

RE-THINKING WOOLF'S MOMENTS WITH THE LIMITED AND SPECIFIC USE
OF ELEMENTS IN HEIDEGGER'S THOUGHT

By

T. VIRGINIA GILLESE

B.A., Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 1989
B.A. (Special), The University of Alberta, 1987

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

In

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Department of English)

We accept this ~~thesis~~ as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

December 1998

© T. Virginia Gillesie, 1998

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of English

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date Jan. 12, 1999

Abstract

Time encompasses human beings as they understand and discover themselves in relation to their mortality. In Virginia Woolf's novels *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves*, we find many instances of moments of being which herald the experiences of time, the anxiety of death and the periodic glimpse into, and of, the self. Martin Heidegger's introduction to *Being and Time*, and his articles "What is Metaphysics" and "Letter on Humanism" also discuss issues such as these found in Woolf's novels.

This thesis focuses on the relationship between existential and chronological time in Woolf's novels with reference to Heidegger's idea that *Dasein* is fundamentally linked to temporality, to time. I further explore the relationship between chronological time's inherent sense of impending death and the personal awareness (which allows for the existential moment) of one's death. In relation to Woolf's idea of a personal presentiment of death, Heidegger's thoughts on anxiety are discussed. Finally, the role of language in the moment of existence is examined. The dual role of language as revealer and concealer of the self is explored as a significant aspect of Woolf's moments of being. Regarding this last point, Heidegger's concept of language, as the place where *Dasein*'s essence is revealed, is used to augment the discussion of the elusive self and its relationship to language.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1	5
1.1 Introduction	5
1.2 Time: An Important Theme	6
1.3 Past: More Than Memory	7
1.4 Seeking to Hold the Present Not the Past	11
1.5 Heidegger: Dasein	13
1.6 Dasein is in Time	14
1.7 Time is Presence	14
1.8 Time: Existing in Relation to Dasein	16
1.9 Woolf's Moments and Presence	17
1.10 Woolf's Moments: Glimpses Into What Is	18
1.11 The Import of the Two Kinds of Time	20
1.12 Woolf's Moments as Timeless	23
1.13 Woolf's Moments: Fleeting Yet All-Encompassing	26
CHAPTER 2	32
2.1 Introduction	32
2.2 Death's Relationship to Time	33
2.3 Death: The Grounding of Existential Anxiety	39
2.4 Heidegger: Anxiety and the Nothing	40
2.5 Woolf's Moments and Anguish or Anxiety	44
2.6 Nothingness and a Turning to the Self	48
2.7 Moving Beyond the Self	50
CHAPTER 3	56
3.1 Introduction	56
3.2 Revelations of the Self in the Moments	57
3.3 The Moments Begin With Difficulty	62
3.4 Death and the Moment	63
3.5 Woolf's Moments are Silent	66
3.6 Moments and Non-Permanence	67
3.7 Language Fractures Woolf's Moments	69
3.8 Sound as Language in <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i>	73
3.9 Heidegger: Language Houses Being	76
3.10 Language: Revealing the Self for Heidegger and Woolf	78

CONCLUSION 82

References 85

Introduction

The concept of time is significant to the moments of being so central to the works of Virginia Woolf. This thesis focuses on Woolf's novels, *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Years*, and the ideas of time, death, and language in relation to the moments of being found in the works. Part of the discussion involving these works will include specific and limited reference to Martin Heidegger's introduction to *Being and Time*, and his articles "What is Metaphysics" and the "Letter on Humanism." The use of Heidegger's thought, in this thesis, will specifically deal with references to *Dasein's* fundamental relationship to time. Furthermore, Heidegger's thoughts on anxiety and their relationship to an understanding of death, and language as the place where the essence of *Dasein* is revealed, will be utilized in this thesis. The thesis does not seek to draw parallels between Woolf's thought and Heidegger's, rather it strives to elucidate Woolf's concepts of time, anxiety in relation to death, and language further through the careful and moderate use of Heidegger's philosophy.

Chapter one consists of an exploration of the two kinds of time found in Woolf's novels. Chronological time, or the conventional notion of time, is that which occurs in the "real" or physical world: it is the linear march of seconds, minutes, hours, days, towards its ultimate conclusion -- death. Within this larger, shared experience of time is another, more personal experience of time. Time in this second instance is existential; it is of the moment. The existential moments of being are contained within the larger sphere of chronological time, and they are fundamentally related to it. Yet within these moments of existence, past, present and future merge, they become equally present in the moment. The experience of the moment of being is, therefore, atemporal or outside of time as it is

commonly thought. Paradoxically, however, it is the conventional notion of time that lays the groundwork for the experience of existential time within the moment, and it is the moment of being which brings about a heightened awareness of chronological time. The relationship of the two kinds of time is symbiotic. Heidegger's thought, in relation to this discussion of Woolf's novels, is used to specifically speak of time as a fundamental experience of human beings. In the introduction to *Being and Time* we find references to the idea that *Dasein* is irrevocably linked to time, and time is not merely physical, it is presence as well as present. Thus, *Dasein* seeks and finds self-understanding in time. Woolf's moments of being are existential to the core; they are the place where presence and present are all-encompassing. As the moments merge past and future into present, the character glimpses the self in a unique way.

The second part of the thesis builds on this dual understanding of time. Chronological time is discussed more fully as that which contains and brings about one's death. This basic awareness of one's death, neither as an abstraction nor as a source of grief but as a personal reality, is the ground upon which the moments of being exist. The existential awareness generated by the acute knowledge of one's death creates the anxiety that heralds the moment's arrival. Anxiety exists because of the awareness of one's death. Such knowledge comes about through chronological time, yet it creates the moment of being which is in existential time. Heidegger's thought, in "What is Metaphysics," is referred to specifically in relation to his idea of anxiety and its link to "the nothing" and *Dasein*. It is in the nothing that, for Heidegger, *Dasein* encounters anxiety. Anxiety is what reminds *Dasein* of presence, of existence. The nothing is a notion akin to the

personal awareness of death Woolf writes of, and found in both of these conceptions of not being is the gateway to the existential experience.

The last section of the thesis deals with language and its role in the moments of being. Each moment of being contains a fleeting glimpse into the self. The self is revealed to the subject in the moment, and there is an existential understanding of the self that is profound. When language enters the moment, however, the revelation of the self in the moment proves elusive. Language is from outside of the moment; moments are silent. When language enters, it seeks to situate the self in the moment; it seeks to make permanent the knowledge of the self which is revealed in the existential moment. While language does situate the self in the moment, it also demands objectification of that which it articulates. The introduction of language, therefore, objectifies the self and thus the subject loses the existential insight into the self which it so desperately seeks to contain. The result is a rupture from the moment of existence back into the conventional notion of time. Language is the cause of the rupture. In his "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger writes about language. Specific reference is made, in this thesis, to Heidegger's discussion of language as the place where *Dasein's* essence is revealed. Language here is a place where the discomfort of existence may be realized and, as such, it allows for an insight into Being, unlike in Woolf's novels where language is an intrusion into the moment. However, like Woolf's notion of the articulation of the self as a means to hold on to self-knowledge or self-revelation, Heidegger's idea of language contains a space for *Dasein* to seek understanding of that which is unique to *Dasein*. In both Heidegger's and Woolf's thinking, the revelations which language seeks to articulate can be experienced but they cannot be owned, yet they are profound and they resonate

with existential import. Time encompasses human beings as they understand and discover themselves in relation to their mortality. In Virginia Woolf's novels *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Years*, we find many instances of moments of being which herald the experiences of time, the anxiety of death and the periodic glimpse into, and of, the self. Martin Heidegger's introduction to *Being and Time*, and his articles "What is Metaphysics" and "Letter on Humanism" also discuss issues such as these found in Woolf's novels.

This thesis focuses on the relationship between existential and chronological time in Woolf's novels with reference to Heidegger's idea that *Dasein* is fundamentally linked to temporality, to time. I further explore the relationship between chronological time's inherent sense of impending death and the personal awareness (which allows for the existential moment) of one's death. In relation to Woolf's idea of a personal presentiment of death, Heidegger's thoughts on anxiety are discussed. Finally, the role of language in the moment of existence is examined. The dual role of language as revealer and concealer of the self is explored as a significant aspect of Woolf's moments of being. Regarding this last point, Heidegger's concept of language, as the place where *Dasein's* essence is revealed, is used to augment the discussion of the elusive self and its relationship to language.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Virginia Woolf, in her novels *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Years*, winds her narrative around time in the moments of being, or significant moments in existence, so characteristic of her works. Martin Heidegger, in *Being and Time: Introduction*, also discusses time and the moments which compose it, in relation to human beings and their existence.¹ For both of these writers, the past informs the present, yet, the past, or memories, when experienced in the present, are no longer the simple past: they are very much the present. They are not merely the present, however, for they contain what *is*, in an experiential, existential sense, and in that they are timeless while, simultaneously, they exist within the context of time. Existentialism in general speaks of time in relation to the individual, and Heidegger's philosophy, central as it is to existentialism, is no exception. When we understand Heidegger's conception of time in relation to Being, we understand a present that is bound up in presence, and a time that exists in relation to *Dasein* and Being as it is both revealing and concealing. Heidegger's thought breaks out of the purely physical and scientific way of looking at time, freeing us to explore time in relation to Woolf's moments as an experience that is akin to the transcendent experience of the revealing of Being. Furthermore, the transcendent nature of Woolf's timeless moments is no longer confined to the realm of pure subjectivity, for just as Being is found in beings, so are moments contained in, though not limited to, a larger world of physicality and chronological time. The moments are not bound by the world, just as Being is not subject to beings, but rather the moments exist within a larger sphere as Being is revealed and concealed in *Dasein*. That the subjects may not know the world in and of itself is not at issue; rather the point is that the moments are not wholly

¹ Martin Heidegger, "Introduction: The Exposition of the Question of the Meaning of Being," *Being and Time*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh in collaboration with J. Glenn Gray and David Farrell Krell, from *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. by David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977). All citations from Heidegger's writing come from this edition.

focused inward to where time is meaningless but instead the personal moment is contextualized by the larger world and the timelessness of the moments is that much more meaningful for their contrast with the traditional world. In *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Years*, the moments of being which exist at odds with conventional notions and experiences of time are what bring meaning to the lives of the vibrant, truly living characters who welcome the startling clarity the moments of existence bring with their inherently meaningful sense of timelessness in time.

Time: An Important Theme

It is fully evident that time is a primary aspect of Woolf's work. In Jeanne Schulkind's introduction to *Moments of Being*,² we are told, "The questions repeatedly posed by the characters of her novels . . . lead to this one end, the spiritual continuum which embraces all of life, the vision of reality as a timeless unity which lies beneath the appearance of change, separation and disorder that marks daily life" (23). At the same time, it must be acknowledged that time is of primary importance for Heidegger: "Time must be brought to light and genuinely grasped as the horizon of every understanding and interpretation of Being" (61). In order to understand ourselves, or ourselves through the characters of fiction which show us ourselves, we must discourse on, about, around, time and our place in it. Bernard Blackstone says about Woolf, "the treatment of time is one of the author's primary techniques."³ This seems quintessentially true of the novel *Mrs Dalloway*. In *The Singing of the Real World*, Mark Hussey notes that "*Mrs Dalloway* is explicitly concerned with the experience of time."⁴ Indeed, the whole novel seems built upon, or around, Woolf's vision of time and the experience of it. And so we have Clarissa mulling over Peter Walsh and thinking:

² Jeanne Schulkind, "Introduction," from *Moments of Being*, by Virginia Woolf, ed. with an Intro and notes by Jeanne Schulkind, Second Edition (Hammersmith, London: Grafton Books, 1989).

³ Quoted in Jean O. Love, *Worlds In Consciousness: Mythopoetic Thought in the Novels of Virginia Woolf* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1970) 48.

⁴ Mark Hussey, *The Singing of the Real World: The Philosophy of Virginia Woolf's Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1986) 121.

they might be parted for hundreds of years, she and Peter . . . but suddenly it would come over her, if he were with me now what would he say? -- some days, some sights bringing him back to her calmly, without the old bitterness.⁵

A parting, both in time and space, is easily superceded. The past, the present, merge in the moment in the street with memory being transformed and lending to the creation of an experience of being. So, too, we have Peter, dreaming, waking, merging: "So the elderly nurse knitted over the sleeping baby in Regent's Park. So Peter Walsh snored. He woke with extreme suddenness. . . . to some room, to some past he had been dreaming of. It became clearer. . . . It was at Bourton that summer, early in the 'nineties" (53). The characters in the novel find themselves in moments around which temporality swirls but in which the present is a timeless constant, surging the past into itself and containing the future within itself.

Past: More Than Memory

The role of memory in the moments of being is more than just a simple remembering. The past plays an integral role here, but in so doing it, too, is transformed and changed. The truly authentic moment is absorbing and profoundly consuming. Simple memory or remembering does not belong in this sphere. J. Hillis Miller, in his article "*Mrs Dalloway*: Repetition as the Raising of the Dead," does not properly distinguish between simple memory or simple past, and the past as a transformed and transforming part of Woolf's moments.⁶ Although he begins with promise, stating that Woolf's technique consists of "her pulverization of experience into a multitude of fragmentary particles, each without apparent connection to the others, and her dissolution of the usual boundaries between mind and world" (53), and further stating, "one way the characters in *Mrs Dalloway* achieve continuity and wholeness is through the ease with which images from their pasts rise within them to overwhelm them with a sense of

⁵ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Herts, Great Britain: Granada Publishing, 1976; Rpt. 1982) 8. All citations of this work are from this edition.

⁶ J. Hillis Miller, "*Mrs. Dalloway*: Repetition as the Raising of the Dead," from Morris Beja, *Critical Essays on Virginia Woolf* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1985) 53-73.

immediate presence" (59), the overall result he proposes is, "profound continuities" (59). Of course, the sense of continuity achieved throughout *Mrs Dalloway* is by way of moments of being, but, on the other hand, the past does not overwhelm them with a *sense of immediate presence*. Rather, the characters are actually in the present, and the past becomes a part of that present. The past informs the moment, it aids in transforming the moment into itself, and, in so doing, the past becomes a part of the present. Thus, we have Clarissa experiencing a morning in London which is imbued with meaning through the layering of memory in a moment. The moment is not merely a remembering, and it is thoroughly both present and in the present:

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn. (5)

The past certainly enters the moment. Thus, we have the phrase, "For so it had always *seemed* to her then," to introduce part of the experience. The past, however, only informs the present: "stiller than this of course," the "this" putting the character quite solidly in the present. She can hear the hinges, she can smell the air, yet it is the air of London, the present air which initiated the moment. The past imbues the present moment with additional layers of meaning and experience so that the blending of the experiences really renders time in the conventional sense meaningless. Presence and the present is the experience.

By seeming to treat the past of Woolf's fiction as simply remembering, Miller's argument follows a different path than that which is explored here. He says, "Storytelling, for Woolf, is the repetition of the past in memory" and "*Mrs Dalloway* . . . is a brilliant exploration of the functioning of memory as a form of repetition" (53). By focusing so wholly on memory and the past as the content of the moments, Miller's argument allows

for an ambiguous understanding as to what is at the heart of the moment. Is the repeating past an all-encompassing present? He says, "The present, for them, [the characters] is the perpetual repetition of the past" (59). But seeing the moments as repetition does not account for the *thisness* of their experience. The air is not Bourton, it is London. Bourton's air was "stillier," though, and, because of the experience at Bourton, its impact on the character, and the role of memory, Bourton's air informs Clarissa's moment. The moment, however, is not just a remembering of Bourton. Rather, the moment is firmly grounded in London, with the addition of Bourton, of eighteen, of stillness, and the result is itself, a unique moment in the present.

Miller's argument, however, is not about time itself but rather it discusses time in relation to the narrative voice. He says, "The manipulation of narrative voice in fiction is closely associated with that theme of human time or of human history which seems intrinsic to the form of the novel" (54). The existence of a narrator implies a past, for the narrator knows the past to which the novel, and the narrative voice, refers. The past, for Miller, is therefore grounded in the use of the narrative voice and does not necessarily dictate the experience of the time of the moments. That is, the telling of the novel may involve the use of the past, but the result of the telling may not be the past. He says, "The narrator tells the story in a present which moves forward toward the future by way of a recapitulation or repetition of the past. This retelling brings that past up to the present as a completed whole.... This form of an incomplete circle, time moving toward a closure which will bring together past, present, and future as a perfected whole, is the temporal form of many novels" (54). Miller's discussion of the past in the conventional sense, therefore, is tempered by his overall discussion of the past in relation to the narrative voice.

In Miller, the narrative voice is a voice which transforms time. His use, therefore, of the word past may be understood in terms of the narrator's transforming power; that is, the narrative voice changes what is past into what is present both for the novel and for the

reader. In this way, Miller does allow for an interpretation of the moments of existence as being truly present, which is why "past, present, and future [may come together] as a perfected whole." Furthermore, the narrative voice gives the past to the reader as a present. He says, "The narrator has preserved [the characters'] evanescent thoughts, sensations, mental images, and interior speech. She rescues these from time past and presents them again in language to the reader" (55). The time of the novel, though arising from a past, becomes a present to the reader as well as a present within the novel.

Though Miller's argument does focus on the repetitive nature of the past within the narrative, he does allow for the moments of being to become more than just containers in the now for what was. He allows that the past becomes not just present in terms of "now remembering" but that it is alive in the moment. Miller uses the concept of resurrection to convey this idea of the present in the moments. He says, "The power of narrative not just to repeat the past but to resurrect it in another form is figured dramatically in the action of the novel" (64). The moments, the dramatic nuclei of Woolf's narrative, may be here understood to encompass not just the past as remembered in the now, but the past as living (resurrected) in the now, the present.

The overall understanding of time in Miller's argument, however, differs from that which is explored here. Miller argues, as a result of his intent to understand time in Woolf's novel not as it is revealed in the moments but in terms of the narrative voice, "there is no present in a novel, or only a specious, ghostly present which is generated by the narrator's ability to resurrect the past not as reality but as verbal image" (62). He goes on to claim that, "*Mrs. Dalloway* may be described as a general day of recollection" (62). Miller's idea of time, within the context of his article, differs from this thesis for it seeks to situate the time of the novel in relation to the narration of the novel, not the experience of the moments of existence.

Ideas more in keeping with the inquiry into time pertaining to this thesis may be found in Hussey's *The Singing of the Real World*. In this text, Hussey says,

Fiction is defined by the creation of a world of time out of time. Novels can achieve a fixing of single moments because they embody a (fictional) present (which may be written as a past) that can be experienced over and over again as a 'present' in the act of reading. In this may be seen a correlation between Woolf's 'reality' and her concept of art's ability to overcome time. (126)

Hussey's interpretation of Woolf looks beyond narrative convention to understand the artist and her work. To a certain extent, Hussey's argument is broad, in the sense that it encompasses the reader's response to the novel. The experience of the novel is immediate and the moments vibrant, they speak to the reader of one's own moments in life, and therefore the response to them is emphatically empathetic. The novel is alive and present as we read it and as we internalize and understand it. The character's moments speak of authentic existence, and so Hussey says, "Woolf's novels . . . testify to a potential in human experience for perceiving a time out of time, for overcoming the limits of actual life through apprehension of a different mode of being altogether" (*Singing* 117). The conventional method of communicating these moments which speak of a different way of encountering the world is not the issue. What is important is that Woolf did communicate such moments, and though imbued with the past, they are not solely defined by the past. Woolf's moments of being speak of a larger experience than merely memory as a revisitation of the past.

Seeking to Hold the Present Not the Past

The only real flaw in Hussey's discussion also involves the use of the past in Woolf's moments. As he seeks to understand the role the past, and memory, play in the moments of being, he falls prey to an easily misunderstood aspect of these moments, that of the character's desire to grasp or hold the moment. Hussey says, "Life constantly vanishing into the past . . . and the possibility of its recovery is a recurring center in Woolf's thought" (*Singing* 125-6). The moments are grasped, characters do seek to hold them, but only because the character seeks to understand and establish the self within the

reverberating context of the meaningful moment. The self, like the moment, is ever elusive, a theme which will be discussed at length in chapter three. What is important here is to understand clearly that it is not the past that is sought in the moments of being, but a grasp of presence, which is necessarily informed by the past, within an existential framework. The past is a part of this concept of time only in so far as it contextualizes the subject and layers the experience; fundamentally, the experience is outside of traditional time and authentic in terms of existential time. So we have Septimus, who fluctuates between terror and euphoria, experiencing:

The word 'time' split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable, words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time. He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. (63)

Within the context of the moment, the past is alive and encompassed within the present which it informs and layers with additional meaning. That Septimus is mad does not negate the authenticity of the moment, for his madness only makes the shock of the moment more searing, more difficult to bear and to draw meaning and understanding from. It does not undo the presence or timelessness of it.

So, too, we have Peter, leaving Clarissa with "the sound of all the clocks striking" (44), yet finding himself strangely out of time:

the sound of St Margaret's glides into the recesses of the heart and buries itself in ring after ring of sound, like something alive which wants to confide itself, to disperse itself, to be . . . as if this bell had come into the room years ago, where they sat sat at some moment of great intimacy, and had gone from one to the other and had left, like a bee with honey, laden with the moment. But what room? What moment? And why had he been so profoundly happy when the clock was striking? (46)

The sound of the clock speaks of time outside of personal experience, yet it rings the experience, like the air surrounding a floating bubble which is the moment of existence. The moment exists within the larger context of clock time, yet it is separate from it. The

past informs the moment, linking it as if now were then, yet now is now and in the present. In the present moment, there is happiness, there is a feeling of connectedness and intimacy, there is a fleeting sense of being outside of time, of being timeless. Despite his emphasis on Woolf's characters' desire to recover the past, Hussey comes to a similar conclusion: "For Peter, the sound contains past, present, and future" (*Singing* 122). Not just the sound, however, but the moment, which is sparked by the sound, contains these elements which combine to form an all-encompassing present; a timeless moment.

Heidegger: *Dasein*

Martin Heidegger, in *Being and Time: Introduction*, also writes of human beings in relation to time.⁷ I shall seek to clarify Heidegger's use of the term "*Dasein*" before embarking upon a discussion of time and its conception. Heidegger uses the term *Dasein* to express a particular and important reality: the pure, underlying nature that is human. Heidegger says, "As ways in which man behaves, sciences have this being's (man's) kind of Being. We are defining this being terminologically as *Dasein*" (54). Thus, when Heidegger speaks of *Dasein*, he speaks of that which is completely and truly human, without exception. To exist, to be human, is to be *Dasein*: "The ontic distinction of *Dasein* lies in the fact that it is ontological" (54). Moreover, Heidegger states, "*Dasein*, as a pure expression of Being, has been chosen to designate this being" (55). *Dasein* is the essence of human nature, which is the inevitable result of being human; human beings exist in terms of their understanding of themselves. They cannot be otherwise, for to be human is to be such; thus, human beings are *Dasein*.

⁷ John Mepham's *Criticism in Focus: Virginia Woolf* (Melksham: Bristol Classical P, 1992) 87-97 argues that a philosophical interpretation can be seen not to argue for "influence" on the writer, but rather as an exploration of the writer's desire to confront and communicate thoughts on existence. This thesis seeks to explore Virginia Woolf in terms of Heidegger's philosophy solely to understand further and explicate Woolf's writing through the articulation of certain philosophical concepts, not to pre-determine her work through the use of a strict philosophical framework or pre-determined thought process.

Dasein is in Time

As *Dasein*, we are in the world: "*being in a world* belongs essentially to *Dasein*" (55), and, as such, we are linked to time. Heidegger says, "The meaning of the Being of that being we call *Dasein* proves to be *temporality* [*zeitlichkeit*]" (61). We are in the world, and because we are alive and in the world we are in time, we are situated in time, we understand ourselves in time. *Dasein* understands Being and itself by being, and *Dasein* is always being in time. That is why Heidegger says, "*Time* is that from which *Dasein* tacitly understands and interprets something like Being at all. Time must be brought to light and genuinely grasped as the horizon of every understanding and interpretation of Being" (61). To understand, grasp Being, the very core of existence for *Dasein*, is to understand "*Time as the horizon of the understanding of Being*" (61). *Dasein* cannot grasp itself, cannot gain an awareness of meaning, outside of an awareness of time and itself in time.

Time is Presence

Heidegger goes on to explain that it is necessary that "Time thus gained be distinguished from the common understanding of it" (61). That is to say, time may be conceived not only as a means for distinguishing historical events from spatial and numerical relationships. Rather, time may be seen as the place, the "horizon," upon which Being reveals itself and is revealed. It is evident, then, that "Being itself -- and not only beings that are 'in time' -- is made visible in its 'temporal' [*zeitlich*]" character. But then 'temporal' can no longer mean only being in 'time.' The 'atemporal' and the 'supratemporal' are also 'temporal' with respect to their Being" (62-63). Being cannot be contained by time, for time is a horizon, a setting, a placing for Being, not a cage for, or a determinant of, it. Yet, *Dasein* is always in time, always understands itself in relation to time: "Being is comprehensible only on the basis of the consideration of Time" (63).

An understanding of time must include the past. In terms of *Dasein*, the past is historicity: "Historicity means the constitution of Being of the 'occurrence' of *Dasein* as

such" (64). Within time, *Dasein* seeks to find the meaning of Being, and *Dasein* cannot do this without an understanding of what and how *Dasein* was. Our past situates and contextualizes our present out of which we understand ourselves and Being is revealed. We are past, present and future: "Whether explicitly or not, it [*Dasein*] is its past," and, moreover, "*Dasein* 'is' its past in the manner of *its* Being which, roughly expressed, actually 'occurs' out of its future" (64). Heidegger discusses tradition in relation to the past and historicity, but what is more important here is to recognize the relationship between being and Being (both in the present tense) with the past, which in turn is linked to the present and the future. Heidegger says,

In its manner of existing at any given time, and accordingly also with the understanding of Being that belongs to it, *Dasein* grows into a customary interpretation of itself and grows up in that interpretation. It understands itself in terms of this interpretation at first, and within a certain range, constantly. This understanding discloses the possibilities of its Being and regulates them. Its own past -- and that always means that of its "generation" -- does not *follow after Dasein* but rather always goes ahead of it. (64)

We bring ourselves, our past, our context, to the moment where we realize or discover the meaning of Being, and in that way we meet what already was, what is revealed is both what was, what is, and what will be.

The meaning of Being, revealed on the horizon of time, is inextricably linked to present or presence, though Heidegger is not satisfied with the concept of the present found in ancient ontology. According to Heidegger, the ancients would say,

the Being of beings is oriented toward the "world" or "nature" in the broadest sense and that it indeed gains its understanding of Being from "Time." . . . the determination of the meaning of Being as *parousia* or *ousia*, which means ontologically and temporally "presence". . . . Beings are grasped in their Being as "presence"; that is to say, they are understood with regard to a definite mode of Time, the *present*. (71)

Heidegger sees this manner of thinking as inadequate; it is "inexplicit and naive" (72).

Primarily, it is far too materialistic to satisfy the truly inquiring mind; just as historicity

must mean more than “this happened and then this happened,” so, too, must the present mean more than, “the table is here so it is present.”

Time: Existing in Relation to Dasein

The present, while of paramount importance to Heidegger, cannot be explained outside of where meaning is found: *Dasein*. Presence and the present, then, exist within the framework of, and for, *Dasein*. Inevitably, this links the present to language, for “*Dasein*, that is, the Being of man, is delineated as *zoon logon echon*, that creature whose Being is essentially determined by its being able to speak” (71). This relationship between the present and language will be more fully explored in chapter 3. What is important here is to realize the link between *Dasein* and presence, and the present. In phenomenology, what is truest is what is there, what is, and to seek presence and the present is to seek what *is*. But what is to be found? What does phenomenology let us realize and grasp as what is, as present? For Heidegger, the answer is that in the present we do find presence in its purest form: we find Being as it is revealed through beings. Being is a fleeting gift which both reveals and conceals, is both found and lost. But it is presence and present, for it *is*: “what remains *concealed* in an exceptional sense, or what falls back and is *covered up* again, or shows itself only in a *distorted* way, is not this or that being but rather, as we have shown in our foregoing observations, the *Being* of beings” (83). This speaks of a striking similarity to Woolf’s moments. As Kathy Brady, in “Time, Space and Silence,” notes, “In the novels of Virginia Woolf, time simultaneously inhibits and enables, punishes and rewards, obscures and reveals.”⁸ Presence is what

⁸ Kathy Brady, “Time, Space and Silence,” from *Virginia Woolf Miscellanies*, Proceedings of the First Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf, Pace University, New York, June 7-9, 1991, edited by Mark Hussey and Vara Neverow-Turk, (New York: Pace UP, 1992) 201-2.

truly constitutes the present, and for Heidegger it is found only in *Dasein*; for Woolf, it is found in moments of existence.

Woolf's Moments and Presence

When you wrest the present from the sole domain of the material world and set it as a potentiality within a higher, more universal sphere, it is easier to understand Woolf's moments not as burdened past but as humanly contextualized present. That is, the moments Woolf writes of may be understood in relation to Heidegger's present in that they are available and open to human beings and, as such, they take place within the context of the past of the particular individual experiencing them. Nevertheless, the moments transcend the past, the present, and the future, while they are simultaneously influenced by them. Moreover, individuals do not experience moments of being because of who they are, but because they are, and because they are in a way which is open to what is being revealed. The moments are a human domain, and they are more or less attainable depending upon one's openness and willingness to experience them. For Heidegger, Being transcends. He says,

Being is no sort of genus of beings; yet it pertains to every being. . . . Being and its structure transcend every being and every possible existent determination of a being. *Being is the transcendens pure and simple.* The transcendence of the Being of *Dasein* is a distinctive one since in it lies the possibility and necessity of the most radical *individuation*. Every disclosure of Being as the *transcendens* is *transcendental* knowledge. *Phenomenological truth (disclosedness of Being) is veritas transcendentalis.* (86-87)

Being transcends because it is universal and it is presence, it is meaning, it is what grounds all. Transcendence is an entirely compatible notion in relation to Woolf. As Hussey notes, in Woolf "might be seen a move toward belief in transcendence, the existence of something apart from all modalities (a self)" (*Singing* 121). For Woolf, the

self is the groundwork for present/ presence, and, in the moments, possible transcendence.

Woolf's Moments: Glimpses Into What Is

Woolf's moments are not to be confused with Being; rather, Woolf's moments are to be understood, with the insight provided through Heidegger's phenomenology, as moments which open up to the individual not as the past but as a contextualized present which contains a transcendental glimpse into what is. What is for Heidegger would be Being; what is for Woolf would be the self. While these may be contrasted, they may also be understood in conjunction with each other. The universality of *Dasein* allows for a contrast with the existentialism of Woolf, which may seem to allow for an inviting argument but which is an argument that is not entirely necessary here. Though we seek to understand and elucidate the moments of being within a transcendent, phenomenological framework which stresses the present while not denying the past, we need not lose sight of Woolf's focus on the self and the moments which occur in relation to it. We do not need to make Woolf into Heidegger, or vice versa. Heidegger simply offers us a door into Woolf by showing us that rational thought does not always need to present an either/or proposition, but rather the present can contain the past and the future within a present, a moment, which transcends.

Just as Heidegger was unhappy with a completely materialistic notion of time, so, too, did Woolf find the notion of time as merely traditional time, or clock time overly constraining and restricting. In other words, Woolf's approach to time appears sympathetic with phenomenology. Hussey analyzes Woolf's conception of time and its relation to the past and notes that "Woolf's novels . . . [are] emphasizing the great discrepancy that exists between the time of the waking mind and that ticked off by clocks" (*Singing* 121). *Clock* time seems linked, in the novel *Mrs Dalloway*, with the chiming of Big Ben, while lived time, the existential experience of time, seems to be somewhat connected to the softer, gentler sound of St. Margaret's. So we have, "Big Ben

strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Such fools we are, she thought" (6), in contrast to:

Ah, said St Margaret's, like a hostess who comes into her drawing-room on the very stroke of the hour and finds her guests there already. I am not late. No, it is precisely half-past eleven, she says. Yet, though she is perfectly right, her voice, being the voice of the hostess, is reluctant to inflict its individuality. Some grief for the past holds it back; some concern for the present. (45)

The juxtaposition of the clocks is symbolic of the juxtaposition of the two sorts of time wending their way through Woolf's novel. There is the authoritative voice of traditional time, and there is the softer, more ephemeral voice of that time which lends itself to individual experience and integrates the past into the timeless or atemporal moment.

Woolf's moments of being stand apart from traditional time. They take place in time while they are not constrained, or dictated to, by the conventional notion of time. They are, if you will, floating, like bubbles which contain their own world, within the overall construct of clock time. Jean Love, in *Worlds in Consciousness*, talks about the existence of the moments within the larger frame-work of traditional time when she says, "While the novel takes place in mythic time, the clock punctuates and marks progress through its single day, in a conventional and empirical-theoretical way."⁹ Is the striking of Big Ben, the presence of traditional time, merely a signpost for the reader or a symbol of opposition to what is real (i.e. the moments of existence)? According to Love, "the clocks express the transcendence of unitary consciousness and also demonstrate its dynamics" (153). The bells allow for a larger context in which we are able to meet others, while at the same time they sound the call for the moments of existence, which are by their very nature intensely personal. So Love notes, "The sounding of St. Margaret's also climaxes and transcends the sounding of Big Ben during the day, with its repeated attraction of consciousness to itself" (153). In a sense, the bells ring in the moments,

⁹ Jean O. Love, *Worlds of Consciousness: Mythopoetic Thought in the Novels of Virginia Woolf* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1970) 153. For a discussion of mythopoetic thought and its relationship to time, please see chapters 3 and 10.

allowing a space for the actual present to be revealed in itself and as the container for the past and the future. I earlier quoted the moment where the sound of the clock blends the past with the future for Peter Walsh. The passage continues with the future entering into the moment: "the sudden loudness of the final stroke tolled for death that surprised in the midst of life, Clarissa falling where she stood, in her drawing-room" (46). Conventional time is the container of, or background for, the moments of existence.

The Import of the Two Kinds of Time

Is the outside world, or the world of conventional time, then of equal import to the personal world of the moments of being? In relation to the outer world, on the surface Woolf seems to differ from Heidegger, for Being is only found in beings and so is not separate from phenomenon (though it is not solely material). For Woolf, however, although the self must dwell in the world, the primacy of the personal moment would appear to supersede the context in which the moment resides. As Jean Guiguet writes in *Virginia Woolf and Her Works*, Woolf "asserts the primacy of the mental operation, of the content of mind, over that element of the outside world which is merely its occasion."¹⁰ The setting for the moment is important, for it allows for the moment and its evocation, but it is not equal to the moment of existence, for therein lies what is most meaningful. In his apprehension of how Woolf considers the outside world and its attendant traditional time, Guiguet differs from Love, and ultimately he places Woolf within a subjective framework. He says, "What is essential is all that came into the mind between sensation and perception: this content is reality" (385). He makes explicit his implicit meaning when he says,

This assertion of subjectivity or idealism is pregnant with consequences as regards space, which is both setting and attribute of the universe; it loses

¹⁰ Jean Guiguet, *Virginia Woolf and Her Works*, trans. Jean Stewart (1962; New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1965) 385. For a similar argument claiming that time and its apprehension in Woolf is sheer consciousness, see Howard Harper, "Mrs Dalloway," from *Between Language and Silence: The Novels of Virginia Woolf* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1982) 109-34.

its reality at the same time as that universe; it no longer exists, save in the sensibility that apprehends it and in the mind that thinks it. (385)

Yet, the backdrop for the moments of being cannot be considered equal to the moments themselves, for the moments contain meaning and from them the characters draw sustenance. On the other hand, although the moment is experienced by a subject, the moment cannot be reduced to the subject, for the moment is informed by the world, both past and present:

By conviction an atheist perhaps, he is taken by surprise with moments of extraordinary exaltation. Nothing exists outside us except a state of mind, he thinks; a desire for solace, for relief, for something outside these miserable pigmies, these feeble, these ugly, these craven men and women. *But* if he can conceive of her, then in some sort she exists, he thinks, and advancing down the path with his eyes upon sky and branches he rapidly endows them with woman-hood; sees with amazement how grave they become; how majestically, as the breeze stirs them, they dispense with a dark flutter of the leaves, charity, comprehension, absolution, and then, flinging themselves suddenly aloft, confound the piety of their aspect with a wild carouse. (52, emphasis added)

The state of mind, the self, the subject, is of course at the centre of the moments. But to argue that that is all it is is far too solipsistic an interpretation of Woolf's vision of reality. Undoubtedly, we are, by ourselves, unable to know the world outside of ourselves, but the moments open up to us a sense of ourselves within a larger context: "with his eyes upon sky and branches" (52). We may not know another perfectly, in and of themselves, yet we can grasp, or sense more than just ourselves: "if he can conceive of her, then in some sort she exists" (52). Woolf acknowledges human limitations, but she does not indulge them. As John Mepham notes, Guiguet "plays down or ignores all those more materialistic aspects of [Woolf's work] . . . the apparent tension between her materialistic insights and her mystical aspirations" (*Criticism* 89). Woolf seeks to situate the self as a limited being in the moment, yet, in a sense, freed to experience that which is larger, or greater, than merely the self. As Brady notes, "When the husk of time splits, it reveals illuminations and daily miracles, connecting and disconnecting us, each of us perceiving

it differently, and yet the same" (202). Acknowledging the limitations of the self confirms an awareness of something beyond the self. As Being is uncovered, revealed and concealed, by beings, so moments are experienced by the individual but only within the overall context of the larger world: thus we have the sounds of Big Ben ushering in moments, and the squeak of hinges and freshness of air pulling the subject into a moment. The moment is intensely personal, and ultimately the character is left with only the self, but the subject is not the moment, for the moment is not entirely focused on the self:

She had reached the Park gates. She stood for a moment, looking at the omnibuses in Piccadilly.

She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that. She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxicabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. . . . and yet to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that. (9-10)

She is aware, in the moment, of the world outside of her, of others, and of herself and her inability to know any of it perfectly. Subjectivity seems a too limiting term for such moments found in Woolf's literature, although most certainly the moments take place, and are grounded, in the subject.

It is possible that Woolf herself would have argued that her characters contained more than just a subjective life. According to Mark Spilka, in *Virginia Woolf's Quarrel With Grieving*, she did, after all, object to James Joyce's writing on the basis that it was "centred in a self which ... never embraces or creates what is outside itself and beyond."¹¹ According to Spilka, this "signalled her own intention to reach outward from the flow of consciousness to apprehend a less alien world" (47). Certainly the moments in her novels give evidence of this reaching out, as they do, as was previously observed, include

¹¹ Mark Spilka, *Virginia Woolf's Quarrel With Grieving* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 1980) 47.

physical impressions of objects which seem to impact on the subject. It would, however, be naive to argue for authentic experience outside of the subject in regards to Woolf's writing. Minow-Pinkney, in *Virginia Woolf and The Problem of the Subject*, reaches an insightful conclusion. She invokes the voice of Julia Kristeva to give us a rounder, more whole understanding of Woolf's characters and their approach to the world. According to Kristeva, subjectivity is a constant process of "dialectic between two herogeneous modalities" and the "thetic phase" consists of a time where the subject must separate from objects. Such thinking is in keeping with the phenomenological tradition of Husserl and Heidegger, where the world exists and we experience it, never mind if our experience is perfectly "true" or not. Minow-Pinkney uses Kristeva's idea of the thetic subject and applies it to the problem of subjectivity in Woolf. The result is an argument for a dialectical relationship, in Woolf, between the object and the subject. Although the narrative consciousness never becomes Kristeva's "thetic subject," the "thetic I" is never completely destroyed. The result is a looser relationship between subject and object: "she modifies the status of subject and offers us a subject which has no simple unity, no clear boundary between itself and others" (61). The narrative consciousness, and the characters it provides for us, are not simply solipsistic versions of subjectivity straight-jacketed in themselves. They are, in keeping with Woolf's fiction, entities which push at traditional boundaries and seek to re-focus our thinking and perception of ourselves, others, and the world.

Woolf's Moments as Timeless

However the scholars choose to see time in Woolf's moments, many agree that the moments contain a sense of time that is timeless, or eternal, or, for this thesis, outside of traditional time, or clock time. Love notes, "the timeless or eternal present within the sound incorporates not only past but future" (154). Like Heidegger's Being, which conceals and reveals, which contains past, present, and future, Woolf's moments also flit in and out of consciousness, often entering on the shirttails of a sensory experience from

the material world, yet letting the character experience a timeless moment which contains all time within it. In essence, Guiguet agrees with this. He says, "Virginia Woolf's 'moment' has no before, no afterwards: it is, as we are, instantaneously and totally" (391). If an all-consuming moment contains nothing before or afterwards, then it can also be said that that moment contains all that is before or after. In either case, the moment exists outside of the ordinary conception of a moment somewhere between past and future. The past is brought into the present in the moment; the future rises up to meet it in its existence "as we are." Another writer who explicitly speaks of Woolf's moments of existence in terms of timelessness is Brady. She says, "Woolf reveals a timeless and timely vision in which traditional boundaries of the future, present and past are indistinguishable and all-inclusive" (202). Like *Being*, the moments of being contain all time within them. The moments of existence give the experience of time as a softer, more fleeting and meaningful notion which is timeless in its essence as it contains present, past and future.

The juxtaposition of the timelessness of the moments of existence with the notion of traditional time can also be found in the novel, *To the Lighthouse*. The question of subjectivity aside, Guiguet notes a distinction between the two conceptions of time in this novel as in many others. He speaks of "time and space" not being that which is defined in the language of "physics" (395). Although his discussion inevitably spreads to include subjectivism and sheer consciousness, it is nevertheless significant here that he also notes, "whether we are concerned with Clarissa, Mrs Ramsay, Lily Briscoe . . . or Eleanor Pargiter . . . it [the moment] means a sense of peace and plenitude." The traditional concept of time, the notion contained in old-fashioned physics, is not the time of the moments of existence. For this reason, Guiguet continues,

Everything [in the moment] is included and understood. Totality, union, communion, possession, this moment satisfies the demands of the whole being, who has mastered his life, who lives it and contemplates it in a

single act, which is existing, feeling and thinking at once. But this moment is an ephemeral victory, a precarious integrity. (395)

The moment of existence in the first part of *To the Lighthouse* seems to flit from character to character, and the narrative does not bother much with the more traditional concept of time that usually moves a novel. We are privy to James's feeling of meaning in a moment. His mother tells him, "you'll have to be up with the lark," and he feels "an extraordinary joy" because "he belonged, even at the age of six, to that great clan which cannot keep this feeling separate from that, but must let future prospects, with their joys and sorrows, cloud what is actually at hand, since to such people even in earliest childhood any turn in the wheel of sensation has the power to crystallise and transfix the moment."¹² The outer world exists, but it is coloured and re-shaped by the moment: "The wheelbarrow, the lawn-mower, the sound of poplar trees . . . all these were so coloured and distinguished in his mind" (9-10). The moment ends with his father uttering a prediction for poor weather. The boy's past desire, still residing in the present, claims the future with his hope-filled moment which transposes the world, colours it and changes it. The moment is shattered by his father's words, and the interruption of them and the loss of the moment brings the opposite of peace and a sense of being outside of time; the interruption re-situates the character back into conventional time with all its inherent constraints. The moment cannot continue forever in any case, for the subject cannot sustain the intensely personal experience of the moment indefinitely. The subject is drawn or pulled back to the conventional experience of the world, with its notion of chronological time, and so the moment ends. The narrative tells us that that world is one where "life is difficult; facts uncompromising; and the passage to that fabled land where our brightest hopes are extinguished" (11). Time, in this sense, is linear and uncompromising in its trek toward ultimate closure, as opposed to the moment of being which held potentiality, possibility and hope within it. The two types of time are clear:

¹² Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*, A Harvest/HBJ Book (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955) 9. All citations are from this edition.

chronological time stands as separate from the time of the moments, which essentially constitutes a timeless, all-encompassing present.

Mitchell A. Leaska discusses the two types of time found in Woolf's texts and the timeless quality of the moments in his book, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf: From Beginning to End*.¹³ He notes that for Woolf, the moment was, "that unique stretch of time when the past filters in and saturates the present; when the inner world is projected onto and colors the outer world . . . when all sense and emotion and past and present and order and disorder and joy and sorrow mingle together and give shape to that ineffable experience we call 'living'" (143). He further notes that such a conception of time is fully at odds with the conventional notion of time. He says, "Mrs Woolf brings clock time to a halt: the horizontal march of time ceases; and a vertical expansion of psychological time takes over in that limited time-area" (146). Although the apprehension of the moment is psychological (how could it be otherwise?), Leaska supports my contention that it is not solely meant to be sheer subjectivity: the outer world is "colored." Whether we know the world in and of itself is not the issue; rather that the experience is not solely focused inward is what is important, as well as the distinction between the timelessness of the moments and chronological time. For this reason, Leaska points out that Woolf's moments, "light up the past and anticipate the future" in order to "describe *how* her people have experienced what they have seen" (119). Woolf's moments, timeless in character and quality, are the ground for meaning in existence.

Woolf's Moments: Fleeting Yet All-Encompassing

The ephemeral nature of the moments means that they become the past just as they contain the past. While the moments exist, however, they contain all. One of Mrs Ramsay's moments is analagous to a religious experience: "sudden bursts of laughter and then one voice (Minta's) speaking alone, reminded her of men and boys crying out the

¹³ Mitchell A. Leaska, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf: From Beginning to End* (New York: The John Jay P, 1977).

Latin words of a service in some Roman Catholic cathedral" (166). Mrs Ramsay's dinner party is a kleidoscope of moments of being, yet the evening, in all its existential vivacity, must come to a close. It does so with the experience and loss of a moment. Mrs Ramsay knows the moment in all its liminal glory while she simultaneously knows it must end. She stands on the threshold, immersed in a moment of being with its suffusion of meaning and its all-encompassing present, knowing how fleeting such an experience is, knowing it, too, will become the past when she crosses the threshold and re-enters not just another room, but also the usual experience of the world in chronological time. We are told,

It was necessary now to carry everything a step further. With her foot on the threshold she waited a moment longer in a scene which was vanishing even as she looked, and then, as she moved and took Minta's arm and left the room, it changed, it shaped itself differently; it had become, she knew, giving one last look at it over her shoulder, already the past. (167-168)

While the moment exists it contains all--past, present, future. But the moment, itself, quickly passes into the past and the character is re-established in chronological time. The moment exists within the larger sphere of chronological time while it is not usurped by, nor does it usurp, the place of chronological time.

In the novel *The Years*, the character Eleanor allows us a glimpse into moments of existence and the timeless quality they carry. In the section "Present Day," Eleanor muses about what really constitutes a life, her life. The answer, finally, is that a sense of existence, of meaning in life, is found in present moments over-laden with the past which contain, in their all-consuming present, the future. The timeless or atemporal moments of being constitute the meaning of an individual's life. Eleanor thinks,

My life, she said to herself. . . . And I haven't got one, she thought. Oughtn't a life to be something you could handle and produce?--a life of seventy-odd years. But I've only the present momment, she thought. Here she was alive, now listening to the fox-trot. Then she looked round. There

was Morris; Rose; Edward. . . . I'm the only person here . . . who remembers how he sat on the edge of my bed that night, crying--the night Kitty's engagement was announced. Yes, things came back to her. A long strip of life lay behind her. Edward crying, Mrs Levy talking; snow falling; a sunflower with a crack in it. . . . Atoms danced apart and massed themselves. But how did they compose what people called a life? . . . Perhaps there's 'I' at the middle of it, she thought . . . and again she saw herself sitting at her table drawing on the blotting-paper.¹⁴

If life is a linear, chronological time span, a certain span of consecutive years that produce this or that, then Eleanor feels she does not have a life. On the other hand, Eleanor does have a life, and a rich one. She hears the fox-trot, she knows her surroundings, she is alive in the present, while she also knows and remembers the tears of her brother's heart-break, the look of falling snow, herself as a young woman. The present is her life because she is wealthy in her amassment of moments of being which are not constrained by conventional notions of time; "the reader is challenged to hold in memory fragments of talk, slivers of thought, half-forgotten images--and through them to connect effects in the present with causes in a very distant past" (212). Leaska goes on to note, "we are allowed to see just enough to re-create those points in Eleanor's past which have made her the person she is" (212-13). Moments, or points, existing in the present, laden with the past, containing the future, have created the meaning in Eleanor's life and filled it with a sense of meaning not found in a linear, conventional conception of time in a lifespan.

The idea that the timeless moments of existence are what really make a life, as opposed to chronological time, is even more apparent in the final scene of the novel. Morris recalls the past, "I haven't seen the sun rise since . . . since . . ." (412), the time is the present, "Now it was summer" (412), and Eleanor's last words are of the future, "And now?" (413). The peace and completeness of the moment is summarized in the last two lines of the novel, "The sun had risen, and the sky above the houses wore an air of

¹⁴ Virginia Gillese, *The Years*, edited with introd. by Hermione Lee, notes by Sue Asbee, The World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992) 348. All citations are from this edition.

extraordinary beauty, simplicity and peace" (413). The all-encompassing, timeless moment is transcendent in its ability to catch and contain, fleetingly, existence. Leaska refers to it as a, "brief but kindled vision of paradise" (223). The same idea may be found in, *To the Lighthouse*, when Lily turns to the past, "recalled by something . . . her picture," which contains within it the present, "with all its greens and blues . . . its attempt at something," and the future: "It would be hung in the attics" (309). Fear of the future cannot curtail a moment: "But what did that matter?" (310). Leaska notes that Lily's reveries bind the book together; "Lily Briscoe's reveries, in particular, derive their integrative power by the nature of their reflexive relations to the references of all the principal angles of vision introduced in the first section of the novel" (146). So, Lily's final vision has a summarizing and finally establishing quality similar to that found in the last scene in *The Years*. The final moment stands as a definite distinction between clock time and the endless quality of time found in the moments. We are told, "she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision"(310). The creative act, seen here as a quintessential moment of existence, contains past, present and future, yet it does not last forever: she "had" her vision, her moment. *Mrs Dalloway*, too, ends with a timeless moment surrounded by chronological time. As Miller notes, "the two times of the characters come together in the completion of the final sentences . . . Or should one say 'almost come together,' since the temporal gap still exists in the separation between 'is' and 'was'"(70). Peter, in chronological time, waits for Clarissa:

What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?
It is Clarissa, he said.
For there she was:

Clarissa embodies a timeless moment of existence, for the narrative last gave her to us in the middle of such, feeling the presence of the night, the life they are leading in contrast to, and communion with, the past and Septimus's death, and feeling the pull to go on:

"But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like him -- the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living. The clock was striking. . . . But she must go back. She must assemble" (165).

Clarissa carries the moment into the final scene of the novel. Edward Bishop, in his book *Virginia Woolf*, notes the repetitive effect of the "there she was" of the moment, for it was used earlier in the book,¹⁵ and, at that point, indicated Peter's inability to communicate. Later, the phrase reverberates within the final moment of being in the novel, and Bishop notes, "it expresses all that she is and has become in her moment of fulfilment" (64). Occurring as the moment does within the over-all frame-work of chronological time ("The clock was striking") the timeless point in her existence which contains past, present and future (again a threshold is used to symbolize the liminal moment between the two notions of time) becomes the meaningful, reverberating "is" of the final scene; but, ephemeral as ever, the moment in all its splendid timelessness, passes into the past of clock time, as Clarissa enters the room and the world of chronological time and "was."

The two realities of time, the timeless moments and the conventional notion of time, that Woolf juxtaposes in her novels are of primary importance for understanding the moments of existence which exemplify the notion of timelessness. To think that the time of the moments is simply the past remembered is to dilute the vigor and life of the moments and to disregard the depth of Woolf's writing and vision. The past does inform the moments of being, but they are quite firmly set in the present, regardless of Woolf's very necessary use of conventional language to communicate them and the use of the past to layer the moment with existential meaning. Heidegger frees us from having to think of time solely in terms of the physical world, linear events, or simplistic, either/or rationalism. Being, as a present/presence that is revealed through beings yet transcends

¹⁵ Edward Bishop, *Virginia Woolf*, Modern Novelists, general editor Norman Page (New York: St. Martin's P, 1991) 68-9.

them, is akin to Woolf's notion of moments of being as transcendent, timeless points in existence where meaning is revealed, though fleetingly, within the larger context of the conventional, physical world and chronological time. The moments of existence, containing the past, standing firmly in the present, and holding the future within them, are transcendent in that they supercede the physical boundaries within which they occur, bringing meaning to those who experience them and overcome limiting notions of conventional time. The moments contain meaning, in a much more profound, existential sense, than the mere counting of years; they are, in a very real sense, our lives, though the *is* of the meaningful moment is as ephemeral and brief as the flick of an eye to *was*.

Chapter 2

Introduction

That death, and life's unceasing journey toward it, was an important theme for Woolf is certain. But an awareness of death, and its import for existential meaning and understanding, is not the same thing as grief. Grief is an emotion that has an object for its focus; the loss of someone or something sparks the feeling of grief. Woolf's moments were not objects for, or results of, grief; rather, they were moments that came into existence because of a sharp awareness of mortality, of temporality, of being in chronological time. The anxiety and existential awareness of death, which is the result of dwelling in the larger world of chronological time, is what the moment of being is predicated upon. Heidegger discusses this existential anxiety and its link to our temporality when he discusses anxiety in connection with the nothing, the abyss. Woolf's moments of existence are also fraught with emotion linked to existential anxiety. Furthermore, Woolf's moments, like Heidegger's idea of the nothing, lead to a transcendent awareness of what is beyond this awareness of finitude. For Woolf, the highly personal moment leads to a greater awareness of what is beyond individuality: a larger reality symbolized in Woolf's fiction in the form of Nature. Nature, the quintessential example of the death and rebirth cycle, epitomizes the idea that it is in facing the abyss, instead of fleeing it, that you find meaning in it. The abyss, the nothing, is often conceptualized concretely as death: the becoming of nothing of the self. Transcendence in the timeless moment of being exists both in spite of and because of death and the anxiety and awareness that surrounds it.

Death's Relationship To Time

Just as Woolf's fiction revolves around ideas concerning time, so, too, does her prose bring into focus a concern with that inevitable accompaniment to time, death. Hussey notes, "The fact of death temporalizes human being; it is that which manifests the horizon of time by which all actual being is bounded" (*Singing* 116-17). The existence of human beings is predicated upon the inevitability of death; we live because we shall die. Death, like birth, is an event which every human will experience without exception. The link between life, and a keen awareness of it, and death was obviously apparent to Woolf. As Spilka notes of Woolf's works, "Death is an omnipresent subject in her fiction, but in spite of -- or rather because of -- its enormous importance, she confines it to parentheses" (2). What Spilka is referring to is Woolf's use of death as a subject without explicit reference to death. In other words, though there are not many examples of people actually dying in Woolf's fiction, death is an underlying theme or current in her work. And the idea of death, or mortality, or temporality, is linked irrevocably to the moments of being which, in all their timelessness, exist precisely because of this awareness of death. As Mepham notes in his comments about those final moments in her novels, "The endings of her novels are characterized by a culminating moment of vision but also by the confrontation with the ultimate antithesis of intentionality, the fact of mortality" (*Criticism* 91). He further notes that these moments contain a confrontation with death, but he adds that there is "a development." Death is not just confronted, it is seen as being a part of the moment; the moment, and the awareness of it, is directly linked to the understanding that existence is related without exception to death. The notion of conventional time, then, is juxtaposed with the time of the moments, yet, at the same

time, neither can exist without the other. This is why we have the repetition of the clock's striking in *Mrs Dalloway*, the moments riding on the sound of the march of chronological time to its inevitable conclusion: "Remember my party, remember my party, said Peter Walsh as he stepped down the street, speaking to himself rhythmically, in time with the flow of the sound, the direct downright sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour" (44). The moment springs out of the symbol of chronological time, the moment existing in timeless contrast to the linear presentation of chronological time, yet the moment is precisely in contrast to this other vision of time because of an awareness of its linear progression and its eventual conclusion: "the final stroke tolled for death that surprised in the midst of life" (46). The awareness of, and anxiety about, death clearly underscores the heightened awareness of the moments of existence.

James Naremore, in his book *The World Without a Self Virginia Woolf and the Novel*, agrees that Woolf's fiction thematically revolves around the subject of death. In referring to the novel *To the Lighthouse*, he notes, "Virginia Woolf's major theme here . . . is the effect of time and death on the human personality" (135). Moreover, he goes on to point out that "the embrace of the self with the world outside and beyond [i.e. the moment of being], which Virginia Woolf was so anxious for modern fiction to show, is inevitably associated in her work with the feeling of death" (142). There is an actual death in this novel, but no death scene. Nevertheless, the moments ride on an awareness of death. In the midst of Mrs Ramsay's moment at the dinner party, the words of a poem seem to encapsulate the moment for her, and they are words which speak of death; the moment blossoms out of a sense of one's own finitude. The pathos of the moment results from the awareness of our death. The quoted lines are: "And all the lives we ever lived

and all the lives to be are full of trees and changing leaves”(166). The feeling the words bring, the sense of mortality, temporality, is what is important to her: “She did not know what they meant, but, like music, the words seemed to be spoken by her own voice, outside her self, saying quite easily and naturally what had been in her mind the whole evening” (166). The timelessness of the moment is meaningful because of its contrast to the march of linear time toward death. Out of the awareness of this temporality springs the heightened sense of self and meaning; out of existence springs essence. *The Years* is unusual in that it contains a death-bed scene. But the theme of death, and its link to the moments of existence, is tangible throughout the whole of the novel. In the death scene, the father and the children are called in to their mother’s presence. The daughter Delia stands outside the room looking in: “There was complete silence in the bedroom. Is this death? Delia asked herself. For a moment there seemed to be something there. A wall of water seemed to gape apart; the two walls held themselves apart. She listened. There was complete silence. Then there was a stir” (45). The heightened sense of awareness, even to the point of the physical world changing, seeming to mutate, is ushered in on an extreme awareness of mortality precipitated by the death of a parent. Life is clearest, in sharpest focus, in contrast to death. The moments gain their lucidity from this contrast. As Love notes, “The life-death opposition is in evidence throughout the novels” (79). The moment comes out of an awareness of, an anxiety around, temporality. The moment stands in opposition to temporality, in its timelessness, just as it exists because of the awareness of temporality. Guiguet speaks of the feeling and awareness underlying the moments as anguish. He says,

Anguish is precisely that feeling of the threat that hangs around the moment, of the precarious nature of vision which extends to the whole

being, since the whole being is basically that vision. Anguish is the reverberation within ourselves of the imminence of that dispersion and loss which, wherever we look -- in front or behind, before or after -- oppresses the whole of what we are, the things and beings that make up our own being. This anguish is inherent in our being, since it is the very sense, the revelation of our existence, based on its reverse, its negation, nothingness.

(396-7)

We exist, and out of that existence and our awareness of its finitude comes anguish, essence, meaning. Woolf's moments come into being through the characters awareness of their finitude, and such an awareness is not necessarily negative. In fact, the moments are full of pathos, full of meaning, in spite of, and because of, their predication upon an awareness of temporality, mortality. As Guiguet notes, "all that this reveals is the reality, the power of that anguish which, for her, meant the sensation and also the essence of time and space -- an anguish which alternated, in her, with a joy no less intense" (397). The pain of the moments does not negate the joy, the profound sense of meaning found in them. In Woolf's moments, death and life are not completely opposed to one another; rather, they exist because of each other.

The topic of death in Woolf's fiction or is not due to some need to artistically communicate her personal grief. To shift away from the notion of existential anguish or anxiety to emotional interpretations of Woolf's novels, (as a catharsis after the deaths of her mother and sister, for example) is to misunderstand her work.. When discussing how to interpret nothingness in Woolf's novels, Guiguet asks if the subject should be answered in the light of her suicide. His answer? "Scarcely" (397). Unfortunately, not everyone avoids this easy temptation. Miller mentions Woolf's theme of death in relation to her eventual suicide several times. He says, "Septimus Smith's suicide anticipates Virginia Woolf's own death" (69), and further comments that the novel "seems almost

nihilistically to recommend the embrace of death, and . . . its author did in fact finally take this plunge" (71). By concentrating on Woolf's own death, Miller's interpretation becomes overly negative as a result of his heavy view of death in the novel: "the apparently living characters reveal themselves to be already dwellers among the dead" (70). Reading the idea of existential anxiety as Woolf's own death detracts from an understanding of the human component of this anxiety and reduces it to personal neurosis. Instead of an acute awareness of life in the midst of, because of, death, we get an interpretation of hysteria at best, psychosis at worst. Suicide becomes Woolf's suicide; death becomes Woolf's death. He further notes, after his comment about Woolf's death, that the novel also "like the rest of Woolf's writing . . . represents a contrary movement of the spirit" (71). He sees the life/death relationship, yet he fails to absorb its import; he relegates it to a subordinate position in his argument, ending again with the personal interpretation: "A novel, for Woolf, is the place of death made visible. Writing is the only action which exists simultaneously on both sides of the mirror, within death and within life at once" (72). This may be very true of Woolf, but is it necessarily true of her novels? Must our understanding of her fiction begin and end with her biography? The characters in the novels, through which she communicates her thoughts, her themes, are not writers writing; they are characters existing in a very particular way which Woolf has chosen to create. The characters are experiencing life in the midst of death, meaning in a moment predicated upon, existent because of, the frailty of human existence. As Howard Harper writes in his book *Between Language and Silence*, "The motif [of time] expresses the ambivalence of the narrative consciousness toward time. It both anticipates the hours . . . as a promise of meaning and dreads them as an announcement of mortality" (121). The

moment which contains meaning arrives out of an awareness of mortality. The point is not to express the anxiety of the author, but rather to communicate the human condition out of which such moments of existence stem.

Another author who insists on interpreting Woolf's fiction in response to her personal history is Spilka. This author insists on reading her prose in the light of the deaths in her family. He states outright, "The personal and literary ramifications of Virginia's absent grief . . . are what interests me" (6). Spilka is honest in admitting that his work is prompted by biography and its attendant interpretation of emotion and psyche. He goes to great lengths to link the novels to past events in Woolf's life; for example, in chapter 2 he quotes from the death-bed scene in *The Voyage Out* and then proceeds to discuss Woolf's memory of her mother's death (14). The book's chapter headings indicate the book's content. Chapter 4 is "Mrs. Dalloway's Absent Grief"; chapter 5 is "Lily Briscoe's Borrowed Grief." Such discussion is not without value. However, Spilka's approach is indicative of a method of discussion vastly different from the one here sought. Biography gives us information about the author with which to approach the literature. Interpreting fiction in the light of biography allows, often, for an emotional, psychological reading of an author's works. So, we have the idea of death rendered as grief. The novels, read as works about the author, contain instances of, objects for, grief. Without sliding into a debate about the merits or problems inherent in such an approach, it is only important here to note that for this thesis, such a method serves solely as a contrast to what is sought. Grief, as discussed above, is an emotion initiated by a loss of some sort. It is a response to something outside of ourselves.

Death: The Grounding of Existential Anxiety

Existential anxiety is a state of being in which the awareness of death, of temporality, is integrated into the experience of existence. In moments of being, the character encounters such an awareness. In this respect, grief is not at all the issue. Death, in the light of this discussion, is not objectified but is actually internalized as being necessary for life. So Harper can say of Mrs Dalloway, "the narrative consciousness . . . needs to see Clarissa's struggle against a similar despair [to Septimus's] as the essential meaning of her life" (132). The struggle is to not give in to death, but to find meaning in the midst of it, meaning because of it. Referring to *To the Lighthouse*, Harper writes of Lily and her painting, "By recognizing and expressing the essence both of the Ramsays' world and of the yearning to know that world, the artist discovers the center of all illumination -- and of the surrounding darkness as well" (160). The culminating "vision" at the end of the novel reflects one of the novel's primary themes, the pull between, and relationship of, light and dark, life and death. The sense that life and its meaning are predicated on death is also found in *The Years*. As Harper notes, "the narrative is preoccupied with the meaninglessness of time -- the empty succession of days, months, seasons, years. The story begins as a search for meaning" (260). At this point in the narrative, the family is waiting for the mother to die, but it seems as though she never will, and the waiting seems interminable and pointless: "But it's all for nothing, Delia said silently, looking at her father. She felt that they must both check their rising excitement. 'Nothing's going to happen -- nothing whatever,'" (44). It is only after the mother's death, and in light of it, that the family seems to come awake: to grief, yes, and numbness, but also to the possibility of life. So, Harper notes that the first chapter of the

novel ends with a question about finding the possibility of light, or life, when it is all so wrapped up in death: "Whether the narrative consciousness can ever believe in the possibility of meaning, whether it can feel again . . . whether it can discover an authentic embodiment for its own inner longings -- all of these questions remain open at the end of the first chapter" (260). And all of these questions resound precisely because of the startling intrusion of death and its attendant anxiety into the lives of the still-living characters.

Heidegger: Anxiety and the Nothing

Heidegger also seeks to understand an awareness of ourselves in relation to anxiety, but for Heidegger this inquiry revolves not just around death but around "the nothing." In his article, "What Is Metaphysics?," Heidegger explores the idea of nothing and how it relates to *Dasein*. For Heidegger, the nothing is. He says, "What about this nothing? The nothing is rejected precisely by science, given up as a nullity. But when we give up the nothing in such a way don't we just concede it?" (97-8). When we speak of nothing we of necessity speak of something; nothing is, but it is not in such a way that conventional scientific thought may grasp it. Heidegger says, "Against it [the nothing] science must now reassert its seriousness and soberness of mind, insisting that it is concerned solely with beings. . . . If science is right, then only one thing is sure: science wishes to know nothing of the nothing. . . . We know it, the nothing, in that we wish to know nothing about it" (98). The nothing is not a being, and so science and scientific thought reject it. In its rejection is implicit its existence; in other words, science does not want to know anything about that. So, Heidegger contends, the nothing is, but in a

different way: "The nothing is conceded. With a studied indifference science abandons it as what 'there is not'" (98).

For Heidegger, it makes no sense to ask "what is the nothing." The nothing cannot be put forth as an "is," for that implies a being, and the nothing is the opposite to a being. Instead, Heidegger puts forward the nothing as, "nonbeing pure and simple" (99). The nothing, here, is thought to be "more original" than "not" or "negation," and in this sense the nothing "must be given beforehand. We must be able to encounter it" (100). We must know that the nothing is there, and, in that way, we may grasp it as itself, not as a "not" of something else, "In order to find something must we not already know in general that it is there? Indeed!" (100). And how can we know the nothing in a way that is not dependent on this or that being not being? Heidegger answers, "The nothing is the complete negation of the totality of beings" (100). He further states, "The totality of beings must be given in advance so as to be able to fall prey straightaway to negation -- in which the nothing itself would then be manifest" (100). Although a complete and utter grasp of the totality of beings is impossible, and therefore also its negation; nevertheless, we are situated amongst the whole of beings and, at times, we have glimpses into this larger sphere. Heidegger says, "No matter how fragmented our everyday existence may appear to be, however, it always deals with beings in a unity of the 'whole,' if only in a shadowy way" (101). When do these moments occur for Heidegger? He puts forward as examples, moments of boredom, and moments of joy in the existence of a loved one. These are the times when we find ourselves in kinship with others. In these moments, the totality of beings is revealed and this is the "basic occurrence of our Da-sein" (102). The nothing

can only be found, "in a correspondingly original mood [to the above mentioned moments] which in the most proper sense of unveiling reveals the nothing" (102).

An awareness of the nothing does occur, although it is a rare and momentary experience, in moments of anxiety. Heidegger says that "an attunement, in which man is brought before the nothing itself, occur[s] . . . in the fundamental mood of anxiety" (102). Just as Woolf distinguished between an awareness of temporality or existential awareness and grief or sorrow, so, too, does Heidegger distinguish between anxiety and fear: "Anxiety is basically different from fear" (102). Fear is to be afraid of or for something or someone, and there is a sense of being unsure and out of control, whereas "Anxiety does not let such confusion arise. Much to the contrary, a peculiar calm pervades it" (102). Anxiety exists precisely because it is impossible to determine its source: "The receding of beings as a whole that closes in on us in anxiety oppresses us" (103). There is a slipping away of the whole, of the totality of beings, that is the elusive source of anxiety. And it is here that we encounter the nothing: "Anxiety reveals the nothing" (103). We hover or hang in anxiety: "We 'hover' in anxiety. More precisely, anxiety leaves us hanging because it induces the slipping away of beings as a whole" (103). This slipping away, however, is not just objectified, is not just an experience of that which is outside of ourselves. There is a sense of loss as individuals: "This implies that we ourselves . . . in the midst of beings slip away from ourselves. . . . In the altogether unsettling experience of this hovering where there is nothing to hold onto, pure Da-sein is all that is still there" (103). Paradoxically, where we find our true selves, in Being, is where we lose our individual sense of ourselves for an experience of pure Being. Furthermore, this experience is silent: "Anxiety robs us of speech" (103). This silent,

anxious moment where individuality is lost is the "occurrence in human existence in which the nothing is revealed" (104).

Anxiety is not a state of existence that comes and goes randomly. The nothing reveals itself in anxiety, but as the place where pure Dasein is, the nothing must be always able to be known "as a slipping away of the whole" (104). Heidegger says that "Dasein means: being held out into the nothing," and, without that awareness of the slipping away of self, there is "no selfhood and no freedom" (105-6). It is only in knowing our existence in all its pain, our "thrownness," that we discover that anxiety is always there, though we are not always conscious of it (108). Heidegger observes that "the original anxiety in existence is usually repressed. Anxiety is there. It is only sleeping" (108). We cannot exist outside of this anxiety because we are finite. We truly find ourselves, and transcend our existence, in facing the nothing, in hanging out over the abyss, in experiencing bravely our anxiety. Heidegger says, "Being itself is essentially finite and reveals itself only in the transcendence of Dasein which is held out into the nothing" (110). Furthermore, "Only in the nothing of Dasein do beings as a whole, in accord with their most proper possibility -- that is, in a finite way -- come to themselves" (110). We exist in time, as finite beings. This finitude, as a definition of our existence, is the source of anxiety. Anxiety clears our vision, it shows us the nothing, and there we find ourselves and lose ourselves: we are brought before ourselves clearly in the silent moment of anxiety, and the slipping away is the slipping away of ourselves. But we also transcend in this moment, for we lose our individuality for a glimpse of what is larger, pure Being.

Woolf's Moments and Anguish or Anxiety

Woolf's moments of being also contain emotions akin to anxiety. Some critics have mentioned her moments in conjunction with the notion of anguish. Guiguet talks about anguish in his analysis of time in Woolf's writing. He feels that the notion of time expressed in her narratives contains "a sense of distance, of separation," and finally "death -- the ultimate loss and the ultimate separation" (396). The moments gain their impetus from the sense of temporality inherent in such an understanding of the underpinning of their existence. Moreover, Guiguet argues that central to Woolf's writing, and directly linked to the notion of death, of finitude, "is the analysis of anguish" (396). Guiguet says,

Anguish is precisely that feeling of the threat that hangs around the moment, of the precarious nature of vision which extends to the whole being, since the whole being is basically that vision. Anguish is the reverberation within ourselves of the imminence of that dispersion and loss which, wherever we look -- in front or behind, before or after -- oppresses the whole of what we are, the things and beings that make up our own being. This anguish is inherent in our being, since it is the very sense, the revelation of our existence, based on its reverse, its negation, nothingness.

(396-7)

It is the anguish, the anxiety, of non-being, of our loss of existence, upon which is predicated the extraordinary self-awareness of the moments of existence.

Within the moment, our existence fleetingly comes into such close focus (past, present and future intertwining) that the individual stands outside of the notion of conventional time and is precisely because eventually one is not. Nothingness brings into focus and renders meaningful our existence, which is crystallized for the characters in

moments of being. This is made explicit in the twinning of Clarissa and Septimus and the moment she experiences realizing his death.¹⁶ Woolf writes,

The clock began striking. The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him, with all this going on. . . . Fear no more the heat of the sun. She must go back to them. But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like him -- the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. But she must go back. She must assemble. (165)

The moment enters with the announcement of chronological time and its inherent message of temporality, mortality. The death of Septimus makes clear what is implicit in the sound of the clock: death is the cradle holding life. The moment becomes all-encompassing, out of time, in the midst of this awareness of temporality, for it is fundamentally freeing to face and recognize existence in all its precariousness: "Fear no more the heat of the sun." As Harper notes, "the narrative turns away from its growing preoccupation with Septimus . . . toward life and toward the supportive kinds of awareness that make survival possible" (132-3). Paradoxically, facing temporality, in anguish and anxiety, emotionally frees one of its constraints and enables one to grasp more fully grasp meaning in existence.

This sense of anguish or anxiety in the face of existential awareness is commonly referred to, as it is by Lucio P. Ruotolo, as "existential anxiety."¹⁷ He uses the beginning of the novel as his example of this anguish in the midst of an awareness of temporality: "one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night . . . a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense . . . before Big Ben strikes" (6). Ruotolo

¹⁶ For a discussion on doubling, see Elaine Showalter, "Mrs. Dalloway," from *Virginia Woolf: Introduction to the Major Works*, ed. by Julia Briggs (London: Virago P, 1994) 138.

uses this passage to exemplify the silent moment, linked to chronological time and thus death, which contains the existential experience. He says that for Clarissa, this moment, "at once suspends and renews her sense of place and person" and, in so doing, "Woolf quickly honors the effects of Clarissa's angst. When, in the next instant, clock time begins again its heavy beat, so irrevocable and final" (100). To refer back to the image of the moment as a bubble floating in the larger context of chronological time, the feeling of temporality, the personal sense of finitude, may be envisioned as the transparent exterior of the bubble containing the timeless experience of the moments of being. The heightened realization of one's existence, predicated on a sense of finitude, is what enwraps the moment. Harper notes the "existence precedes essence" idea in his discussion of *The Years*. At the end of the section 1911, Eleanor goes up to her room. We are told, "She felt as if things were moving past her as she lay stretched on the bed under the single sheet. But it's not the landscape any longer, she thought; it's people's lives, their changing lives" (201). She is inundated with sensations in the room: the sound of the man moving around in the next room; moths fluttering around the candle; the sound of a cow lowing, birds, an owl; the sight of a water stain above her; movements in the hallway outside her room. All of this conspires to bring about a moment of existence that enters on musings about the movement of life, change and travel, symbols that resonate with a feeling of time passing, and ends in a symbol of death. As the scene comes to a close we read,

Again the sense came to her of a ship padding softly through the waves; of a train swinging from side to side down a railway-line. Things can't go on for ever, she thought. Things pass, things change, she thought, looking up at the ceiling. And where are we going? Where? Where? . . . she mused;

¹⁷ Lucio P. Ruotolo, *The Interrupted Moment: A View of Virginia Woolf's Novels*, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986) 100.

made an effort; turned round, and blew out the candle. Darkness reigned.
(203)

Harper notes that this scene reverberates with a sense of existential awareness. He says, "For the moment Eleanor's relentless abstract questioning ceases, and she simply is: existence displaces the search for essence" (262).

The feeling of existential anxiety permeates *To the Lighthouse*. Guiguet writes that the book juxtaposes chronological time with "the personal reign of Duration" and that "Mrs Ramsay -- who has died, in parentheses, under the reign of Time -- haunts these pages with a presence that echoes the material permanence of the lighthouse" (252-3). The moments in the first part of the book revolve around Mrs Ramsay; for example, the moments of being which occur around the table at the dinner she hosts. After she dies, moments of existence take place within her shadow, her death serving as the ever-present reminder of existential anxiety, her continuing presence in their lives serving as testimony to the affirming value of the moments of being. This relationship, between existential anguish and anxiety and the encounter with existence, brought to light under the umbrella of Mrs Ramsay's existence and death, is demonstrated in this longer passage detailing Lily's musings. We are told,

the old question which traversed the sky of the soul perpetually, the vast, the general question which was apt to particularise itself at such moments as these, when she released faculties that had been on the strain, stood over her, paused over her, darkened over her. What is the meaning of life? That was all -- a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one. This, that, and the other; herself and Charles Tansley and the breaking wave; Mrs. Ramsay bringing them together; Mrs. Ramsay saying, "Life stand still here"; Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent) -- this was of the nature of a revelation. In the midst of chaos there was shape; this

eternal passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was struck into stability. Life stand still here, Mrs. Ramsay said. "Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!" she repeated. She owed it all to her. (240-241)

In life, Mrs. Ramsay had experienced existential awareness in moments, and she had brought others to an awareness also. We are told that Lily thinks, "And directly she [Mrs. Ramsay] went a sort of disintegration set in" (168). Relationships, moments, become clear in Mrs. Ramsay's presence, and, from this presence, brought even more startlingly into focus because of actual death, Lily comes to the understanding that the ongoing revelation is existence, pockets of time which stand still and which occur out of the feeling of hanging out over the abyss, out of the awareness of temporality.

Nothingness and a Turning to the Self

Heidegger's awareness of nothingness is first encountered as a slipping away of beings, and, initially, a turning toward the self: "in this very receding things turn toward us" (103). Implicit in this statement is a sense of self, for only in respect to the self may we become aware of other beings in relation to us, or turning toward us. The initial encounter with the nothing situates us. This initial situating, or revealing, of the self, will be more fully explored in chapter three. What is important here is to recognize that existential awareness or anxiety holds within it at its onset a personal and inward aspect that focuses on the self. This is equally true of Woolf's moments; initially, they are intensely personal and private. Leaska writes of Mrs. Ramsay that she "is not without her moments of awareness, moments when she is alone and can be herself, when she need not think of others" (124). The novel expresses it this way: "To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something

invisible to others. . . . it was thus that she felt herself" (95). Mrs. Ramsay experiences a turning inward as the initiation into the moment of being. Ruotolo also notes, in relation to Mrs Dalloway, the initial sense of privacy and sense of self that the moments hold. He discusses the scene of Clarissa sewing, just prior to her interruption by Peter:

Quiet descended on her, calm, content. . . . So on a summer's day waves collect, overbalance, and fall; collect and fall; and the whole world seems to be saying 'that is all' more and more ponderously, until even the heart in the body which lies in the sun on the beach says too, that is all. Fear no more, says the heart. Fear no more, says the heart, committing its burden to some sea, which sighs collectively for all sorrows. . . . And the body alone listens to the passing bee; the wave breaking, the dog barking, far away barking and barking. (36-37)

Ruotolo speaks, in relation to this scene, of "Woolf's appreciation of artistic accomplishment and the accompanying temptation to enclose herself within the serenity of a thoroughly satisfying moment" (95). Putting Woolf herself aside, since the moment given is from a piece of fiction, the moment mentioned here certainly expresses Clarissa's experience of the sense of the personal, the self as an individual, in the early experience of the moment. In this example, the individual is aware of the self, the heart beating, while also sensing other beings existing in proximity; there is the sense of a being amongst beings. We catch a similar meaning in a scene from *The Years*. As was previously noted, Eleanor, in the section "Present Day," captures the essence of the existential character. Her inward turn, in the introductory sensation of a moment of existence, is evinced in this example: "My life, she said to herself. . . . Perhaps there's 'I' at the middle of it, she thought; a knot; a centre; and again she saw herself sitting at her table drawing on the blotting-paper" (348). The moment comes to the character with an initial sense of being amongst beings.

Moving Beyond the Self

The moments of being, however, ultimately open to a larger, less personal sense of awareness. As with Heidegger's "slipping away of beings" to reveal Being, so, too, does Woolf have a slipping away from the self in the moment to an awareness of what is beyond, what is larger, the world outside the self. In his book *Virginia Woolf*, Bishop says, "if the characters indulge a little in this temptation out of [chronological] existence, it is always in order to more fully embrace life" (63). The moment that is initially all-consuming on a purely personal and private plane blossoms into an awareness of what is beyond the self. As Minow-Pinkney notes, "Woolf's texts disperse the transcendental unified subject" (60). There is a sense of the self being left behind, of pure individuality stripping itself away and the larger state of existence coming to the fore. Naremore comments on this when he states, about Mrs. Dalloway, that she, "haunted by a fear of death, feels somehow that there remains a vague transcendental unity" (103). Again, we have the notion of the transcendent in relation to the moments, this time in distinct relation to an awareness or sense of death. Death, however, is here limited to the fate of an individual; with the paring down of the moment in death or nothingness comes the sense of something greater, of something beyond mere beings.

To what does the moment open itself? For Heidegger that which underlines all is Being; for Woolf what epitomizes the transcendental is Nature. Nature contains the larger world of the individual while still allowing the individual to experience existence unmitigated. In *Mrs Dalloway* is the scene, discussed earlier, of Peter Walsh and his thoughts as he dozes on the bench in the park. One of the images he has is of the "figure at the end of the ride," so we know that death is very much a part of this moment.

Furthermore, the "moments of extraordinary exultation" he experiences are not just a purely subjective "state of mind" as he at first contends, for he adds, "But if he can conceive of her, then in some sort she exists," and the moment opens further to, "sky and branches." Ultimately the "vision" consists of a sense of communion with nature,

as if . . . all this fever of living were simplicity itself; and myriads of things merged in one thing; and this figure, made of sky and branches as it is, had risen from the troubled sea . . . as a shape might be sucked up out of the waves to shower down from her magnificent hands, compassion, comprehension. (52)

As Naremore notes, "All of Virginia Woolf's fiction attempts to indicate a universal, timeless sense of life which may be called truth or reality. Very often this truth is expressed through descriptions of nature -- vast perspectives where we sense a beautiful but impersonal force that is destructive to individuals but seems to live in all things" (105). The individual, awareness stemming from the inescapable reality of death, enters the moment with a heightened sense of oneself as a being. Ultimately, in facing and experiencing the existential anxiety of the moment, the moment opens to a greater sense of what is: Nature.

Mrs. Ramsay, in *To the Lighthouse*, also contains examples of the moments of being in relation to a freeing loss of individuality into Nature. Mrs. Ramsay feels her death, and thus her existence, in all its existential intensity. The result of her moment of existence is a widening sense of herself into a beam of light: the lighthouse beam. The novel tells us, "When life sank down for a moment, the range of experience seemed limitless. . . . one after another, she, Lily, Augustus Carmichael, must feel, our apparitions, the things you know us by, are simply childish. Beneath it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is unfathomably deep; but now and again we rise to the surface." The

moment brings her self into stark outline; she sees herself stripped bare of image or false conceits and revealed in all her existential reality. The darkness that underlines existence is what brings into such sharp focus her sense of herself. Yet, the darkness, or death, is not the end of her, only the end of a strictly rigid sense of individuality. In fact, Mrs. Ramsay finds herself freed: "There was freedom, there was peace, there was, most welcome of all, a summoning together, a resting on a platform of stability. . . . and pausing there she looked out to meet that stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of the three, which was her stroke. . . . she became the thing she looked at" (96-97). Mrs. Ramsay finds freedom by embracing the existential reality underlining, by necessity, her very existence, and in doing so she transcends the strict sense of existence to discover herself alive in Nature.

Ruotolo discusses Mrs. Ramsay's sense of existence, but, oddly enough, he argues that she narrows her sense of reality as a result of her moments, rather than expanding it. He says, "Mrs. Ramsay experiences in these crystalline moments a sense of privacy all but immune from interruption. Drawn to inanimate, single objects, she divulges through her fantasies a narrowing rather than an expanding sense of reality" (126). Ruotolo argues for a narrowing sense of reality because he claims that the loss of individuality, or, as Woolf puts it, "personality" (126), is a shrinking not an expanding act. Arguing for such an understanding of a loss of personality, however, does not allow for Woolf's idea of Nature as a transcendent underlying reality. With specific reference to Clarissa, Naremore notes that she, though "haunted by a fear of death, feels somehow that there remains a vague transcendental unity" (103). Moreover, Naremore states, when speaking in general terms about Woolf's fiction, that it, "attempts to indicate a universal,

timeless sense of life which may be called truth or reality" (105). When one understands Woolf's conception of Nature, "this peace, this rest, this eternity" (96) makes perfect narrative sense. Without such an understanding, however, the meaning of the loss of personality leads nowhere and the essence of the passage is lost. Ruotolo does acknowledge, however, that Mrs. Ramsay's transference of identity to the lighthouse beam is a "victory over time and space" (126). Essentially, Woolf's character here experiences, in the timeless moment of being, the anxiety of existence that makes possible the peace of transcendence. For Woolf, that transcendence came about through Nature, but such an experience was predicated upon a personal awareness of death and an ensuing loss of rigid individuality. As Naremore notes, "an intense desire for unity . . . or, in a more cosmic sense, the compulsive need to relate one's life spiritually to the vast power of nature -- all these things can result in the destruction of individuality" (142).

The Years also contains examples of moments of being which enter upon a heightened awareness of death and, within the moment of existence, open up to a transcendent experience of Nature. As the 1914 section draws to a close, we have Kitty arriving at her country house. She goes out into the country, and there she has a moment of existence. Kitty senses her own death in the changing seasons and changes that are inevitable in life: "Spring was sad always, she thought; it brought back memories. All passes, all changes, she thought. . . . Nothing of this belonged to her; her son would inherit." Existence comes into sharp focus as the moment unfolds, and she begins to lose the sense of herself as an individual to the all-encompassing moment: "Suddenly she saw the sky between two striped tree-trunks extraordinarily blue. . . . Her body seemed to shrink; her eyes to widen." Ultimately, the moment absorbs her into itself, pulling her

into a loss of self to a consuming identification with Nature which exists within a moment which is outside of normal conceptions of time: "A deep murmur sang in her ears -- the land itself, singing to itself, a chorus, alone. She lay there listening. She was happy, completely. Time had ceased" (264-265). Kitty is completely a part of the moment, yet the earth is "alone" for she has been absorbed into it through the experience of the moment. Harper notes that in this moment Kitty "enters into a mysterious appreciation of nature which enables her to stop time, suddenly to transcend the relentless sweep of the seasons and the years." Moreover, he notes that, "In her moment of epiphany she realizes that she is part of the land itself, that its rhythms are hers, in a universal and timeless whole" (263).

The timeless whole of the moment is one which is predicated upon an acute awareness of chronological time. The human awareness of the relentless march of existence in time toward precisely one end, death, is what drives the moment of being. In the midst of this impersonal march springs a highly personal moment, and within it is contained an experience of time that is atemporal or outside of the conventional notion of time: the moment itself is a self-contained experience of time. The moment, with its awareness of death, is not to be confused with grief or mourning, for the moment contains a heightened sense of one's own inevitable death, not a feeling of loss for someone or something outside of oneself. Heidegger explores a similar experience of existential anxiety when he discusses the abyss, a hanging out over anxiety that brings into sharp relief a transcendent awareness of Being. Woolf's moments also ultimately lead to a transcendent pinnacle, for in facing the anxiety of existence, the moment of being comes about and the eventual result is a loss of an overly rigid individuality and a

realization of, and identification with, Nature. Woolf's writing contains a sense of something beyond merely the self, but to which the self properly belongs, the cyclical, circular rhythm of Nature.

Chapter 3

Introduction

Woolf's moments of being have at their very core the revelation of the self. The centre of the moment is the revealing of the self to the self, the character to the character. The insight and revelation of the self is at the very heart of the moment of existence. These moments are initially shocking to the individual or character experiencing them. The moments are even, at the onset, distasteful. The shocking nature of the moments may be accounted for by their sheer authenticity, their unmitigated honesty. Once the initial shock of the moment is overcome, however, the characters find a sense of meaning and a glimpse of the self in the moments. The meaning and insight found in the moments takes place in silence. From the silent centre of the moment two things can occur: either the moment can open into a transcendent experience of Nature where rigid individuality gives over to a sense of union with the larger whole (as was discussed in chapter 2), or the character, in an attempt to grasp the moment and its attendant revelation of the self, seeks to make something permanent of the moment and, in so doing, fractures the moment. The fracture occurs when the character tries to articulate, and thus own, the revelation of the self. Language interrupts the silent moment, and the fracture that occurs is two-fold. Language fractures the revelatory moment itself away from the character experiencing it (for the moment occurs in silence), and language, necessitating in and of itself an objectification of the individual for the individual to speak of the self, fractures the self from the self. The result is that the character experiences a double sense of isolation: isolation from the meaningful moment where a meaningful sense of self was revealed, and isolation from the self proper. Paradoxically, in grasping the revelation of

the self found in the moment, the moment and the revelation are both lost and found. They are lost in that they are broken off or broken away from the character, yet they are found in the sense that the character is left with something from the moment which can be articulated. Even confusion or isolation is something, and it is this ambiguous yet authentic something which the character takes away from the moment which is fractured by language. Heidegger, in his essay "Letter on Humanism," speaks of language in a similarly multi-functional way. Heidegger claims that in silence Dasein is claimed or finds his way into Being, yet it is in language that we find the lighting and concealing of Being. Language houses Being, yet we are claimed by Being in silence. For both Woolf and Heidegger, language is a bringing near and a removing far. The result, regarding Woolf's moments, is that language fractures the moments, objectifying both the moment and the self, so the character is left with a sense of loss and isolation in relation to both. At the same time, the character takes from the experience an authentic, though limited and often unsatisfactory, understanding of the self, and, in that sense, language, in Woolf's novels, plays a concealing and revealing role.

Revelations of the Self in the Moments

What is essentially revealed in all of Woolf's moments is the self to the self, the character to the character. In *The Elusive Self*, Louise A. Poresky notes that the "link between the psyche and the spirit comprises the crux of Woolf's theme, throughout her novels, of an individual's need to discover Selfhood."¹⁸ Unfortunately, Poresky throws her helpful insights into a religious interpretation of Woolf's works, stating that in *To the Lighthouse* Woolf posits the lighthouse as God and the Ramsays as those who lack

¹⁸ Louise A. Poresky, *The Elusive Self: Psyche and Spirit in Virginia Woolf's Novels* (East Brunswick, NJ: Associated UP, 1981) 233.

spiritual essence (129). Poresky is quite alone in her Christian interpretation of Woolf's writing, as is apparent when you contrast her interpretation of the symbolism of the lighthouse with the position held by the critics discussed earlier in this thesis. The crux of her interpretation seems to hang on the fact that Woolf refers to writing what is in her "soul," a term Poresky insists on reading as directly and strictly Christian (127). In any case, Poresky's argument, despite its overall shortcomings, does hold some useful insights. In discussing *The Years*, she notes that it is in quiet solitude that Kitty is able to experience a moment where she discovers a sense of herself. Woolf's novel tells us that Kitty's

muscles felt strong and flexible as she pressed her thick-soled shoes to the ground. . . . Suddenly she saw the sky between two striped tree-trunks extraordinarily blue. She came out on the top. . . . Her body seemed to shrink; her eyes to widen. She threw herself on the ground. (265)

In this moment, Kitty seems to come into a sense of herself, her place in the world. As Poresky notes,

The sensation Kitty has that her "body seemed to shrink; her eyes to widen" . . . suggest a spiritual awakening. It implies that Kitty no longer conceives of herself as a body, an object functioning in the world, and an object scrutinized by others. Rather, she now can become the perceiver: she can look out from herself, instead of being on public display. (232)

Kitty, in this moment, comes into a spiritual or psychic revelation of herself. She no longer feels objectified. Rather she feels herself grounded in herself the subject.

Eleanor also experiences a sense of herself in a moment of being. At the end of the novel, she sees in a crystalline moment both her own isolation reflected back at her in opposition to the couple she sees together, and a call to act in her own life no matter her age, her aloneness, the existential awareness of her own self struggling to communicate.

Woolf writes:

Eleanor was standing with her back to them. She was watching a taxi that was gliding slowly round the square. It stopped in front of a house two doors down. . . .

A young man had got out; he paid the driver. Then a girl in a tweed travelling suit followed him. He fitted his latch-key to the door. 'There,' Eleanor murmured, as he opened the door and they stood for a moment on the threshold. 'There!' she repeated, as the door shut with a little thud behind them.

Then she turned round into the room. 'And now?' she said, looking at Morris, who was drinking the last drops of a glass of wine. 'And now?' she asked, holding out her hands to him.

The sun had risen, and the sky above the houses wore an air of extraordinary beauty, simplicity and peace. (413)

Eleanor sees the couple and understands the need for love and companionship their unity suggests. Poignantly brought before her is her own aloneness in her life, in her very mortal existence, and her, and the world's, need for love. As Poresky notes, "As she watched the couple outside, Eleanor could only repeat 'there,' because her vision lay outside her life" (241). It is outside of her, yet it reveals to her her own aloneness, loneliness, and the sense that she is watching as others are more keenly engaged in life. Interestingly, the words she murmurs to herself do not fracture the moment; it is only when the language is directed outside of the moment, to Eleanor's brother Morris, that the fracture occurs. Language cuts into the moment, and Eleanor loses the acute sense of herself that the moment brought, yet the break is not entirely negative. Her words to Morris are an appeal for something more, an appeal that they grasp the present and not be forced to the sidelines because of age or circumstance. The closing description of the novel is lovely and hopeful. Poresky notes that James Hafley has discussed this moment saying, "The private Eleanor can say that she has had her vision; the public Eleanor, recognizing that vision as a means, . . . must behave in the light of her response." Furthermore, Poresky notes, "she must act now, within the present moment that Zen

Buddhists, for instance, consider the focal point of reality, in which the divine spirit moves" (241).

Lily is another character who experiences a vision containing an insight into herself and her life. Lily's moments revolve for the most part around her art and Mrs. Ramsay. Two moments reveal to Lily her own feelings of inadequacy and her sense that her life is not valuable, yet the moment also brings her a sense that she, her life, her existence, is enough. Both of these moments are linked to Mrs. Ramsay and her presence even after death. Woolf writes,

One wanted, she thought, dipping her brush deliberately, to be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that's a chair, that's a table, and yet at the same time, It's a miracle, it's an ecstasy. . . . Ah, but what had happened? . . . Her heart leapt at her and seized her and tortured her.

"Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!" she cried, feeling the old horror come back -- to want and want and not to have. Could she inflict that still? And then, quietly, as if she refrained, that too became part of ordinary experience, was on a level with the chair, with the table. (299-300)

Here, Lily is confronted with her feelings of her life as not enough, with the sense that existence is not an experience of fulfillment but of yearning, of wanting. She recognizes her feelings of inadequacy in relation to life, and it is symbolized in her difficulty with her painting. There is a feeling of anguish in Lily's realization of herself in her existence, yet the anguish and self-realization become a part of the experience and are, then, not nearly so devastating. A second moment occurs at the end of the novel and also contains an insight into her own feelings of insignificance with a freeing sense of how trivial that is in relation to her actual experience of life.

At the end of the novel, Lily's moment is triumphant. She sees herself revealed as herself in existence, but existence becomes enough. Her self in her existence is realized as enough. Woolf tells us,

Quickly, as if she were recalled by something over there, she turned to her canvas. There it was -- her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, . . . its attempt at something. It would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? she asked herself, taking up her brush again. . . . With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, . . . I have had my vision. (309-310)

In this moment, Lily's understanding of herself becomes clear. She feels her own existence and its limitations; she knows her achievements are only qualified. Yet, because the moment discloses to her a sense of her own self, and, in this case, her own worth, she is able to realize that her own vision, and by extension herself in existence realizing that vision, is enough.

In *Mrs Dalloway* we also have characters meeting themselves in moments. For example, a moment of being reveals to Clarissa herself, her existence, her faults and failings, her mortality. Woolf writes:

Laying her brooch on the table, she had a sudden spasm, as if, while she mused, the icy claws had had the chance to fix in her. She was not old yet. She had just broken into her fifty-second year. Months and months of it were still untouched. . . . Clarissa . . . plunged into the very heart of the moment, transfixed it, there -- the moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all the other mornings, seeing the glass, the dressing-table, and all the bottles afresh, collecting the whole of her at one point (as she looked into the glass), seeing the delicate pink face of the woman who was that very night to give a party; of Clarissa Dalloway; of herself.

How many million times she had seen her face, and always with the same imperceptible contraction! . . . That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together . . . never showing a sign of all the other sides of her -- faults, jealousies, vanities, suspicions. (34-35)

In this moment, what is revealed to Clarissa is her own inevitable death, and the journey of existence toward this end, as well as her self, her being, in the midst of this existence and with all its faults and limitations. The nub, the heart, of each moment is just such a revelation: A sense of, or glimpse into, the self, is what each moment centres on.

The Moments Begin With Difficulty

Although the heart of each moment is filled with revelation and meaning for the character, the onset of the moments is often distastefully shocking. In discussing *Mrs Dalloway*, Ruotolo writes of Clarissa: "the past intrudes in the form of less hierarchical and more personal relationships to interrupt her experience of the present or at the very least to complicate it," and, further, "If she is not serenely at home in the present, it is because, however timidly, she anticipates change with a mixture of dread and pleasure" (99). The moments bring a change of experience as the past, present and future merge to create an experience of time and perception that reveals the self. Initially, there is "dread," a feeling that life is being changed, complicated, unpleasantly unhinged. This is evinced in the lines where Clarissa experiences a moment which unites her young self with her present self: "'Do you remember the lake?' she said, in an abrupt voice, under the pressure of an emotion which caught her heart, made the muscles of her throat stiff, and contracted her lips in a spasm as she said 'lake'" (39). The result is that she sees her life before her, and "Quite simply she wiped her eyes" (40). The moment is full of life, of intimations of death, of revelations of the self and questions concerning one's self and one's life: "What had she made of it [life]? What, indeed? sitting there sewing this morning with Peter" (40). The initial experience of the moment is often painful in its authenticity.

To the Lighthouse also contains examples of moments which are brought in on feelings of discomfort. When Lily and Mr. Bankes see the Ramsays watching their children play catch, "for one moment, there was a sense of things having been blown apart, of space, of irresponsibility. . . . In the failing light they all looked sharp-edged and

ethereal and divided by great distances" (111). The honesty of the moment is, at least unsettling, at most, painful or even initially distasteful. The world seems "blown apart;" reality is experienced as slightly skewed, off kilter. Since appearance is stripped bare, what usually cushions the experience of existence is gone, and the stark experience demands an adjustment and an acknowledgment and acceptance. Ruotolo notes that this novel, "probes those moments when human volition flags." He goes on to state that the moment cited above is an example where, "the usual course of events is suspended and transformed for the two observers and for the reader: 'It seemed as if solidity had vanished altogether'" (120). There is a sense of a slipping away of conventional reality, and this can be, initially, disconcerting or even shocking. So we have Mrs. Ramsay thinking, "But what have I done with my life?" and feeling, "She had a sense of being past everything, through everything, out of everything" and "she felt, more and more strongly, outside that eddy; or as if a shade had fallen, and, robbed of colour, she saw things truly. . . . There was no beauty anywhere" (125-126). The honest intensity of the moment is initially shocking. The authenticity of the moment makes its sudden stripping away of artifice and superficial appearance disconcerting, unsettling.

Death and the Moment

Eventually, however, the moments open into a revelatory experience of the self. As was discussed previously, the heart of the moment is the revelation of the self to the self. The moments' of existence relationship with the heightened awareness of death was discussed in chapter two. The revelation of the self is linked to this awareness. Naremore notes in his book, "the embrace of the self with the world outside and beyond, which Virginia Woolf was so anxious for modern fiction to show, is inevitably associated in her

work with the feeling of death or with the loss of any active life as an individual" (142). The awareness of one's own existence and its predication upon inevitable death is irrevocably linked to the revelation of the self which occurs in the moment. So we have Mrs. Ramsay asking herself, "But what have I done with my life?" and reflecting, "the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her" (125-126). Her existence comes keenly before her, and she sees her flaws and limitations within it. She sees herself as the nurturer, the one who smooths over and congeals the whole. In asking the question regarding her life, the reader is left with the impression that she sees her life as not adequately reflecting herself. She has a fleeting glimpse of herself as something, someone more than the role she is required to fulfill. This feeling is linked to an awareness of death: "giving herself the little shake that one gives a watch that has stopped, the old familiar pulse began beating, as the watch begins ticking --one, two, three, one, two, three. And so on and so on, she repeated, listening to it" (126). Time and its progression, and her existence within its unceasing march, are linked to her awareness and revelation of the self.

Clarissa also gives us an example of this revelation of the self occurring in accordance with an awareness of death. Clarissa remembers her earlier "terror; the overwhelming incapacity . . . this life, to be lived to the end . . . there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear." Moreover, "it was her disaster -- her disgrace. It was her punishment to see sink and disappear here a man, there a woman, in this profound darkness, and she forced to stand here in her evening dress. She had schemed; she had pilfered. She was never wholly admirable" (164). Her feelings are not simply one-sided, though, as the moment is many-layered, and revelations come and go, revealing other

facets of the truth: "she had never been so happy. Nothing could be slow enough; nothing last too long. No pleasure could equal . . . this having done with the triumphs of youth, lost herself in the process of living, to find it, with a shock of delight, as the sun rose, as the day sank." She feels that, "It held, foolish as the idea was, something of her own in it, this country sky, this sky above Westminster." And, eventually, "She felt somehow very like him -- the young man who had killed himself. . . . The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. But she must go back" (164-165). This moment contains a reference to terror, an overwhelming feeling that resides deep within Clarissa and which the moments call up when they initially occur, yet the moment contains happiness and a sense of the self. Her self is also revealed to herself in her identification with Septimus. Naremore discusses the doubling of the Clarissa character with Septimus when he says, "In dying, Septimus of course 'lives on' through his alter-ego, Clarissa" (107).¹⁹ What does Clarissa find through Septimus? Clarissa finds a moment filled with meaning, revelation, death. As Naremore notes the link between the anxiety of death in the moments and the revelation of the self found in the moments:

Death, as Mrs. Dalloway observed, can be a kind of embrace. And the embrace of the self with the world outside and beyond, which Virginia Woolf was so anxious for modern fiction to show, is inevitably associated in her work with the feeling of death or with the loss of any active life as an individual. (142)

The awareness of one's own death, so much a part of the moments (as discussed in chapter two) is plainly connected to a revelation of the self as that self is seen in relation to existence, to life, to being. So, Naremore points out that, "Smith . . . has a partially

¹⁹ See also Joan Bennett, *Virginia Woolf: Her Art as a Novelist* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945) 108; Elaine Showalter, "Mrs. Dalloway Introduction," from *Virginia Woolf: Introductions to the Major Works*, ed. by Julia Briggs (London: Virago P, 1994) 138.

redemptive death, in that he gives to Mrs. Dalloway, quite unawares, an acute sense of her unity with life" (106). Woolf writes,

The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him, with all this going on. . . . the whole house was dark now with this going on, she repeated, and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun. She must go back to them. (165)

The moment comes to completion with the voice of the clock pulling Clarissa back to "find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room" (165). The death of Septimus becomes a clarifying element in the moment for Clarissa, and she feels her own existence, with its journey toward its own end, without fear yet with clarity. She feels situated in her existence, and no longer confined by it. Her self, like her existence and ultimate death, become freeing truths which reveal her core self, not just her social situation, and she finds meaning and sense in this. The moment contains a revelation of her self to her self.

Woolf's Moments are Silent

The moments of existence, which contain as their very core the revelation of the self to the self, occur outside of language. In every instance this is the case in the midst of the moment. Lily, wondering, questioning, seeking meaning in life, herself notes that these are things "she could not say" (267), and Clarissa, at the end of the novel, goes away from the party and muses that death is "wreathed about with chatter . . . let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter" (163). There is the sense that language, when focused outward or stemming from outside, impedes the immediate, honest experience of the moments. Even Eleanor must turn herself physically away in order to achieve a moment in the midst of people: "Eleanor was standing with her back to them" (413). And

Kitty, in her escape from society's notion of her to her own sense of self, catches the train and feels, "All the tension went out of her body. She was alone," as "She seemed to be passing from one world to another" (257-258). Bishop, in his book *Virginia Woolf*, writes of this very silence in the moments. He says, "Silence for Woolf was not menacing, though it was the zone of absence and death, it was also the realm of plenitude, meaning and presence" (60). Language for Woolf, Bishop goes on to say, cannot "articulate meaning, for that is ineffable," but it can take the reader to the point where meaning may be apprehended (60). The moments in Woolf's novels seek to do just that. Neither the revelation of the self to the self, nor the elemental and authentic understanding of existential awareness and finitude that the moments contain can be held up as objective yard-sticks for meaning; yet, through language, Woolf creates the silent moment which resonates for the character and, by extension, for the reader.

Moments and Non-Permanence

Although the moments are not, by definition, permanent, this does not remove meaning from them or make them less pertinent to life. As Bishop notes, "if the moments of communion are never permanent, that does not deny their validity. They are inevitably grounded in time" (63). The moments themselves may take place out of time, or in an existential, a-temporal space, yet they are based on, and the character is pulled back into, time. The moments never completely take over the character, and, in fact, they resituate the character into a firmer sense of chronological time: "if the characters indulge a little in this temptation out of existence, it is always in order to more fully embrace life" (63). Woolf's moments of being, which slide in and out of existence, are analogous to Heidegger's Being, which reveals and conceals itself.

For Bishop, the moment is an "out of existence" experience, or an experience of death. (See chapter two for the discussion on death.) The moment, however, is not so much of death as of life which is finally and only predicated upon death. Nevertheless, Bishop's understanding of the moment is useful here as he discusses the silence of the moments and their relationship to language in a way which is not identical with, but is similar to, my understanding of their relationship. He notes that, "Speech is associated with life, presence, breath, but it is always expiring, moving out of existence, towards silence" (65). Having previously noted that the moments take place in silence, and that meaning resides in that silence, the link between the moments and their counter-part, speech, is clear. Bishop writes that "For Woolf the word is always striving toward orality, her novels resolving themselves into cries at the edge of silence" (65). Bishop goes on to extend his discussion into an inclusion of writing as another form of language, and he associates it with the moments and with death. What is important for this thesis, however, is his understanding of oral language in Woolf's novels with, or in contrast to, the silence of the moments. He explains that, "Woolf uses writing to direct us toward speech, toward, presence, toward origin, but with the knowledge that the movement is necessarily interrupted" (65-66). Bishop's understanding of the moments is that they interrupt the life experience which is language with their own experience of silence and death. By extension, the novels are like the moments; they are silent, death, meaning-laden; yet, simultaneously, they strive toward presence, toward speech: "The novels are gestures, in which we participate, toward a recovery/creation of presence, toward meaning inseparable from words and yet lying always just beyond language" (65).

Language Fractures Woolf's Moments

For this thesis, the inversion of Bishop's dynamic between language and silence will be argued: The characters are moving toward silent, meaningful moments which are fractured or suddenly ended by language or its equivalent. As Jean Schulkind notes in her "Introduction" to *Moments of Being*, Woolf held the belief that "the individual in his daily life is cut off from 'reality' but at rare moments receives a shock. These shocks or 'moments of being' are not, as she had imagined as a child, simply random manifestations of some malevolent force but 'a token of some real thing behind appearances'" (22). Reality, truth, the core of existence and experience, is the silent moment, then, not the language which surrounds or interrupts it. Bishop's argument is nevertheless useful, for it says that there is a path to follow regarding the relationship between the silent moment and the burst of language in the novels, and it establishes the relationship which exists between the two. As Bishop notes, "Life and death become interpenetrating, not just in theme and dramatic action but in the dynamics of the prose" (65). The dynamic between the silent moment and language exists, and it is a relationship and concept worthy of exploration and discussion.

Some but not all moments end or fracture into language. As was discussed in the previous chapter, there are moments which remain silent and dissolve into a transcendent experience of a larger whole. Other moments end with various sorts of interruptions. The moments which end with language or its equivalent are either marked by a character's verbal interruption of another character's moment or they display a character's own desire to hold onto or own the revelation of the self in the moment through language. The moments which are fractured by another's use of language find the character feeling

objectified outside of the moment while the moment itself becomes objectified in their memory. There is a double sense of objectification: the character and the moment. This is also the case for the characters whose language interrupts their own moment. In seeking to grasp and retain the heightened sense of themselves as individuals instead of letting the greater awareness of themselves grow into, and become part of, a larger sense of reality, these characters paradoxically lose the moment and its revelatory experience. The attempt to hold, grasp, or make permanent the moment and its corresponding revelation of the self through language gives rise to two occurrences. The use of language necessitates a double objectification: the moment itself needs to be objectified in order to be thought out enough to be grasped through articulation, and the self itself, revealed in the moment, must be objectified since it is the heart of the moment the character is striving to make permanent. The revelation of the self must be stepped away from in order for it to be evaluated, understood, grasped in a manner which will allow for articulation, and the same must occur for the moment as a whole. There is, therefore, a double fracture, or isolation: one from the self in the moment, and one from the moment proper.

In *The Years*, Delia strives to find a sense of meaning for herself through the death of her mother. At the moment of her mother's death, Delia begins to experience a moment which seems to hold a feeling of authenticity:

For a moment there seemed to be something there. A wall of water seemed to gape apart; the two walls held themselves apart. She listened. There was complete silence. Then there was a stir, a shuffle of feet in the bedroom and out came her father, stumbling.

'Rose!' he cried. 'Rose! Rose!' he held his arms with the fists clenched out in front of him.

You did that very well, Delia told him as he passed her. It was like a scene in a play. She observed quite dispassionately that the raindrops were still falling. One sliding met another and together in one drop they rolled to the bottom of the window-pane. (45)

The moment seems to be unfolding for Delia in such a way that she begins to experience not only loss but connection, death and life, loss, grief, and renewal, hope. The death of her mother is ambiguous for her; the family has been waiting for the mother's death and suffering her illness with her, so the loss of the mother is tinged with relief. The drops sliding, parting, converging, signify Delia's own feelings which must be known honestly in order to converge into guiltless grief. The father's exclamation of sorrow strikes Delia as so simplistically and artificially emotional that her moment is fractured and the parting starkness of her own sorrow and relief is never fully realized. The moment breaks away from Delia and ends in raindrops puddling together without understanding. Delia struggles again to make sense of life and existence in the midst of death at her mother's funeral. We are told that

She stared down into the grave. There lay her mother; in that coffin -- the woman she had loved and hated so. Her eyes dazzled. She was afraid that she might faint; but she must look; she must feel; it was the last chance that was left her. Earth dropped on the coffin; three pebbles fell on the hard shiny surface; and as they dropped she was possessed by a sense of something everlasting; of life mixing with death, of death becoming life. For as she looked she heard the sparrows chirp quicker and quicker; she heard wheels in the distance sound louder and louder; life came closer and closer. . . .

'We give thee hearty thanks', said the voice, 'for that it has pleased thee to deliver this our sister out of the miseries of this sinful world ---'

What a lie! she cried to herself. What a damnable lie! He had robbed her of the one feeling that was genuine; he had spoilt her one moment of understanding. (84)

Here, Delia is having a moment of being which is bringing clarity to her experience of life in the midst of, because of, death. She is understanding that individuality is ultimately lost. The words of the minister fracture the moment from her, causing the moment to reside outside of herself and become a mere memory: "She looked back. . . . The

ceremony was over; rain was falling" (85). The interruption further objectifies Delia from herself: "None of us feel anything at all, she thought: we're all pretending" (84). The clarity of feeling the moment brought her, which opened herself to herself, which gave her a glimpse into herself, is now apart from her and she feels apart from the self which was revealed to her in it.

There are instances where language does not produce this alienating, fracturing effect on the moment and the character in the moment, but they are few. One such instance may be found in the character of Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*. As Mrs. Ramsay presides over her dinner table, she experiences a long, drawn out moment which goes on for pages. Language and voices enter her sphere of being, yet they do not puncture the moment. We are told that, "voices came to her very strangely, as if they were voices at a service in a cathedral" (165-166), and later we are told, "The words . . . sounded as if . . . they had come into existence of themselves" and, furthermore, "like music, the words seemed to be spoken by her own voice, outside her self, saying quite easily and naturally what had been in her mind the whole evening" (166). Language here does not have the distancing, objectifying effect that is often found in other moments because the language Mrs. Ramsay hears is integrated into the moment and becomes merely an extension of herself in the moment. The external effect of language, then, is here negated.

Other instances in *To the Lighthouse* do contain examples of the fracturing effect of language on moments and characters in moments. For example, Lily experiences a metaphysical moment when the inherent longing of the moment of existence (to understand the why of existence) comes into sharp focus. We are told, "Was there no

safety? No learning by heart of the ways of the world? No guide, no shelter, but all was miracle, and leaping from the pinnacle of a tower into the air? Could it be, even for elderly people, that this was life? -- startling, unexpected, unknown?" (268). In an attempt to understand, contain, know, she cries out for an answer to the embodiment of both life and death, Mrs. Ramsay. The result is a return to her physical self outside of the moment of being which reveals the inner self:

"Mrs. Ramsay!" Lily cried, "Mrs. Ramsay!" But nothing happened. The pain increased. That anguish could reduce one to such a pitch of imbecility, she thought! Anyhow the old man had not heard her. . . . No one had seen her step off her strip of board into the waters of annihilation. She remained a skimpy old maid, holding a paint-brush. (269)

Lily's own desire to secure an understanding of existence, an understanding grasped fleetingly and intuitively in the moments of existence, leads to a fracturing away from the moment and herself as she is revealed in the moment. She is left feeling herself to be full of pain, on the brink of insanity, and the epitome of societal failure, an old maid, whereas, in the fullness of the moment, she had felt that she, her art, her life and its attempts, "remained forever" (267).

Sound as Language in Mrs Dalloway

Mrs Dalloway reflects a more complex idea of language and its role than do the other two novels under discussion. Woolf uses the sounds, such as the chiming of Big Ben in *Mrs Dalloway*, to function as traditional language is utilized in these other books. As was discussed in chapter one, the sound of Big Ben is associated with the conventional notion of time. This sense of time stands in opposition to the time, or lack thereof, found in the moments, while it simultaneously holds or contains the moment within the larger sphere of itself. As was discussed in chapter two, the sense of existential

anxiety which an authentic awareness of chronological time instigates is at least part of what ushers in the moments of being: their honest experience of unmitigated existence arises out of a sense of being contained in chronological time and journeying toward death. Containing as it does this sense of death, chronological time holds within it the ultimate fracturing power. The fracturing away which language accomplishes does just that: it pulls us out of the atemporal moment of being, (which contains, yet is not at odds with, death) and back into the conventional sense of time and existence. In *Mrs Dalloway*, the sound of Big Ben chiming accomplishes a dual role. The sound of the clock juxtaposes chronological time with the existential experience of the time of the moments, thereby heightening the character's sense of anxiety and pushing the character into the moment. Eventually, the clock's chiming fractures the moment and pulls the character back into chronological time by the clock's re-entry into the moment and the interruption of the moment's existential experience (with its reminder of conventional notions of time and life).

One example of this dual role of Big Ben's is found in the moment Peter Walsh experiences after visiting Clarissa. The moment begins with,

Remember my party, remember my party, said Peter Walsh as he stepped down the street, speaking to himself rhythmically, in time with the flow of the sound, the direct downright sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour.
(44)

Peter becomes wrapped up in the moment. He feels, "All India lay behind him," and he experiences a feeling of good fortune at being in love. He reflects on Clarissa and he realizes that she bothers him. He finds her "insincere." The sound of Big Ben now re-enters his sphere: "the last tremors of the great booming voice shook the air round him; the half-hour; still early; only half-past eleven still" (45). At the re-introduction of an

awareness of chronological time, brought about through the voice of Big Ben, the moment begins to change for Peter. At the end of the paragraph his sense of self is displaced, rattled, and his understanding of his place in the world is impinged upon: "and then it's all up, it's all up, he thought, looking rather drearily into the glassy depths, and wondering whether by calling at that hour he had annoyed her; overcome with shame suddenly at having been a fool; wept; been emotional; told her everything, as usual, as usual" (45). Peter is not left like this for long, for soon the voice of St Margaret's pulls him into another moment of being. Yet, it is significant that it was the sound of Big Ben which aided both in drawing him into the moment and in pulling him, or fracturing him, from it.

Another example of Big Ben pulling a character out of a moment occurs at the end of the novel when Clarissa is having her moment at her party. Clarissa has thought about death, about life, about her childhood, about herself, her life, the core of her self, and she is watching the old woman going to bed, then, "with the clock striking the hour. . . She must go back to them. . . . The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. But she must go back. She must assemble" (165). One is left with the definite impression that it is only by being pulled back, or fractured from the atemporal world of the moment of being, through the sound of Big Ben, that Clarissa's moment ends and she goes back to the party and the conventional notion of time. The repetitive use of the word "must" further establishes that the moment is full and complete; there is no sense that there is a need to return to conventional notions. In fact, there is a feeling of just the opposite. The experience seems so complete, with its merging of life and death, past, present, and future, in silence. It is the intrusion of Big Ben's voice or sound that recalls

Clarissa, and the "must" relates a sense of duty to the conventional experience of life. The silent moment of being is fractured and she "must" out of duty, out of obligation, out of a sense that once the intrusion occurs it cannot be otherwise, lose the moment. As is often the case with Woolf, the physical end to the moment takes place with the crossing of a threshold: "she came in from the little room."

Heidegger: Language Houses Being

As Woolf's moments occur in silence, surrounded on either side by language or symbolic sound, so too does Heidegger link Being to the silence and emergence of language. In his "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger speaks of the link between thinking and Being and language. He says, "in thinking Being comes to language. Language is the house of Being"(193). With this link between thinking and Being and language we are reminded of Woolf's own triad: silence, the moment, and the fracturing (objectifying) of the self in and from the moment. Thought is presupposed in the objectification of the self and the moment. What is strikingly dissimilar here is Woolf's insistence on the moment, where pure existence is experienced, as the place that is lost to language, whereas Heidegger's Being is found, revealed, housed in language. He says, "Thinking . . . lets itself be claimed by Being so that it can say the truth of Being" (194). Woolf would not disagree with this, one may suppose, as it is through language that the character takes away something which may be held, understood. Yet, the fracture from the moment occurs through language, and in that sense there is a distinct difference in thought here between these two writers.

Silence is, however, a part of Heidegger's thinking on language and Being. He notes that, "if man is to find his way once again into the nearness of Being he must first

learn to exist in the nameless" (199). Furthermore, "Before he speaks man must first let himself be claimed again by Being, taking the risk that under this claim he will seldom have much to say" (199). Certainly this resonates with the heart of Woolf's silent moment where the character is stripped bare and authentically revealed as a mere and yet significant part of existence. The character does, in the moments, exist in the nameless, and it is only in trying to name the nameless, own the un-ownable, that the moment is fractured away from the character.

The essence of man's Being, for Heidegger, lies in that which is revealed through language. Language is the house of Being. Whereas for Woolf, although language is not entirely negative, there is a splitting away from the revelation of the essence in the moment and the cause of the rupture is language. Heidegger observes, "Because plants and animals are lodged in their respective environments but are never placed freely in the lighting of Being which alone is 'world,' they lack language" (206). It is Being, that sense of existential Angst, which provides language. Thus, language becomes, "the lighting-concealing advent of Being itself" (206). This does not mean that language is used to position ourselves subjectively in the world, but that in language we are provided with a means for realizing that "Dasein itself occurs essentially as 'thrown'" (207). It is with this "thrownness" that Heidegger's thought is found to be once again analogous with a Woolfian concept: the moments of being where the experience of existence is found are sudden, not sought, and disturbing, at times even initially painful. Such an experience is very much in line with Heidegger's notion of "thrownness" where Dasein experiences existence as not comfortable or easy but as a part of Being.

According to Heidegger, we draw the essence of our existence from the truth of Being, and drawing near to Being “occurs essentially as language itself” (212). Language is not a tool for understanding or achieving; it is a place where Dasein glimpses Being. Thinking is done in silence, out of silence and thinking comes language, and in language Being is both revealed and concealed. What is it that occupies thought? The “simple relationships” that include “everything spatial and all space-time” because such concepts “occur essentially in the dimensionality which Being itself is” (213). In other words, we approach an understanding of Being in silent thought. Language is not, however, a tool to grasp or own Being. Language houses Being, it is the home of Being. Language is not a tool to serve us further in our grasp of Being; rather “language is the house of Being in which man ek-sists by dwelling, in that he belongs to the truth of Being, guarding it” (213). Language, then, allows us a space to be or dwell where Being is revealed, or where Dasein is aware of Being.

Language: Revealing the Self for Heidegger and Woolf

Here, in the understanding of language as a revealer and concealer of Being or ek-sistence or existence, Heidegger's thought again parallels Woolf's. For Woolf, the moments contain a glimpse into what is essential about the self, and they are a “space” where authentic existence may be fleetingly grasped. For Heidegger, language affords a home where a similar grasping may occur. Obviously, the great difference lies in the fact that for Woolf a rupture occurs with language whereas for Heidegger the moment of dwelling occurs in language. Nevertheless, the revealing moment contains insight, for both writers, into ek-sistence/existence and the nature of the subject or Dasein. Furthermore, Woolf and Heidegger share a triadic structure of silence, language and

revelation in their exploration of an understanding of authentic human experience:

"Everything depends upon this alone, that the truth of Being come to language and that thinking attain to this language. . . . language requires much less precipitous expression than proper silence" (223). So, though language is used in a fundamentally different way in Woolf and Heidegger, nevertheless we gain insight, one from the other, when we understand language as a variable component in the human experience.

Moreover, Woolf and Heidegger converge in their essential understanding of the never-ending search for the self or for a home for Dasein in Being. If you understand "thrownness" to mean not at home in the world, or lost to the self: "a homelessness in which not only man but the essence of man stumbles aimlessly about," (218) then you have at least a concept analogous with Woolf's view of the endless and repetitive search for the self. Just as the self is glimpsed and revealed in the moment, only to be severed by language and lost in its immediacy, so too does Dasein grasp the essence of existence through Being. But Being, like the moments, is only revealed fleetingly: Being is both revealed and concealed (as was discussed earlier), just as the moments, and the self in the moments, is always coming into and going out of experiential existence. The grasp of the self, or the sense of place for Dasein, is always sought; it constitutes a reality of existence. Neither Woolf nor Heidegger feels that at any point, even in the moment of pure existence where the self is discovered or Dasein encounters Being, there is an end to the human experience of searching. What is sought is an ever-elusive, static understanding of the self: a sense of existence as comfortable and proper as home. Instead of a closed, complete feeling, however, characters take away a sense of themselves even as they lose an authentic experience of themselves, and Dasein learns

that it is its very "thrownness" from which the call of Being comes (221-2). The urge for closure, and the remaining sense of that which is fuller, greater, larger, than the mere individual materially existing, echoes within and prepares characters, and Dasein, to be open to the experience of the moments, or for dwelling near to Being.

The self which is revealed to the character in the moments, then, is not one which may be owned. The experience of the moment and its revelation is authentic and honest, but it is also, by its very nature, fleeting. When the moments occur, they are often distasteful, sometimes even painful, in their unmitigated honesty. The experience of existence, stripped bare of cosmetic enhancement, is raw and profound. Death is an inevitable part of this experience, for it is the truth of our deaths upon which rides the truthful moment of existence. Since the moment is always only experienced, never owned or known in an objective sense, Woolf's moments always occur in silence. If, as was discussed in chapter two, the moment evolves into a dissolution of strict individuality (and an understanding of the self as a small, yet not insignificant part, of the greater whole sometimes referred to as Nature), the moment ends in a peaceful letting go and loss of the self just as the self is known best. On the other hand, if the character seeks to know or own the moment, two things occur: the moment itself is objectified; and the self of the character in the moment is objectified. This objectification comes about through regular language (uttered words) or symbolic language (sounds that resonate with meaning), since the use of language necessitates an objectification of that which is articulated. To speak of the self in the moments, therefore, the self would need to be objectified. In the case of symbolic language, the objectification occurs in the act of symbolizing: the symbol must be understood to resonate outside of the mere self in order

for the symbol to exist in any meaningful sense. Both of these forms of language (regular and symbolic) are able to produce the same effect: the moment is fractured away from the character and a sense of isolation from the moment and the self is effected. Such thinking is analogous with Heidegger's ideas on language and Being. For Heidegger, actual thought of Being must occur in silence; for Woolf, moments of being, the place where the self is revealed to the self, take place in silence. But for Heidegger, Dasein comes near to Being in language, and this is certainly different from Woolf's understanding of language and its relationship to moments of being. Yet, the two writers come together again as they both conceive of an understanding of Being, or Dasein's place in the world, or a glimpse into the self and one's existence, as something that is both revealed and concealed. For Heidegger, Being is always revealing and concealing and Dasein's dis-ease in the world propels Dasein toward it; for Woolf the characters are always grasping and seeking the self in the moments, and when a rupture occurs they take away that which they can articulate while they lose that which they no longer directly experience. For both writers language plays a role in our human experience and journey, as does silence and the revelation of that which is truly human but which can never be owned.

Conclusion

To be human, to be alive, is to be in time. As this thesis has discussed, in Virginia Woolf's works *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Years*, there are two types of time written of: the conventional notion of time and existential time. Chronological time is that which is ticked off by the convention of seconds, minutes, hours, days, until, ultimately, our physical reality ends with death. The existential times of the moments of being, however, are atemporal (or outside of conventional time); they contain past, present, and future within themselves and, as such, they are perfectly present. Martin Heidegger's introduction to *Being and Time* discusses time as something more than the time of the physical world, but rather the essence of time is present, or presence. Such thinking highlights Woolf's concept of existential time as the moment that contains all time within it, and thus stands apart from the conventional notion of time. Yet, in Woolf's thought, the moments of being exist within, and because of, the overall context of conventional time. There is a relationship between the two types of time. The time of the moments of being is founded upon an awareness of chronological time and the ultimate physical reality of its end; the existential nature of the moments of being is highlighted when the moment is juxtaposed with the recurring reality of conventional time. The relationship between the two types of time is profound and irreversible.

The reality of chronological time, its end in death, lays the foundation for the moment of existence by creating the existential anxiety upon which the moment comes into being. The fundamental awareness of death is the groundwork upon which moments of being grow. Anxiety for Heidegger in "What is Metaphysics" is linked to "the nothing" and its relation to *Dasein*. *Dasein* becomes aware of Being through the anxiety of

hanging out over the nothing. This is akin to Woolf's idea of the existential awareness of death. Such an awareness is not grief or mourning; it is a profound and personal awareness of the reality of one's death as the unchangeable end. The moments of being open for the subject when this awareness is realized, and, in the moment, the anxiety is superseded by the timeless and freeing nature of the moment. Life becomes more than physical time; one feels linked to that which is timeless.

The self finds a greater sense of meaning within the moments, for meaning is no longer merely relegated to the physical world and its reality. Furthermore, the self is revealed to the self, though fleetingly, in the moments of existence. The realization of the self in the moment occurs in silence. The temptation, of course, is to capture that self-realization, and the method of doing so is through language. Language allows for an articulation of that which reveals itself, and in that sense it allows for an intellectual grasping or holding of experience or sensation. But articulation of the self requires, by nature, an objectification of the self. To put something into language one must objectify that something. Objectification fractures the moment by severing the self from the self, and thus the revelation of the self in the moment is lost. In Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism" he talks about language as the place where Being is glimpsed. Unlike in Woolf, here language does not play a fracturing or separating role, but rather language is the means for realizing the essence of existence; it is the place where Being may be sought. Like Woolf's understanding of the eternally elusive self, Being cannot be owned or contained. Being, like the glimpse of the self found in the moments of existence, is always appearing and disappearing. The profound meaning of the moments of being, existential in nature, can be known of but not held; like the appearing and disappearing of

Being, the revelation of the self appears and disappears again and again in the fleeting and ephemeral experience of the moment of being.

References

- Abel, Elizabeth. "'Cam the Wicked': Woolf's Portrait of the Artist as her Father's Daughter." From Reid. 112-129.
- . *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989.
- Alexander, Jean. *The Venture of Form in the Novels of Virginia Woolf*. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat, 1974.
- Beer, Gillian. "Hume, Stephen, and Elegy in *To the Lighthouse*." From Reid. 71-86.
- Beja, Morris. *Critical Essays on Virginia Woolf*. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1985.
- Bennett, Joan. "Characters and Human Beings." From Beja, *Critical Essays on Virginia Woolf*. 29-37.
- . *Virginia Woolf: Her Art as a Novelist*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945.
- Bishop, Edward. *Virginia Woolf*. Modern Novelists. New York: St. Martin's P, 1991.
- Blackstone, Bernard. *Virginia Woolf: A Commentary*. New York: Harcourt, 1949.
- Bowlby, Rachel. *Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1997.
- . *Virginia Woolf Feminist Destinations*. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988.
- Brady, Kathy. "Time, Space and Silence." In Hussey and Neverow-Turk. 201-02.
- Brewster, Dorothy. *Virginia Woolf*. New York: New York UP, 1962.
- Briggs, Julia. "The Story So Far." In Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: Introductions to the Major Works*. vii-xxxiii.
- , Ed. *Virginia Woolf: Introductions to the Major Works*. London: Virago P, 1994.

Clements, Patricia and Isobel Grundy, Eds. *Virginia Woolf: New Critical Essays*.

London: Vision P, 1983.

Daiches, David. "The Nature of Virginia Woolf's Art." In Latham. 11-13.

--. "Symbolic Pattern in *To The Lighthouse*." In Latham. 70-1.

Dibattista, Maria. "'To The Lighthouse': Virginia Woolf's Winter's Tale." In Freedman.

161-88.

Drabble, Margaret. "Virginia Woolf: A Personal Debt." In Homans, *A Collection of Critical Essays*. 46-51.

Evans, William A. *Virginia Woolf: Strategist of Language*. Lanham, MD: UP of America, 1989.

Fleishman, Avram. "Woolf and McTaggart: An Interrogation of the Metaphysics in *To The Lighthouse*." 1969; rpt. in *Fiction and the Ways of Knowing*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1978. 163-68.

Freedman, Ralph. "Introduction: Virginia Woolf, the Novel, and a Chorus of Voices." In

Freedman, *Virginia Woolf: Revolution and Continuity*. 3-12.

--. *Virginia Woolf: Revolution and Continuity*. U of California P, 1980.

Gamble, Isabel. "Clarissa Dalloway's Double." In Latham. 52-6.

Ginsberg, Elaine K. and Laura Moss Gottlieb, Eds. *Virginia Woolf: Centennial Essays*.

New York: The Whitston Publishing Company, 1983.

Gorsky, Susan [Rubinow]. *Virginia Woolf*. Boston: Twayne, 1978.

--. --. Revised Edition. Boston: Twayne, 1989.

Gottlieb, Laura Moss. "*The Years*: A Feminist Novel." In Ginsberg. 215-30.

- Graham, John W. "Time in the Novels of Virginia Woolf." UTQ 18 (1949): 186-201;
rpt in Latham. 28-44.
- Grant, Amanda. "Life Without Boundaries." In Hussey and Neverow-Turk.. 199-201.
- Guiget, Jean. *Virginia Woolf and Her Works*. 1962. Trans. Jean Stewart. London:
Hogarth, 1965.
- Hafley, James. "The Affirmation of *The Years*." In Latham. 103-05.
- . *The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as Novelist*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1954.
- . "Virginia Woolf: Narrators and the Art of 'Life Itself.'" In Freedman, *Virginia Woolf: Revolution and Continuity*. 13-28.
- Harper, Howard. *Between Language and Silence: The Novels of Virginia Woolf*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1982.
- Hawthorne, Jeremy. *Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway: A Study in Alienation*. Sussex, England: Sussex UP, 1975.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Being and Time: Introduction." Trans. by Joan Stambaugh in collaboration with J. Glenn Gray and David Farrell Krell. In *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*. 41-89.
- . *Existence and Being*. Translated with introduction by Werner Brock. 3rd Edition. London: Vision, 1968.
- . *Identity and Difference*. Translated with introduction by Joan Stambaugh. New York: Harper and Row, 1969.
- . *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings from Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*. Edited, with General Introd. and Introd. to each selection by David Farrell Krell. NY: Harper and Row, 1977.

- . "Letter on Humanism." Trans. by Frank A. Capuzzi in collaboration with J. Glenn Gray. In *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*. 193-242.
- . "What is Metaphysics?" Trans. by David Farrell Krell. In *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*. 95-112.
- Hochman, Baruch. "Virginia Woolf: the Self in Spite of Itself." In *The Test of Character: From the Victorian Novel to the Modern*. East Brunswick, N.J.: Association of U Presses, 1983. 157-76.
- Homans, Margaret, Ed. *A Collection of Critical Essays*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1993.
- . "Mothers and Daughter in Virginia Woolf's Victorian Novel." In Reid. 130-41.
- Hussey, Mark. *The Singing of the Real World: The Philosophy of Virginia Woolf's Fiction*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1986.
- and Vara Neverow-Turk, Eds. *Virginia Woolf Miscellanies: Proceedings of the First Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*. NY: Pace UP, 1992.
- Latham, Jacqueline E. M., Ed. *Critics on Virginia Woolf*. Readings in Literary Criticism. Miami: U of Miami P, 1970.
- Leaska, Mitchell A. *The Novels of Virginia Woolf: From Beginning to End*. NY: The John Jay P of the City U of NY, 1977.
- Lee, Hermione. *The Novels of Virginia Woolf*. London: Methuen, 1977.
- . "To The Lighthouse." In Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: Introductions to the Major Works*.
- Lodge, David. "Virginia Woolf." In Reid. 23-32.
- Love, Jean O. *Virginia Woolf: Sources of Madness and Art*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1977.

Marcus, Jane, ed. *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1981.

--. *Worlds of Consciousness: Mythopoetic Thought in the Novels of Virginia Woolf*. n.p.: U of California P, 1970.

Mephram, John. *Criticism in Focus: Virginia Woolf*. n.p.: Bristol Classical P, 1992.

--. "Figures of Desire: Narration and Fiction in *To the Lighthouse*." In Reid. 33-44.

--. *Virginia Woolf: A Literary Life*. London: MacMillan P, 1991.

Miller, J. Hillis. "'Mrs. Dalloway': Repetition as the Raising of the Dead." 1970. In *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1982. 176-202. In Beja. 53-73.

Minow-Pinkney, Makiko. "Mrs. Dalloway." In Reid. 98-111.

--. *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 1987.

Moi, Toril. "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Feminist Readings of Woolf." In Reid. 87-97.

Moore, Madeline. *The Short Season Between Two Silences: The Mystical and the Political in the Novels of Virginia Woolf*. Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1984.

Naremdre, James. *The World Without a Self: Virginia Woolf and the Novel*. Forge Village Massachusestts, Yale U, 1993.

Newman, Herta. *Virginia Woolf and Mrs. Brown: Toward a Realism of Uncertainty*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996.

Novak, Jane. *The Razor Edge of Balance: A Study of Virginia Woolf*. Miami: U of Miami P, 1975.

- Poole, Roger. *The Unknown Virginia Woolf*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978.
- Poresky, Louise A. *The Elusive Self: Psyche and Spirit in Virginia Woolf's Novels*. East Brunswick, N.J.: Associated UP, 1981.
- Reid, Su, Ed. *Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse*. New York: St. Martin's P, 1993.
- Richter, Harvena. *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage*. n.p.: Princeton UP, 1970.
- Roe, Sue. *Writing and Gender: Virginia Woolf's Writing Practice*. New York: St. Martin's P, 1990.
- Ruddick, Lisa. *The Seen and the Unseen: Virginia Woolf's To The Lighthouse*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1977.
- Ruotolo, Lucio P. *The Interrupted Moment: A View of Virginia Woolf's Novels*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986.
- . "Mrs. Dalloway: The Unguarded Moment." In *Virginia Woolf: Revaluation and Continuity*. Edited by Ralph Freedman. Berkeley: U of California P, 1980. 141-60.
- Schaefer, Josephine O'Brien. "Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay." In Latham. 72-8.
- da Silva, N. Takei. *Modernism and Virginia Woolf*. Windsor: Windsor Publications, 1990.
- Simon, Irene. "The Sea in *To The Lighthouse*." In Latham. 79-81.
- . "Some Images in *Mrs. Dalloway*." In Latham. 57-60.
- Spilka, Mark. *Virginia Woolf's Quarrel with Grieving*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 1980.
- Tambling, Jeremy. "Repression in Mrs. Dalloway's London." In Reid. 57-70.
- Warsi, Shaheen. *The Mind and Art of Virginia Woolf*. Chaukhambha Oriental Research Studies No. 3. Varanasi: Chaukhambha Orientalia, 1976.

Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*. Herts, Great Britain: Granada Publishing, 1976; Rpt.

1982.

--. *The Years*. Edited with Introd. by Hermione Lee. Notes by Sue Asbee. The World's

Classics. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.

--. *To The Lighthouse*. A Harvest/HBJ Book. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,

1955.