? ... a gigantic pattern, momentarily perceptible?" [21]

Eleanor herself somehow symbolizes the unity of personality, preserved, in its main essence, through time. She strikes a kind of balance between the succeeding periods. It is she that, at the close of the final party in the novel, significantly looks at that symbol of the past, the ink-corroded walrus on a writing desk that has followed the family for half a century,[22] she that likewise rapturously gazes at the future, embodied by the young couple before a neighbouring house. Like a female two-faced Janus she thus includes both past and future within her eyes.

The impression she makes on the reader's mind bears considerable unity. In the young girl of the eighties, the "buffer between [her sisters] and the intensities... of family life",[23] one finds already the old woman with no life but that of others. Several other characters likewise convey the feeling that, in the core of the human being, a hard kernel, the carrier of the essentials of personality, and of the almost fatalistic seeds of its future, persists through time; that the creature that finally faces death in old age is only the butterfly already contained in the chrysalis of youth. One feels Edward, the gentle old scholar, in the young Oxonian that dreams his love for Kitty into a translation of the *Antigone*.

21. p. 398.
22. p. 460.
23. p. 469.

Kitty, the 1880 bickering girl, longs to kick off conventions as promptly as she repeatedly does her tight satin shoes. She foreshadows the old 1937 rebel, roused into a passion by the memory of the "cruel old days".[24] Martin, the boy bursting out laughing among the family in deep mourning and the young philandering dandy of 1908, persist in the old man, who, over sixty, still enjoys life enormously. North sees in old Milly's hands, where diamonds sink in the fat fingers, a symbol of disgusting, successful compliance. Isn't it the logical outsome of the "mousy, downtrodden, inefficient little chit" present in the young girl? Rose, the active, brick-throwing political rebel, lives already in the "horrid little spitfire".[25] So also the younger rebels, Peggy and North, lurk in the sly adolescents that let themselves out of a window to picnic in the Roman camp.

A good many symbols of the persistence of the past recur, besides, throughout the book: repeated gestures, snatches of songs, turns of phrases, street hawkers' distant cries, old family relics. One may consider them to stand not only for the persistence of memories but also for the continuity preserved by the very self through time. The general impression they convey is that some essential core, comparable to the stactic point in the hub of a rotating wheel, persists through time, despite unavoidable adjustements to changing circumstances.

The symbols are many and insistently repeated. The old kettle that wouldn't boil for the family tea in 1880,[26] recurs in the 1913 scene, soon after the old Colonel's death. Eleanor repeats in 1908[27] Milly's gesture of fraying the wick of the kettle.[28] The old song about the King of Spain's daughter,

24. p. 432.
25. p. 449.
26. p. 8.
27. p. 162.
28. p. 9.

heard by the boy Martin,[29] plays on the lips of the philandering young man.[30] The voices of men crying "any old iron to sell", or the tune from the barrel organ in the streets of 1891 London, re-sound in Sara's or Eleanor's ears[31] nineteen years later.[32] Eleanor keeps through the decades the spotted walrus with a brush in its back[33] as a part of her mother's memory[34] and, half a century later, sees in it a token of survival.[35] The great crimson chair with gilt claws that once stands in Lady Pargiter's hall and receives her golden evening cloak[36], a symbol of happiness and splendour[37], radiates the warmth and glamour of past times in one of her daughters' later home,[38] or strikes a melancholy contrasting note in the other's poverty-stricken room.[39] Similar symbols are Nicholas's talk about Napoleon and the psychology of great men, repeated unchanged after the lapse of twenty years,[40] Sara's recurrent memories of Edward's translation of the *Antigone* and her word-by-word quotations from North's old letters.[41]

We may now attempt to sum up Virginia Woolf's view of the rleation between personality and time as found in *Orlando* and *The Years*.

The former novel emphasizes chiefly the changes effected by the succeeding years. But it admits that "the most sucessful practitioners of the art of life" contrive to harmonize

29. p. 243.
30. p. 242.
31. p. 96.
32. p. 185.
33. p. 35.
34. p. 96.
35. p. 460.
36. p. 155.
37. p. 136.
38. p. 310.
39. p. 177, 337.
40. p. 333, 339.
41. p. 343.

in an integrated self all they once were and all they eventually become. In *The Years* the impression of consistency conveyed by several characters over a period of half a century no less than the insistently recurring symbols of echoes from the past, seems meant to illustrate the persistence of self through time, of an unbroken line of development linking the several phases in the life of individuals.

Whether the unity preserved by the characters through time is due to the fact that, generally shown from the outside, they do not let us witness possible inner oscillations, is another side of the question.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

«Between the Acts»: a last remark

We have now come to *Between The Acts,* Virginia Woolf's posthumous novel. It presents many traits already found in earlier ones, though achieving a general effect all its own. As in *Mrs Dalloway,* the temporal frame encompasses a single day, with flashbacks in the characters' minds to reveal aspects of their past. It also has virtually no story. The events compressed into it boil down to very little: at Pointz Hall, a country estate in the heart of England, the small family group of Giles and Isa Oliver welcomes a handful of guests arrived to watch the annual pageant acted there. In this particular year (1939) it consists of several scenes and a miniature play, which gracefully imitate past literary styles, and represent the great periods in English history, from the early Briton to contemporary days. In the intervals, people talk, stroll about or have tea. The pageant acted and the guests gone, we feel the approach of a scene of jealousy, concerning Mrs. Manresa, one of the guests, between Isa and her husband. But we never hear their words. With two laconic sentences, the book closes: "Then the curtain rose. They spoke". A critic complains that the novel thus finishes exactly when it should begin.

One cannot agree with him. In fact, so much has been suggested by the author's penetration into the characters, by the criss-cross of emotion among them, by the perpetual current of love and hate between the central couple, that further action proves unnecessary. A whole world has been

suggested, so rich and revealing of human life that one feels no need of any other imaginative stimulus. Using Isa as a mouthpiece, Virginia Woolf seems beforehand to defend herself against her critic:

> "Did the plot matter?... The plot was only there to beget emotion. There were only two emotions: love, and hate.
>
> There was no need to puzzle out the plot... Don't bother about the plot: the plot's nothing." [1]

Between the Acts contrives harmoniously to blend different elements. Poetry shows up in several descriptive pieces, in the initial scenes of the pageant, even in the echoes from the prosaic talk of nurses. Comedy appears in other pageant scenes, in Miss La Trobe's vociferating struggle to get them acted, in the friendly banter of gentle Mrs. Swithin by her brother, old Bart Oliver. Pathos lurks in William Dodge's character or in the darker aspects of Miss La Trobe's. Satire grins in the Victorian scenes. The past sends its echoes through the pageant itself and survives in a few Victorian characters among the audience. Contemporary reality underlies it all, in the characters' social background, in the hubbub of office, phone, bell, shop and money compressed in their minds, in the gramophone blaring to the audience and, most tragically, in the drone of the aeroplanes flying ominously above, on the eve of the second World War.

Character is again shown mostly from the inside. But to the people's stream of consciousness — which often reveals much of their background and past lives as well as their opinions on one another — suggestive pieces of dialogue, ordinary actions and descriptions of their physique are skilfully added. None of these means proves exclusive of any character, but one notices that, according to the nature of the creature portrayed, one of them gets the upper hand. Brooding Isa appears chiefly through her own thoughts, feelings and half

1. p. 109.

sung snatches of poetry, old Bart through his teasing of poor Mrs. Swithin or his rough play with his grand-children. Mrs. Manresa reveals herself in her talk, her clothes or in the little manoeuvres to trap Giles. He himself emerges most typically in his surly, inarticulate ways, and in his angry impatience for action.

Having thus considered the general aspects of the novel, we may now turn to the one that specifically regards this thesis. One does not observe in the characters of *Between the Acts* any conscious attempt at integration. Dreamy and shy, boisterous and straightforward, sensual and vulgar or surly and passionate, they simply let themselves be. Neither do they evince any preoccupation with an harmonious, comprehensive vision of life.

In the latter respect, Mrs. Swithin, Giles's vague, kindly, absent-minded aunt, proves an exception. She has found, in her religious beliefs so often derided by her brother, a sort of unifying frame to hold and explain the whole of life. Here we see her on a circular tour of the imagination — "one making", that is, revelling in her view of the universe as a single, coherent, if sometimes mysterious harmony:

> "Sheep, cows, grass, trees, ourselves — all are one. If discordant, producing harmony — if not to us, to a gigantic ear attached to a gigantic head. And thus — she was smiling benignly — the agony of the particular sheep, cow or human being is necessary; and so — she was beaming seraphically at the gilt vane in the distance — we reach the conclusion that all is harmony, could we hear it. And we shall." [2]

That this is not the novelist's own standpoint can be proved in several ways. Not only by the gently ironic light bathing Mrs. Swithin's figure or by the explicit agnosticism of most Woolfian central characters, but also by the label elsewhere tacked on to religion: "a contraction", "a reduction" of the complexity of life to "simplified absurdity". [3]

2. p. 204.
3. p. 221.

Besides, virtually the last note the novel strikes undoubtedly resounds with the despair of individuals' ever achieving within themselves the consistency on which the vision of life as an harmonious whole depends.

This note emphatically clangs in the last memorable episode, when Miss La Trobe, instead of having the villagers perform a pageant scene representative of contemporary society, sends among the audience dozens of glasses, where she compels them to face themselves. Nothing could more graphically symbolize the fear of facing self, of "seeing to the bottom of the vessel"[4], than the hurry and constraint in which they all draw back, emphatically refusing to look at themselves. Only Mrs. Manresa, that embodiment of sensuality and vulgarity, calmly gazes into her glass, and even uses it to powder her nose. As if, in a bewildering world, none but those who simplify life to the point of living by the body alone, could muster courage thus symbolically to affirm their own individuality.

Also symbolically, all the mirrors catch of the people in the audience are parts: "here a nose... There a skirt... Then trousers only... Now perhaps a face.".[5]

Meanwhile, a sinister gramophone blares over the pandemonium that soon follows:

> "All you can see of yourselves are scraps, orts, and fragments?" [6]

And it repeats and re-echoes itself with the grim refrain: "scraps, orts and fragments..."

No one individual, but any personality in contemporary society, is thus presented as hopelessly fragmentary, tragically destined never to amalgate into a consistent shape, never to find the relief of unity and wholeness.

4. *A Writer's Diary*, p. 132.
5. p. 214.
6. p. 220.

A voice among the audience complains:

... "Ourselves? But that's cruel. To snap us as we are, before we've had time to assume... And only, too, *in parts*"... 7

As if, to see oneself, one needed some preliminary exorcism, or any seeming unity and consistency in personality were but a social pretence, a composing mask akin to Mrs. Dalloway's, to be worn before inquisitive eyes.

With this last disillusioned remark, which throws on the face of the whole of contemporary society an inelutable fragmentariness and dissolution, Virginia Woolf winds up her last novel.

7. p. 214.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Conclusion

This survey of the role played by the twofold quest — for completeness and harmony in life and for the integration of personality — in Virginia Woolf's novels draws to an end. We may now sum up her views on the subject, so far as they appear in the nine novels. We shall also attempt to sketch a relation between these views and the personal inner struggle, which we witness in the author's diary, and which certainly led her to devote so much of her creative writing to the theme.

In the novels, she initially seems to believe in the possibility of the achievement of comparative integration through love. The central lovers of the first two emphatically express this hope. Mrs. Ramsay, that lyrical portrait of Virginia Woolf's own mother, the main character in *To the Lighthouse,* illustrates the attainment of the ideal.

But this optimistic vision can by no means be considered final. Impressions heaped by the other books lead us to think that the author finds it the exception rather than the rule in life. One even wonders whether it does not represent, in the early works, mere conformity with the traditional novel winding up by a happy end, and, in the case *of To the Lighthouse,* the idealization of cherished, happy childhood memories, rather than the mature writer's conscious beliefs.

Virginia Woolf more frequently admits a modest solution: the comparative achievement of integration by those who,

in order to shield themselves against what they for some reason deem dangerous emotional intercourse, effect an inner withdrawal from their fellow creatures' world, and find an artificial centre of gravitation in a vicarious pursuit. The Mary Datchet of *Night and Day* seeks hers in social work, the Lily Briscoe of *To the Lighthouse* in art, while Louis, in *The Waves,* places his in the conquest of power.

The view presented in other instances seems almost always either implicitly or frankly pessimistic.

Jacob's Room, by the very process of focusing character — fragmentary and discontinuous — implies scepticism about consistency and harmony within self. To Mrs. Dalloway, who sees the unified, coherent personality as a mere social pretence, harmony can be reached only in death. Orlando adds a few humorous remarks on the manysidedness of self and introduces the theme of its struggle to keep continuity through time. Except for Louis, *The Waves* strikes a gloomy note. Neville fails to find an organizing centre in life, and turns against it in bitter retaliation. Bernard throws the full weight of his important position in the novel on the side of scepticism and disillusionment. Rhoda goes even further. By her suicide, after the long, dreary acceptance of her own fragmentariness, she crowns the affirmation of utter inner dissolution.

The Years displays a pleasanter picture, since its creatures symbolically stand for the continuity of self through time. Yet, the external approach to character might explain it away as a mere illusion of the reader, who, because he is not allowed to penetrate the minds of the individuals portrayed, can see only the composed exterior people often contrive to present to the world's eyes.

Between the Acts adds, in the insistently repeated phrase, a last sad vision of self, besieged by the perplexities of a stormy world, hopelessly condemned to unending fragmentariness: «scraps, orts, fragments»...

We may now attempt to follow in the author's diary the specific passages where, in her ows name, she utters thoughts and feelings similar to those of her creatures in their quest for an integrated personality and vision of life. Of course, this raw material has been pared down to a minimum by Leonard Woolf's cutting of the most private passages in the twenty-six volumes of diary, thus reduced almost exclusivelly to matters directly or indirectly connected with her art. But enough remains to show how much of Virginia Woolf's own fight for inner consistency the nine novels mirror.

A Writer's Diary shows her a human being at the same time awed and fascinated by the mystery of self. This interest dates back to her early years. She alludes to an occasion in her childhood when she could not step across a puddle for thinking on the strangeness of life and self.[1] She has Nancy Ramsay go through a similar feeling in the scene beside the pool in *To the Lighthouse*.[2]

One traces the emotional waverings apparent in so many Woolfian characters to the "upheavals",[3] the "ups and downs",[4] the "tosses and tumbles",[5] the fits of depression of their creator, whom they led to a complete mental breakdown in 1913, and, by haunting her with the dread of insanity, finally drove to suicide.

The diarist constantly refers to her painful inner oscilations. She feels "divinely happy one day, so jaded the next." [6] Her emotional temperature sinks "deathly low" then rises "fever high".[7] She compares her brain to a scale, which may precariously balance or dip again, since "one grain pulls it

1. p. 101.
2. p. 87.
3. *A Writer's Diary*, p. 67.
4. Idem, p. 209.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 277.
6. p. 221.
7. p. 174.

down".[8] A change of house makes her oscillate for days.[9] She notes down «the strength and vividness of feelings which suddenly break and foam away";[10] "anguishes and despairs; and heavenly relief and rest and then misery again."[11] To such a being, "one false move means racing despair, exaltation and all the familiar misery: that long scale of unhappiness".[12] References to fits of depression, when she pitches into the "great lake of melancholy",[13] prove too many to be quoted.[14]

Her physique cannot but reflect this spiritual torture. She has symptomatic headaches,[15] suden fits of complete exhaustion,[16] experiences "lassitudes and ebbs of life".[17] She alludes to "partly mystical illnesses", in which she lies down "quite torpid, often with acute physical pain". Something happens in her mind. «It refuses to go on registering impressions. It shuts itself up. It becomes chrysalis».[18]

The changeability of her moods leads Virginia Woolf, as some of her characters, to a feeling of fragmentariness and irreconcilable many-sidedness within herself. Bernardo's and Orlando's many selves merely echo their creator, who once tells Lytton Strachey: "I'm twenty people".[19] She mentions occasions when she is «scattered and various and gregarious».[20] The «shattered splintered fragments»[21] her body

8. p. 270.
9. p. 64.
10. p. 113.
11. p. 123.
12. p. 264.
13. p. 143.
14. p. 63, 268, 207, 250, 336, 273, etc..
15. p. 263.
16. p. 209.
17. p. 178.
18. p. 153.
19. p. 35.
20. p. 48.
21. p. 185.

once feels like reflect the same idea. Her obcession that life is "transitory, flying, diaphanous" [22] likewise represents its projection.

Virginia Woolf once attributes her emotional oscillations to her having had no children,[23] another time to the strain of living between "two spheres", fiction and life.[24] But she does not yield passively to her moods. She sees herself "fighting something alone".[25] Indeed, her perpetual struggle commands our respect even more than her suffering rouses our compassion.

Like her characters, Virginia Woolf searches for some immutable truth, some transcendental reality, where she may as last find unity and permanence. Thus she tries to define it:

'something abstract; but residing in the downs or sky, beside which nothing matters; in which I shall rest and continue to exist. "Reality" I call it.' [26]

She adds:

"And I fancy sometimes this is the most necessary thing to me: that which I seek." [27]

Unfortunately, like Bernard, she does not seem to find an harmonizing, comprehensive philosophy.

All the same, she wants to bring order into her world [28] — the wish she makes her creatures echo.

It is curious to notice that whatever success she reaches in her quest is connected with the attitude of withdrawal and the organization of self around work evinced by some of the people in the novels: Mary, Lily, Louis. The attitude

22. p. 141.
23. p. 29.
24. p. 209.
25. p. 141.
26. p. 132.
27. Idem.
28. p. 181.

of inner withdrawal soon becomes clear. Not for anything does she once identify herself with Rhoda,[29] that quintessence of spiritual isolation. Life is to Virginia Woolf, as to Septimus, the mad suicide of *Mrs. Dalloway,* an "undependable brute".[30] She calls herself "an outsider",[31] "driven by loneliness and silence from the habitable world".[32]

Besides, she confesses that, as Louis, she is "seldom penetrated by love of mankind".[33] She may even blurt out:

> "I do not love my kind. I detest them. I pass them by. I let them break on me like dirty rain drops". [34]

We will not take this harsh assertion too literally. In the same diary one sees her capacity for affection, chiefly in her deep devotion to her husband and to her sister Vanessa. But she never alludes to love as the force of gravitation that holds her life together. She very explicitly declares that only work effects what she names the "synthesis" of her being. "Only writing composes it:" ... "nothing makes a whole",[35] unless she is writing. The writing mood alone gives her "the exalted sense of being above time and death".[36] Nothing but creating "can bring about proportion" [37] to her. In her art only can she experience the sensation of "holding the thing — all the things — the innumerable things — together".[38] The praise of critics to *The Years* makes her use some of the very words uttered by her characters in their moments of elation, when she cries: "I'm free, whole, round".[39]

29. p. 156.
30. *A Writer's Diary,* p. 82.
31. p. 322.
32. p. 148.
33. p. 39.
34. p. 79.
35. p. 208.
36. p. 225.
37. p. 232.
38. p. 208.
39. p. 277.

In intervals of peace and joy, to express her feeling of plenitude, she likewise lays hold of the image that she lends the people in the novels, and contentedly breathes: "the globe rounds again".[40]

As her diary — with her life — draws to an end, some passages[41] give us the impression that her tortured soul at last mellows into acceptance and contentedness. But others show that these portray only flitting, illusory moments of respite. In March 1940, close to the illusory moments of peace, we find her repeating, in her own name, the words she makes ring in *Between the Acts*: «scraps, orts, fragments»...[42] The vision of life and self as inescapably fragmentary, thus keeps preying on her. In March 1941, the month of her suicide, we see the perpetual "battle against depression" raging on.[43]

Having just finished *Between the Acts,* she certainly experiences the sensation of verging on insanity, the "misery" that followed *To the Lighthouse, The Years, The Waves.*[44] To this, the war adds its strain. On the top of all, the recurring, uncontrollable dread of madness. Unable to fight any longer, she kills herself. By her suicide, she makes real the imaginary acts of two of her fictional characters: Septimus in *Mrs. Dalloway,* Jinny in *The Waves* — the act she once would have Mrs. Dalloway herself perform.

Under the shadow of a cruel illness she lets the silver globe wander out of her sight. But, as we remember the moral integrity evinced by her diary, the courage she so long kept in her unequal fight and the unique legacy of her art, we cannot but hope that, past the threshold of another world, she may have seen it soar before her eyes again.

40. p. 355.
41. among which, on p. 330, 340, 355, 359.
42. p. 334.
43. p. 364.
44. p. 229, 265, 268.

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