"THE BITTER GLASS": DEMONIC IMAGERY IN THE NOVELS
OF
VIRGINIA WOOLF

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to examine in Virginia Woolf's fiction the demonic imagery of violence as it constitutes her ultimate conception of reality. Her novels record the self's ritualistic and symbolic journey into the interior landscape of the unconscious, each work probing behind the carefully wrought illusions of social reality in an effort to define that dark and violent inner truth. This quest in search of the self is essentially and necessarily narcissistic, frequently ending in disaster for the individual searcher who mistakes surface reflection for reality. Ultimately, Woolf depicts man as isolated and fragmented in his attempts to find pattern and meaning in life, and the inherent stubbornness which causes him to fight for life is seen throughout her novels in the recurring theme of identity lost, regained, and lost again. In this doomed world of Virginia Woolf's fiction, the tortuous and narrow path of man's destiny can, and does, lead only to the grave.

In The Voyage Out, her first novel, Woolf uses consistently the violent imagery of disintegration that pervades all her fiction. Rachel Vinrace, the young, inexperienced heroine of the book, flees the sterility and isolation of her room for the glittering world of experience, only to drown in the "cool translucent wave" of that very experience. And as the long night of this book ends, the morning light brings no relief and no sense of rebirth—only
a terrible reminder of life's pointless cycle of light leading to inevitable darkness. Indeed, Rachel Vinrace's return to the sterile darkness from which she emerged establishes the central metaphor in all Virginia Woolf's fiction.

Although Night and Day appears to be a comedy of manners, it is a black comedy of life in a suffocating world where the individual must deny himself and his feelings in an effort to survive. The artificality of the plot and structure only serves to underscore the artificiality of social life where truth is sacrificed in order to maintain the illusion of harmony and beauty, where the appearance of order and tranquility disguises the violence inherent in a society that worships conformity. In Jacob's Room the individual is never able to form a lasting relationship and remains isolated in a world where it is impossible to ever really know another. Jacob, in his restless, futile quest for identity, becomes a symbol of modern man, doomed to wander through the desert of life in a hopeless search for meaning amid the ruins of the past.

The images of violence in Mrs. Dalloway once again create an impression of existence as a living death where the individual, enslaved by convention, is no longer able to communicate with others. Clarissa Dalloway's parties are her "offering" to life, an attempt to maintain order and balance in the face of the chaos which threatens to engulf her; yet, terrified of dying, her existence becomes a living death, an emotional suicide, mirroring the actual suicide of Septimus
Smith. In *To the Lighthouse* the party is over long before the story has finished. With the unexpected death of Mrs. Ramsay, who has seemed to offer a beacon of warmth and security for those engaged on the voyage out, Mrs. Ramsay's family and friends are plunged into the darkness and confusion of the night, where they are no longer able to ignore the fact that life's harsh fruit is death. Virginia Woolf's penultimate novel, *The Years*, is a chronicle of three generations in the Pargiter family, reflecting the increasing sterility and isolation of modern society, where man must continue the endless dance macabre, doomed like Antigone to a living death.

In *Between the Acts*, Woolf's final and most profound novel, the images of violence well up as if from the layer of mud at the bottom of the cesspool, spreading in ever-widening circles, pulling each one of the characters relentlessly into the vortex of loneliness and despair. As each falters and plunges to the bottom, he is faced with the reality that only bones lie in the mud beneath. And the "voyage out" in search of the self, failing to bring man to the shores of understanding and acceptance, becomes instead, an endless spiral of senseless repetition in which one must either drown or go mad.
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Key to Abbreviations of Virginia Woolf's Works Used in This Study

For ease of reference I will make use of the following abbreviations when quoting from Virginia Woolf. See my bibliography for full citation of the texts.

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"Gaze no more in the bitter glass
The demons, with their subtle guile,
Lift up before us when they pass,
Or only gaze a little while,
For there a fatal image grows . . ." 

The fatal image reflected in the "bitter glass" of Virginia Woolf's fiction is the image of life not death. This is the monstrous inversion which lies, like Leviathan, at the bottom of her novels, rising occasionally to explode upon the surface and "scatter its entrails to the winds." Aware that beneath the deceptively smooth surface of everyday existence "pain lies quiescent, but ready to devour" (VO,421), Woolf reveals her despair in images of violence: isolation, imprisonment, death and decay, images which crystallize in her fascination with Antigone, a tragic symbol of the individual buried alive by a relentless society whose true gods are "Proportion" and "Conversion" (MD,151).

Critics have generally argued that these images are subordinate to Woolf's vision of regeneration; yet, it is my view that they constitute a primary and persistent voice that constantly threatens to overwhelm the positive statement in her fiction. This thesis is an attempt to trace the dark current of pessimism which flows through all the novels, reaching its greatest concentration in Between the Acts, Virginia
Woolf's final and most profound attempt to make her "world fall[s] into shape" (AWD, 164). Haunted by the "strange contradictions and anomalies which make a man at once divine and bestial" (CE II, 86), she was conscious of an Apollonian-Dionysiac duality lying at the very root of man's existence. Terrified of "passive acquiescence," she was exhilarated and challenged, like Bernard, by "the daily battle, defeat or victory, the absorbing pursuit" (W, 270) of life itself.

Contrary to the impression given by many critics that, hypersensitive and emotionally unstable, she retreated from reality, occasionally "stretching out from her enchanted tree and snatching bits from the flux of life as they float past, and out of these bits [building] novels," Virginia Woolf clearly recognizes that "stridently, clamorously, life is forever pleading that she is the proper end of fiction" (CE II, 135). While accepting the bleak fact that "nothing . . . had any chance against death" (DM, 11), she realized that "to retire to one's study in fear of life [was] equally fatal" (CE II, 136), and believed that if her work was "to survive, each sentence must have at its heart, a little spark of fire, and this, whatever the risk, the novelist must pluck with his own hands from the blaze" (CE II, 136).

Although it was difficult for Virginia Woolf with her Victorian background to explore the dark shadows in the depths of man's nature, Harvena Richter observes that "her line tangled with the deepest fish in her pool; up from the unconscious she dredged uncommon hates and fears, androgynous
tendencies . . . and aspects of homosexual love." In a world of rapidly changing values, she felt compelled to expose the "skeleton beneath" (VO,4) the facade of society. What she glimpsed behind the curtains and between the acts appalled and fascinated her. "I saw all the violence and unreason crossing in the air: ourselves small, a tumult outside, something terrifying: unreason" (AWD,181).

Hopeful that by creating a work of art she might "bring order and speed again into [her] world" (AWD),181), Woolf confessed in her diary to an "insatiable desire to write something before I die, this ravaging sense of the shortness and feverishness of life, make me cling, like a man on a rock, to my one anchor" (AWD,119). In spite of her awareness that the mind was "a queer conglomeration of unconscious things . . . full of monstrous, hybrid, unmanageable emotions" (CE II,219), she realized that to give life meaning and wholeness, it was necessary to confront the horror of one's own potential darkness and become resigned to it. While admitting the terrors of the voyage.--"No one knows how I suffer, walking up this street, engaged with my anguish alone, fighting something alone" (AWD,147), she felt "it was superb this last protest" (DM,11). The inherent stubbornness which causes man to fight for life is seen throughout her novels in the recurring artistic theme of the loss and regaining of identity. This ritual quest symbolizes the journey of the self into the dark interior landscape of the
unconscious while the hopes and fears of the individual are reflected in his surroundings.

Each time she finished a book, however, "the voyage landed her on the same shore—that of herself" where she fell victim to "an atmosphere of doubt, of questioning, of despair" (CE II, 89) so violent and exhausting that she became ill and a breakdown threatened. Still her courage forced her to confront the sterility of modern society, to try to find some reason for living in spite of an increasing sense of isolation: "I say to myself—fight, fight—If I could catch the feeling I would—the feeling of the singing of the real world, as one is driven by loneliness and silence from the habitable world" (AWD, 148).

In this unreal world we are doomed to inhabit, Virginia Woolf found narrow and twisting the path that man was destined to travel to the grave. "Why is life so tragic, so like a little strip of pavement over an abyss. I look down, I feel giddy; I wonder how I am ever to walk to the end" (AWD, 29). Whenever she hesitated in her effort to weave the fabric of order, she gazed through the wide places in the "netting" into the void below. Without warning nature's placid waters heaved apart to reveal the monstershouldering its way to the surface. As she looked at the reality of life, the shawl fell away and exposed the skull behind its folds. Like Helen Ambrose in The Voyage Out, she realized that "when one gave up seeing the beauty that clothed things, this was the skeleton beneath" (VO, 4). A modern novelist whose interest
lay in the "dark places of psychology" (CE II,108), she was aware that things which seem to have no apparent connection are often associated in the mind; that "beauty is part ugliness; amusement part disgust; pleasure part pain . . . the two emotions, so incongruously coupled, bite and kick each other in unison" (CE II,222). In her writing she felt compelled to reveal this horrifying vision of life as well, to hold up the mirror to nature and by turning "the looking-glass . . . show us that the other side of her cheek is pitted and deformed" (CE II,223).

Although much of the action in her novels seems to centre in the drawing room with the party as the major image of an ordered, creative life, the realization grows that in the shadows just outside the frail mandala of light lurk the forces of chaos and annihilation. It is to these forces that "the other side of the mind is now exposed--the dark side that comes uppermost in solitude, not the light side that shows in company" (CE II,3). Welling up from the deep, fertile places of her imagination, demonic imagery floods her novels, mirroring the states of consciousness that "picture modern man's distress in his search for values." Living in this world of violence with its power to "lay bare regions deep down in the mind where contradiction prevails" (CE II,86) threatens to drive the individual to the brink of madness. Life turns into "one of those appalling nightmares which because they belong to the world of reality and yet seem to be overlaid with unreality, have the double horror
of the collapse of one's everyday life and at the same time
the most fantastic and devastating dream."  

In the world of nightmare, the "singing of the real
world" (AWD,148), of life itself, becomes a torture, a cycle
of despair turning man relentlessly upon the wheel of birth
and death and rebirth. The love and companionship of others
is all that there is to ease the pain and futility of the
journey; to relieve the "horror and terror of being alone"
(BTA,246). Ironically, the irresistible desire to come
together, to embrace, bears within itself the seeds not only
of life but also of death. When the torrent of words is
exhausted we are left alone with sounds of one syllable, cries
in the night and, finally, silence. Between the acts of birth
and death, no life exists other than dying; this is the
monstrous inversion. All else is an illusion and when the
illusion fails, the individual is "forced into the coffin
(and womb) of the earth to be either finally buried or finally
reborn."  

In a world where living is an endless torment,
Woolf can only long, like Phyllis Webb, for the suffering to
end--finally: "Where does it dwell, that virtuous land/
Where one can die without a second birth?"

Having forced herself to "face the fact that there
is nothing--nothing for any of us" (AWD,143) and that life is
a pointless "treadmill--going on and on and on for no
reason" (AWD,180), Virginia Woolf maintains that actively to
choose death is a kind of victory over the living death of
everyday existence. To decide to die is a creative act, it
fills one with exultation this "power to rush out unnoticed—alone—to become part of the eyeless dark" (M,13). Always "more than half in love with easeful Death," she revealed in her novels the "fatal image" of the disintegration of the individual, society and nature in the wasteland that lies behind the thin and trembling "veil of civilization" (TTLH, 51) where, "all things turn to barrenness/ In the dim glass the demons hold." Many critics still persist in viewing Virginia Woolf's fiction as divided into three separate phases: her apprenticeship which resulted in The Voyage Out, Night and Day and the transitional work, Jacob's Room; her mature period consisting of Mrs. Dalloway, To The Lighthouse and The Waves; and, finally, her last novels, The Years and Between The Acts, an indication to some that her "vision falters." Contrary to this interpretation, I feel that, although her major themes of alienation, disintegration and death take various forms and dramatic modes, nevertheless, her perspective is consistent and creates a unified vision in which the central patterns and images recur throughout the whole of her fiction.

Therefore my separation of the novels into three chapters is a division of convenience rather than one representative of a division of Woolf's career. In my first chapter I examine The Voyage Out singly because it is her earliest work, and provides the framework of images and themes present in all her later novels. The second chapter explores these same images and themes as they appear in Night and Day,
Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To The Lighthouse and The Years. Unfortunately, I have found it necessary to omit an analysis of The Waves, Virginia Woolf's "most difficult and complex" book. It is not that images of violence fail to occur in The Waves; indeed, they inform rather than ornament the novel. But to illuminate the profound depths of this work, so intricate in design and imagery, would require a full-scale analysis beyond the scope of this study.

My reading of Between The Acts appears in a separate chapter, not because it is distinct from the rest of her work, but because it represents the final statement of her vision, a culmination and emphatic reiteration of the same themes, patterns and images of despair that have informed all her fiction. For ease of presentation, therefore, I have pursued a kind of book-end structure in order to emphasize the essential similarity between her first novel and her last novel—the two radical statements at the beginning and end of her career—hoping to cast some light on the central core of her work as it stands between them.
CHAPTER I

THE VOYAGE OUT

In The Voyage Out, her first and perhaps most unguarded novel, Woolf uses consistently the violent imagery of disintegration that pervades all her fiction. Recent critics tend to agree that it is more than merely a promising beginning; every single mode of subjectivity used in her later novels is present in her first. James Naremore argues that it not only presents her major themes but is highly characteristic of her later style. While according to both James Hafley and Harvena Richter nearly every event in the book is made symbolic, so that the actual voyage out becomes an image of the inward journey into the ambiguous depths of the unconscious. When this initial effort to reconcile the duality in man's nature fails, the chaos, which Virginia Woolf feels is the reality of life behind the illusion of order, is reflected in the demonic imagery of the novel.

The quest in search of the self is essentially and necessarily a narcissistic pursuit which ultimately ends in death. Mistaking the reflection for reality, the individual plunges into the whelming tide and drowns. In the search for
Identity, the voyage out is a desperate attempt to leave the isolation and sterility of the room or prison, for experience of the outside world. However, the journey is also horrifying as the outward movement reveals that life is a circle without end, spiralling downward into the abyss. As the momentum of the journey increases so do feelings of disintegration and isolation. When order and communication are swept away in the relentless tide, time becomes confused, sex is twisted or perverted and the sense of identity is lost as the buried life boils to the surface. On the dark journey into the unconscious, "the way out is as dangerous as the room itself." 24

In The Voyage Out, according to Richter, it is these hazards of the voyage into the inner world of the psyche which are seen "in full and tragic detail." 25 She maintains that the word "out" in the title merely indicates the physical direction of the voyage to South America while the actual journey is inward to "the watery world of emotion and the inner depths" 26 symbolized by the name of the village, Santa Marina. The image of the quest is centred in the repeated attempts of the young, inexperienced heroine, Rachel Vinrace, to leave the sterility and isolation of her room for the world of experience outside. Growing up in the stifling, patterned society of her aunts, she has longed for the strength "to smash" their world "to atoms." 27 She leaves her room in Richmond, exchanging it for one on her father's ship, where
the illusion of the voyage out obscures, for the moment, the fact that she is still buried alive like Antigone. Her father becomes, like Creon, an image of the narcissistic parent suspected of "nameless atrocities with regard to his daughter" (20).

Uncertain of her ability to cope with the demands of life, Rachel again retreats to the refuge of her room, preferring dreams to the dangers of reality. She senses that to begin to feel, to care about things is "to create an abyss between oneself and others who feel . . . differently" (34). On the other hand, to isolate herself and try to hold the present moment still, like a reflection frozen in a mirror, gives only an illusion of order, a pale image of life "removed from the flux and caught within the frame, static; metamorphosed into glass." Looking like one of life's victims "dropped from the claws of a bird of prey" (35), the young girl seems a pathetic reminder that "death is the true reflection, offering peace and silence." 

The sudden intrusion of the Dalloways into her sheltered world plunges Rachel into confusion and uncertainty. She is fascinated with the glittering image of life they reflect and, catching sight of her own "melancholy" (41) face in the mirror, is suddenly dismayed by her own dreary and limited existence. Failing to discern the insincerity beneath Clarissa Dalloway's delicate appearance and gracious social manner, Rachel is entranced by this "lady of quality" (50) who is so
confident that she "seemed to be dealing with the world as she chose; the enormous globe spun round this way and that beneath her fingers" (47). In reality, beneath her superficial interest in the party aboard the Euphrosyne, Clarissa feels that they are "a set of cranks" (52) and that "its a pity, sometimes, one can't treat people like dogs" (52). Ironically, while feeling that it is so "good to be alive" (63), Clarissa Dalloway becomes an image of the corruption at the heart of society with the aura of death about her. Fascinated by Clarissa's fatal image, for Rachel the "curious scent of violets" (48) which mingled "with the soft rustling of [Clarissa's] skirts, and the tinkling of her chains" (48) is dangerously intoxicating; flowers for Rachel are inextricably woven with memories of her mother's funeral.

If Clarissa brings thoughts of death into Rachel's room, Richard Dalloway creates the sudden shock of sexual awakening. Sleek and powerful, he seems to possess for the young girl the "sinister" (75) attraction and promise of violence implicit in the two English warships following each other "low in the water and bald as bone" (75) looking like "eyeless beasts seeking their prey" (75). The emotional tumult which shatters the calm surface of Rachel's innocent world is echoed in the howling storm as Dalloway's fierce embrace plunges her into the terror of the buried life, bringing her face to face with the dark, shadow side of her nature. Appalled at this vision of herself which she cannot accept, Rachel sinks into the nightmare which recurs in the novel.
whenever she is confronted with her own sexuality. As her submerged desires and fears rise to the surface:

She dreamt that she was walking down a long tunnel, which grew so narrow by degrees that she could touch the damp bricks on either side. At length the tunnel opened and became a vault; she found herself trapped in it, bricks meeting her wherever she turned, alone with a little deformed man who squatted on the floor gibbering, with long nails. His face was pitted like the face of an animal. The wall behind him oozed with damp, which collected into drops and slid down. Still and cold as death she lay . . . . (86)

Shocked by the terrible possibilities of life revealed by her dream, Rachel instinctively turns away from this new knowledge which threatens to destroy her like a "wizened tree" (78) leaving her battered and broken "by the salt Atlantic Gale" (78).

The Dalloways leave Rachel shaken by the momentary glimpse of the very real dangers hidden beneath the facade of polite society. She has a sudden vision of the sickness lying at the heart of life in which the quiet serenity of Richmond has changed to an image of a diseased world "with drains like nerves and bad houses like patches of diseased skin" (93). In this demonic world the individual is sacrificed to glut a rapacious, mechanized society. It is an awareness of this wasteland that fills Rachel's aunt, Helen Ambrose, with a sense of dread, a morbid "presentiment" (349) that the voyage out will end where it began, in darkness on the river of death.

A mysterious and romantic figure draped in purple shawls, Mrs. Ambrose takes on the appearance of a wise and
prophetic Sibyl accompanying Rachel on her dangerous journey through the infernal regions of the world. The trip through London seems to be leading Helen, like Aeneas, through the realm of the dead. Having left her own children behind, she feels mutilated, as if her mind were "a wound exposed to dry in the air" (6). The narrow, twisting streets, "shrunk to a cobbled lane" (6) and shrouded in a "fine, yellow fog" (6), seem to the distressed woman like a great labyrinth where sordid lovers, "tattered old men and women" and sodden hags" (4), are doomed to endlessly circle their lives away. Hunched under "a vast black cloak" (5), the city is like a vampire "a crouched and cowardly figure" (12), draining the lives of individuals. Out of the darkness a mysterious old man appears, Charon-like, to ferry the Ambroses across the river Thames to the ship. As the Euphrosyne ventures out into the night with its frail cargo, it seems to other ships passing "an emblem of the loneliness of human life" (99). Behind them, London glows under a great circle of light like a "pale yellow canopy" (11) as if attempting to deny the darkness of night. Instead of creating a sense of peace and comfort, it seems to be blazing endlessly, "eternally burnt, eternally scarred" (12), a terrible city of judgment surrounded by the raging flames of Phlegethon.

As the voyage out to Santa Marina gets under way, the action of the novel begins its slow, inevitable spiral into the vortex. The image of water which is seen in the name of the village, becomes the mirror of death into which the individual,
like Narcissus, must plunge in an attempt to reach himself. From the first, Rachel, in the sterility and isolation of her room aboard the Euphrosyne, is seen as a shallow pool, her eyes "unreflecting as water" (16). She toys with "fossilized fish" (16) until the black waves of her nightmare force her into the depths of her subconscious where she can no longer "deny the white, hairless, blind monsters lying curled on the ridges of sand at the bottom of the sea" (18) which, like the Kraken, threaten to waken and rise to the surface.

Reluctantly awakened to the infinite possibilities of life which she "had never guessed at" (85), Rachel can no longer tolerate the confinement of her room. Like a moth she is drawn irresistibly to the glittering lights of the hotel. Looking in from the darkness outside, she feels that each bright window reveals "a different section of life" (114) which, while at first fascinating, soon overwhelms her with a sense of danger. Later, as a guest at the hotel, it seems to her that she is surrounded "by the faces of strangers, all hostile to her, with hooked noses and sneering indifferent eyes" (181). As she looks at the great, black trees in the garden, she is reminded that death is the inevitable end of the mad, whirling dance of life where "dreadful sorrows had always separated the dancers from their past happiness" (194). But unable to resist the music, Rachel finds herself relentlessly swept into the frenzied "Dance Macabre" which ultimately ends in her fevered delirium and death.
Torn between fear of the "unknown sea" (271) and a desire to "hurl herself over the waterfall" (271), Rachel's inner turmoil and uncertainty is like a stormy landscape which is "dark beneath clouds . . . lashed by wind and hail" (272). As her increasing desire to live struggles against her fear of life, she feels that she is a prisoner strapped in a chair, tortured and "exposed to pain" (272). In the darkness of the night, a huge, jagged tree seems to rise suddenly before her, its great branches separating her from the light like "black bars separating her from the days" (272). Reflecting an image of the tree of life with its roots in death, it is a vision that will "last her for a lifetime" (205). Feeling that "it might have been the only tree in the world" (205), Rachel, like Neville, finds it embodies a reality which she cannot ignore or pass by. Yet, hating the prison of her room, and "half sick of shadows," she turns irresistibly from the mirror's pale reflection toward the "centre of light" (273) and the shining promise of Terence Hewett's love.

As in a dream, Rachel begins her fatal journey down the river which, "swirling past in the darkness" (325), carries her inexorably into the mysterious "heart of night" (325). While she sinks into the underwater world of her unconscious desires, the jungle reflects her terror. Birds "shriek," monkeys "chuckle maliciously" and primitive beasts "croak" (327) as the remorseless river carries her past vines and roots which seem to be "strangling each other" (327) into the narrow, underground caverns of her nightmare. Appalled
by the rushing turbulence of her feelings, Rachel wonders why it is "so painful to be in love; why is there so much pain in happiness?" (349). In an attempt to escape the necessity of making polite conversation with the rest of the party, the young couple drift into a dreaming state, feeling that they have "dropped to the bottom of the world together" (335). Overwhelmed by their "exquisite joy" (338), Terence and Rachel are unable to tell whether what they feel is true or only "a dream" (337). Content merely to be near each other, they no longer feel the need to communicate and their speech becomes a disjointed, child-like repetition of meaningless phrases "as their voices joined in tones of strange and unfamiliar sound which formed no words" (337).

But as she looks up from beneath this submerged world of make-believe, Rachel has a terrifying vision of the world from the other side of the looking-glass. Suddenly it seemed to her that "a hand dropped abrupt as iron on [her] shoulder: it might have been a bolt from heaven. She fell beneath it, and the grass whipped across her eyes and filled her mouth and ears. Through the waving stems she saw a figure, large and shapeless against the sky. Helen was upon her. Rolled this way and that . . . she was speechless and almost without sense" (347). It is Helen Ambrose, looming larger than life in Rachel's traumatic daydream, who becomes an enigmatic figure strangely interwoven in the young girl's feelings of love and guilt and fear.
Ironically, Helen, who always seems so confident and in control of life to her niece, is in reality reluctant to get involved in the adventure, unwilling "to feel herself the victim of unclassified emotions" (340). Even her admirer St. John Hirst, accuses her of being "the least adventurous" (330) person he has met when, refusing to go into the jungle with Rachel and Terence, she turns "her back on the trees which disappeared in the black shadows behind her" (329). Suddenly, afraid that she has let the lovers stray too far into the darkness alone, Helen, like an errant Sibyl, is filled with "presentiments of disaster" (349) as the shrill "cries of senseless beasts" (349) ring in her ears. As her fears for their safety increase, she is sadly aware of the frailty and insignificance of human existence in a world where "the profound and reasonless law asserted itself, moulding them all to its liking, making and destroying" (322) them at will. Nature, she realizes, is an impersonal, destructive force that breaks "the delicate flesh of men and women ... and lets life escape" (350). Looking with distrust at the order and security reflected in the brittle surface of society, Helen is aware that "underneath the likings and spites, the comings together and partings, great things were happening--terrible things" (321). Horrified as she gazes at the "blackened grass and charred tree stumps" (347) surrounding the native village, it seems to Helen a terrifying image of the wasteland of man's dreams where, "beneath twigs and dead leaves she had seen the movement of a snake" (322).
The return to Santa Marina is a return to the isolation of the room for Rachel. Becoming increasingly oppressed by the need to share her feelings completely, she longs to escape to the dreamy depths again, "to be washed hither and thither and driven about the roots of the world" (365). Terence senses her remoteness and is frightened by it. At times he is certain that she feels only hostility for him, wanting "to blow his brains out" or "throw him into the sea" (365), and he realizes sadly that she wants "many more things than the love of one human being" (370). As they cling together, it seems to the young couple that they are standing "on the top of a precipice" (371) no longer able to communicate with one another. Catching sight of themselves in the mirror, they are dismayed to find that, "instead of being vast and indivisible they are really very small and separate" (371). With a shock, Terence and Rachel suddenly realize how insignificant they are because without them in it, the glass will go on reflecting a world of things.

To Rachel, life now seems an endless wheel turning, a long, aimless progression which finally rubs away all "the marks of individuality" (390). As her weariness increases, she becomes ill and the waves on the shore seem to echo her despair, sounding like "the sigh of some exhausted creature" (398). Unable to cope with the demands of a society that is like an insatiable vampire, "all hostile and all disagreeable . . . with mouths gaping for blood" (378), Rachel returns to the cold cavern of her room for the last time. Sinking down
through the raging fever into the "cool transluscent wave" (402), she sees the damp, oozing tunnel of her nightmare again. Like the nymph, Sabrina, she lies "curled up at the bottom of the sea" (416) where death brings her peace, finally. At last she is "completely cut off, and unable to communicate with the rest of the world" (403), leaving Terence to face the darkness alone.

For him the days have turned to endless night. The world that held his dreams is in fragments and "all around him he seemed to hear the shiver of broken glass" (400). In Rachel's death, at last he sees the futility of the struggle when death is the true reflection of life. The mirror that held their image is like the "crystal glasse" of Comus, it contains within its beauty the darkness of the beast. With his world in ruins, nothing seems whole to Terence, even the old nurse "seemed to shrivel beneath one's eyes and become worthless, malicious and untrustworthy" (420), while the "slim, black cypress trees" (420) in the garden, stand ominously quiet, enfolding the house in their dark embrace. Suddenly, all "sights and sounds appeared sinister and full of hostility and foreboding" (420). Shocked that he has exposed himself to such suffering by caring for someone else, Terence is certain, now that he has lost Rachel, that "never again would he feel secure, he would never believe in the stability of life or forget what depths of pain lie beneath small happiness" (421). Rather than living in agony, buried alive, he feels it is better to escape in death. Terence
feels an exquisite sense of peace as Rachel dies, for if "this was death—it was nothing, it was to cease to breathe, it was happiness, it was perfect happiness" (431). It is only when he sees the fragments of reality, the cups and plates, that he realizes he is alone, condemned to live while she "has outsoared the shadow of our night," leaving him behind in the "strife, and fret and anxiety" (418).

When the long night finally ends, the morning light brings no relief but a terrible reminder that life goes on repeating the endless cycle of rebirth. The first sounds heard at daybreak are "little inarticulate cries, the cries it seemed of children, or of the very poor, of people who were very weak or in pain" (433). But as the darkness fades to a dim memory in the increasing light of day and "the sounds of life become bolder and more full of courage and authority" (433), people come together in an effort to reassure themselves that "surely order did prevail" (439).

Shaken by Rachel's sudden death, the guests at the hotel desperately try to find an explanation for something so unexpected happening: "how could one go on if there were no reason?" (436) To some, wearied by the "hard and labourious" (434) demands of life, there does not seem "to be much point in it all" (434) and yet, "one went on, of course one went on" (434). It is only man's stubborn courage which forces him to look for some meaning in life in spite of his feelings of failure and futility. "'It's not cowardly to wish to live . . . It's the very reverse of cowardly'" (455). As Mrs.
Thornbury thinks back over her own experiences, trying to remember the good times amid "much suffering, much struggling" (439), death seems to her a sweet relief rather than tragedy, especially for young people: "they were saved so much; they kept so much" (439). But Mrs. Flushing who "had urged Rachel to come on the expedition" (437), cannot bear the thought that she is somehow responsible for the young girl's death. Unwilling to submit to the "dark and nothingness" (438), she is appalled by her failure to defeat the forces of nature which annihilate man: "She was like a wounded animal. She hated death; she was furious, outraged, indignant with death, as if it were a living creature. She refused to relinquish her friends to death" (438).

Her emotional turmoil is reflected in the violent storm which suddenly envelops the hotel, shrouding it with darkness and silencing the nervous conversation of the guests in a "clap of thunder" (450). Moving quickly away from the windows where they could see the trees and flowers lying exposed and vulnerable as the "lightening aimed straight at the garden every time" (450), the guests cluster under the "central skylight" (450) as if seeking some warmth or comfort in the lurid "yellow atmosphere" (450). Rather than gaining any reassurance from each other, however, their faces look "white" and "strained" (451) as the crash of "something struck" (451) by the lightening is a grim reminder of Rachel and the inevitability of death.
But with the passing of the storm, the rain, like great tears, "seemed now to extinguish the lightening and the thunder" (451) and the guests turn with relief to their evening activities hoping that the companionship of others will erase their memory of the darkness. Their aimless conversation has no more direction or meaning, however, than the frenzied flight of the moth over their heads. As it dashes from lamp to lamp, drawn irresistibly to the glowing promise of the light, those watching the "poor creature" (452) from below, feel it would be "kinder to kill it" (452) and end its misery. Yet no one moves, preferring to sit and watch the moth destroy itself, for at that moment "they were comfortable and had nothing to do" (452).

To St. John Hirst, coming suddenly into the "lamp-lit room" (455), after the dark terror of the night, the contrast is almost more than he can comprehend. Comforted by the warmth and companionship of what he now feels are "so many cheerful human beings" (456), he lets his thoughts of Terence and Rachel and the "long days of strain and horror" (456) slip away from him. Half-asleep, St. John drifts into a dreaming state where the harsh realities of life, the loneliness, suffering and fear, seem a thing of the past. Looking at the others with a "feeling of profound happiness" (456), he watches fascinated as "the movements and the voices seemed to draw together from different parts of the room, and to combine themselves into a pattern before his eyes" (456).
Grateful as the illusion of order dulls the pain of reality, St. John is "content to sit silently watching the pattern build itself up, looking at what he hardly saw" (456). But as he relaxes for the moment, "half-asleep, and yet vividly conscious of everything around him" (458), the reflection of order shatters and the party disperses into the night, "a procession of objects, black and indistinct" (458). As St. John watches "the figures of people picking up their books, their cards, their balls of wool, their work-baskets, and passing him one after another on their way to bed" (458), there is a sense that this is the inevitable pattern of life, that man, bound on the slowly turning wheel, must find the courage to face the challenges of the day in spite of his constant awareness of the oncoming night.
CHAPTER II

DARK POOLS OF IMAGINATION

NIGHT AND DAY

After the strange and frightening journey of The Voyage Out which plunged her, like Rachel, into the dark terrors of the submerged self, Virginia Woolf suffered a severe breakdown. Perhaps in an attempt to restore her sense of balance and direction in a world where life so often appeared to be merely "a little strip of pavement over an abyss" (AWD,29), she turned to the seemingly safe world of "facts" (AWD,189). Trying to reconcile the conscious and unconscious forces which she felt were reflected in the day and night side of life, Woolf explored in her second novel, Night and Day, the "perpetual disparity between the thought and the action, between the life of solitude and the life of society, this astonishing precipice on one side of which the soul was active and in broad daylight, on the other side of which it was contemplative and dark as night." 40

In spite of her awareness of the danger of slipping over the precipice herself—for when "one deals with people on a large scale and says what one thinks, how can one avoid melancholy?" (AWD,10) --her courage forced her to face the challenge: "I don't admit to being hopeless though: only the spectacle is a profoundly strange one; and the current
answers don't do, one has to grope for a new one" (AWD,10). Her search for a new answer led her to attempt the traditional form of the novel of manners. Finding Night and Day the "least satisfying" of her novels, James Hafley feels there is a serious clash between the form and content. E. M. Forster calls it a "deliberate exercise in classicism" in which Virginia Woolf is "using tools that don't belong to her" noting with some satisfaction that, "she has never touched them again." In reality, although Night and Day appears to be a comedy of manners, rooted in the conventions of romance, it is a black comedy of life, the same that Woolf re-enacts in every novel. The artificiality of plot and structure only serves to underscore the artificiality of social life where truth is sacrificed in order to maintain the illusion of harmony and beauty. It is a suffocating world in which the individual must deny himself and his feelings in an effort to survive; to wake from the dream is to discover that the comic dance of life in society leads inevitably to darkness. At first the characters seem to step in the socially acceptable patterns of courtship and romance, but the illusion is shattered and convention flouted as the dancers suddenly change partners and direction. The appearance of order and tranquility in this novel barely disguises an awareness of the evil and violence inherent in the society that worships conformity.

The action of the novel is centred mainly on the comfortable Hilbery home and in the attempts of Katharine Hilbery to escape from the suffocating conventions of her life
where "the glorious past . . . intruded too much upon the present, and dwarfed it" (33). The only child, Katharine lives a sheltered and often lonely existence, so isolated from the realities of the world outside that, "she very nearly lost consciousness that she was a separate being, with a future of her own" (115). In the stifling security of her home, it seems as if she is submerged beneath the sea, imprisoned in "a grotto in a cave" (7) where, "the booming sound of traffic in the distance suggested the soft surge of waters" (7).

Buried alive in a house which has become a shrine to her ancestors, Katharine's existence often appears to her as lifeless as the relics which surround her. Bound by a sense of duty to help her mother write the "Life" of her famous grandfather, Richard Alardyce, she is dismayed by the futility of her own life which seems to be submerged in a "deep pool of past time" (114). At times, barely able to contain her "rage" and "anger" (117), Katharine rebels against "the unfairness of the claim which her mother made to her time and sympathy" (117), retreating to the even greater isolation of her own room where she tries to lose herself in dreams and "the nothingness of night" (106).

When Ralph Denham first meets Katharine, she seems so remote from reality that he is filled with a desire to "say something abrupt and explosive, which should shock her into life" (6). Burdened himself with family responsibilities that he cannot ignore, Ralph is scornful of Katharine's inexperience, certain that she will "never know anything at first hand"
(12) as long as she remains, like a princess in her tower, separated from life by "a maze of diamond-glittering spider's webs" (15). Ironically, it is he who spins fairytales to colour the "infinite dreariness and sordidness" (27) of his existence. When he discovers that, despite his daydreams, Katharine is engaged to William Rodney, he is unreasonably enraged, feeling that she has deliberately deceived him with her innocence, "let him see her as a child playing in a meadow, shared his youth with him" (160). In despair as his illusions crumble, Ralph gazes into the future with horror contemplating a bleak world without Katharine, where "abysses seemed to plunge into darkness between them" (161).

Unaware of Ralph's fantasies, Katharine begins her tentative journey out of the sterility of the room no longer able to accept the restrictions that hold her there. Having become engaged to Rodney "in a desperate attempt to reconcile herself with the facts" (254), convinced that "a perfectly loveless marriage was what one did in real life" (108), she gradually realizes that the engagement is a "farce" (257). In submitting to the pressures of society she has been treacherous to herself and Rodney. Appalled at her dishonesty, she tells Rodney the truth, certain "that not to care is the uttermost sin of all" (255). As the walls of her conventional world begin to disintegrate, Katharine sees her fear and confusion reflected in the "lightening-splintered ash-tree" (254) standing before her, while the garden of her youth has become a vision of the wasteland "where the bracken was brown and
shrivelled" (256). For a moment as her courage falters, Katharine feels that she and Rodney are "like the children in the fairy-tale who were lost in a wood" (256) and, in an effort to return to the comfort and security of her innocent world, she decides to submit to convention and "try to make [him] happy" (259).

However, as she gazes at the "horned skulls, sallow globes, cracked oil-paintings and stuffed owls" (205) in the hallway of her uncle's "dilapidated mansion" (206), she seems to see for the first time that they are only the empty husks and meaningless relics of life. They become an image of what her existence will be if she remains isolated, closing the door upon reality "as if it were a thousand doors softly excluding the world" (149). Unless she makes the effort to live her own life as an independent person, Katharine sees herself becoming a reflection of her cousin Euphemia, who "in the prime of her life was being rapidly consumed by her father" (217). Like Creon's, his relentless egotism is draining his daughter's vitality until her "cheeks were whitening" (217) and she has "little of substance" (217) remaining.

More fearful now of remaining in the room rather than leaving it, nevertheless, Katharine finds the voyage out a terrifying experience. Realizing that she is really in love with Ralph, she is suddenly shaken by the risk of caring so much for another: "to a person controlled by habit, there was humiliation as well as alarm in this sudden release of what appeared to be a very powerful as well as unreasonable
force" (468). Certain that she has lost him because of her indecision, she rushes in panic and terror through the dark streets of London looking for him as if she were trapped in a nightmare: "never since she was a child, had she felt anything like this blankness and desolation" (468).

In her determination to live she resists the tyranny of convention, finally aware of the prison of her existence. Opposing her father for the first time in her life, Katharine "looked for a moment like a wild-animal caged in a civilized dwelling place" (505) making Mr. Hilbery feel that "civilization had been very profoundly and unpleasantly overthrown" (595). With his orderly, conventional world "in a state of revolution" (505), her father suddenly has a fearful "vision of unpleasant encounters on the staircase; his meals would be poisoned for days to come" (505). Only Mrs. Hilbery, crooning the magic word "love" like a wise Fairy Godmother, can restore the illusion of order again, "riveting together the shattered fragments of the world" (512).

In a desperate effort to ignore the dark uncertainties outside, Katharine, like a child, is momentarily lulled by her mother's bed-time story. But the happy ending of the "ancient fairy-tale" (512) seems a sudden reminder to the girl of the real terrors of the journey into the world of experience where the future lay ahead, "unwritten" (537): "It was life, it was death. The great sea around us. It was the voyage for ever and ever" (512). Startled out of her dream of love, Katharine feels that she is looking into the dark
"abyss" able to see into the very "depth of disillusionment" (513) and discern what is lurking there. She realizes that this uncertainty, "the horror of changing from one state to the other, being happy one moment and miserable the next" (513), is what makes believing her mother's story so dangerous; what if their love "came to an end suddenly--gave out--faded--an illusion?" (513)

Mrs. Hilbery's insistence that one must have "faith in [the] vision" (513) of love, echoes Ralph's conviction that "if life were no longer circled by an illusion. . . then life would be too dismal an affair to carry to an end" (516). Ironically, it is Ralph who feels confident that he has reconciled himself to the terrors of the real world. As the eldest son in a fatherless home, he has the burden of responsibility for the family resting on his shoulders. Although he accuses Katharine of hiding from life, it is only by retreating to his shabby room at the top of the house that Ralph can gain any relief from reality. Weary of the insatiable demands of his mother and family, it seems to him that ultimately all men are "doomed to misery in the long run" (27). He suddenly realizes the futility of trying to escape from life through day-dreams, feeling certain that "we've all got to be sacrificed; What's the use of denying it? What's the use of struggling against it?" (25).

As his vision of love fails, Ralph feels that life is an endless torment where man is doomed to "just turn round in the mill every day of our lives until we drop and die,
worn out" (25). Convinced that he has lost Katherine to Rodney, he "let the tide of disillusionment sweep through him" (162). As an image of the wasteland rises before him it seems that, "all his life was visible, and the straight, meagre path had its ending soon enough" (162). Bruised by his defeat, like the old, tattered tramp he meets, Ralph sees his failure mirrored in the "swift race of dun-coloured waters" (163) of the river. Reflected in this dark tide he sees the "very spirit of futility and oblivion" (163) of life, and he is appalled by the need to try to make some sense in a world where there is nothing anyone can trust: "Not in men and women. Not in one's dreams about them. There's nothing--nothing, nothing left at all" (163).

Unable to bear the desolation of a world without love, Ralph's first impulse is to retreat from the demands of society to a little cottage in the country where he can write about life rather than confront it. He seems remote and isolated to Mary Dachet when she sees him alone on a London street bench, looking "as if he were sitting in his own room" (165). However, the security of the room, "an affair of four walls, whose objects existed only within the range of lights and fires" (373), is an illusion. Having been exposed to the "arrows of sensation" (285), it is impossible for the individual to deny those feelings and still live.

To Ralph and Katherine, caught in the "terrible extremes" (407) of their emotions, torn asunder, first by love and then by fear, it seems as if they have plunged "in
disorder . . . upon rocks" (407). Terrified of Ralph's desire to possess her completely, there are moments when Katharine fears that in sharing her essential "loneliness" (521) with him, she has sacrificed her own individuality. While for Ralph, although there are glorious calm spells when he feels in control of his life, at other times, in a storm of confusion and doubt, he has an image "of a lighthouse besieged by the flying bodies of lost birds, who were dashed senseless, by the gale, against the glass" (417). In his imagination it seems to him that he "was both lighthouse and bird; was steadfast and brilliant; and at the same time he was whirled, with all the other things against the glass" (418).

The image of light, which has created the sense of warmth and security of the daylight side of life, now becomes an "opaque substance" (534) reflecting the uncertainties of the night, containing within its flaming depths the threat of destruction. As Ralph stands alone in the darkness, it appears that both Katharine and her house are "bathed in that steady flow of yellow light" (419), and he is being drawn toward them as irresistibly as a moth or lost bird "by the splendor of the blaze" (419). To Katharine, suddenly seeing him "isolated in the little circle of light" (532) on the pavement, Ralph appears "to be blazing splendidly in the night, but so obscure" (534) that he seems out of her reach. She feels that in spite of their love, they may never penetrate that obscurity and really know each other: "She might speak to him, but with that strange tremor in his voice, those eyes blindly adoring,
whom did he answer? What woman did he see? And where was
she walking, and who was her companion?" (537) Suddenly it
seems to Katharine so terribly fragile, this "globe which we
spend our lives in trying to shape, round, whole, and entire
from the confusion of the chaos" (533).

Having left the security of the innocent world, the
young couple cling to each other in an attempt to protect
their vision of a happy ending. For once the illusion shatters,
al that remains are only "moments, fragments, a second of
vision, and then flying waters, the winds dissipating and
dissolving" (537). And to sink beneath the dark waters of
the abyss is to be faced with the reality of an existence
where "a skeleton world and blankness alone remained—a
terrible prospect for the eyes of the living to behold" (437).
While Katharine and Ralph try to reassure themselves that,
"they were victors, masters of life" (535), ironically, it
is life itself that relentlessly consumes them since they
are "at the same time absorbed in the flame, giving their
life to increase its brightness" (535). As the final scene
of the novel seems to swell in a hymn of praise to the
creative power of love, the river, "which bore its dark tide
of waters, endlessly moving beneath them" (538), is an ominous
reminder to the young couple that beyond the fairy-tale world
of illusion lies the dark wood of experience.
In Night and Day, Virginia Woolf tried to stifle the nightmare of the voyage out with a vision of the warmth and compassion of love, however fragile that dream might be. But in Jacob's Room, the individual is never able to form a lasting relationship and remains isolated in a world where "Nobody sees any one as he is." As the images of violence in the novel assume the measured resignation of an elegy, Jacob, in his restless, futile quest for identity, becomes a symbol of modern man, doomed to wander through the desert of life in a hopeless search for meaning amid the ruins of the past.

Lost briefly, as a child, when he runs away at the seashore, Jacob Flanders is, in reality, lost for the rest of his life, unable to find any reason for living. As his brother calls Jacob's name, his voice expresses "an extraordinary sadness" (7). It sounds like the cry of all men who journey alone and helpless in the "stony rubbish" of the wasteland: "pure from all body, pure from all passion, going out against the world, solitary, unanswered, breaking against rocks--so it sounded" (7). In Mrs. Flanders we hear an echo of what Eliot in The Waste Land calls that "murmur of maternal lamentation." A young widow, "lonely and unprotected" (6), she faces the harsh necessity of raising three sons alone, appearing to her neighbours like one of those poor creatures who must "stray solitary in open fields, picking up stones, gleaning a few golden straws" (6).
Jacob, rebellious and difficult to understand, is his mother's greatest worry. He is "so obstinate already" (9) and such a "naughty little boy" (9), attempting to leave the security of the nursery in spite of her efforts to control him. As he wanders alone, determined to explore the mysteries of the sea, Jacob finds it a terrifying experience, however. Coming without warning upon an "enormous man and woman . . . stretched motionless" (7) like two corpses in the sand, the little boy is suddenly stricken with the knowledge that he is lost. As he runs away from the horror of the "large red faces" (8) looking up at him, Jacob stumbles upon an "old sheep's skull" (9) half-buried among the broken sticks and straw in the sand. The lovers, lying amid the wreckage of the sea, seem to reflect the futility of love in a world where the final embrace is death. In spite of man's restless struggle to find some reason for living written in the dust of the wasteland, he finds only bones, "clean, white, windswept, sand-rubbed" (9), which inevitably turn "to powder" (9).

When Betty Flanders hears her son's voice mingle with the ringing of the church bells in the evening, it seems to her that the two sounds "mixed life and death inextricably" (14). The inevitable spiral to the grave which man is destined to follow, is mirrored in the pathetic world of the helpless crab, a prisoner, trapped in the tiny sea of Jacob's pail. Alone and forsaken, "beaten to the earth" (12) like the purple flower by the storms of nature, "the opal-shelled crab slowly circled round the bottom, trying with its weakly legs
to climb the steep side; trying again and falling back, and trying again and again" (12). Jacob sleeps through the storm, "profoundly unconscious" (12) in his innocence of the price of experience embodied in the grinning skull, with its "big yellow teeth" (12), which lies at the foot of his bed. Having once been admitted to his room, however, the fatal image of the skull remains with him for life, appearing, at last, like a death's head carved in wood above the door of his empty room in London (176).

As Jacob moves restlessly from room to room trying "again and again," like the crab, to find some way to survive the agony of his disillusionment, it is obvious that death is the only relief. Finally, the ghostly relics of his life are all that remain of Jacob in his empty, silent room, where like a tomb, "listless is the air . . . just swelling the curtain; the flowers in the jar shift. One fibre in the wicker arm-chair creaks, though no one sits there" (37). In an effort to protect himself from the dark terrors of the quest, Jacob, like a frenzied moth, tries to find some comfort reflected in the glowing halo of light surrounding, first Cambridge, then London and finally Greece.

He arrives at Cambridge, certain that he will find some glint of understanding where the light of learning shines like a beacon, "not only into the night but into the day" (30). However, with a growing sense of disillusionment, he realizes that the flame which "burns steady even in the wildest nights," is only "a lantern under a tree" (30) where, lured, like
himself, by the glowing promise, "every insect in the forest creeps up to it—a curious assembly, since though they scramble and swing and knock their heads against the glass, they seem to have no purpose—something senseless inspires them" (30).

Neither the exciting discussions with friends nor the melancholy beauty of Keats and Byron, can drown for Jacob, the sound of the "weakly creak and screech of brains rinsed in cold water and wrung dry" in the "sixpenny weeklies written by pale men" (33). Forced to face the fact that such a desolate world is "capable of existing" (33), Jacob realizes, bitterly, that once "face a teacher with the image of the taught and the mirror breaks" (40). With the shattering of his illusions at Cambridge, nature seems to echo his despair with the ominous fall of a tree like an execution in the dark wood, where "a terrifying volley of pistol-shots rings out—cracks sharply; ripples spread—silence laps smooth over sound. A tree—a tree has fallen, a sort of death in the forest" (30. This "fatal image" of the fallen tree, in fact, marks the death of Jacob's innocence.

But with the resilient courage of youth, he is "off" again, "circling higher and higher" (35) like the gaily painted butterflies who, in their eagerness to fly, overlook a world in which they feed on "bloody entrails" (22) and settle to rest "on little bones" or "beneath a ruin" (22). While this sense of impending death spreads out to cover the land Jacob tries to ignore it by turning to the sea. However, even here, as he sails along the coast of Cornwall with Tim Durrant, he is
overwhelmed with the "pungent" scent of "violets" wafting across the water from "Land's End" as if coming from the "fields of death." Turning to gaze at the "white cottages", Jacob is reassured, at first, by their "extraordinary look of calm, of sunny peace" as they cling to the cliffs above the sea, but suddenly he notices that "imperceptibly the cottage smoke droops, has the look of a mourning emblem, a flag floating its caress over a grave". Once again overcome with a sense of the futility of the struggle, Jacob wonders why life begins with such innocent hope only to be crushed by "overpowering sorrow". For as man perceives that the pattern finally leads to the inevitable darkness, life becomes "but a procession of shadows, and God knows why it is that we embrace them so eagerly, and see them depart with such anguish, being shadows".

Disheartened once more, Jacob feels that it is useless to attempt to deny the reality of this sorrow which lies at the heart of life, for "it is brewed by the earth itself. It comes from the houses on the coast. We start transparent, and then the cloud thickens. All history backs our pane of glass. To escape is vain". Preferring not to look too closely at this dark image in which the past becomes a meaningless record of futile repetition, he moves toward the city, hoping to find some peace while "the lamps of London uphold the dark as upon the points of burning bayonets". But, for Jacob, the elusive answer to the riddle of life seems to remain just out of reach in the
darkness, "always impelling one to hum vibrating, like the hawk moth, at the mouth of the cavern of mystery" (72).

Instead of bringing a sense of balance and order, the glowing circle of light above the city seems to reflect the fires of destruction, where man, the eternal Guy, his "headpiece filled with straw," is doomed to burn year after year. In an effort to maintain the illusion of gaiety and hold back the "checkered darkness" (73), the individual, wearing his foolish cap like "pierrot" (75), becomes part of the endless masquerade ball. While beneath the frantic dancers, "sunk in the earth, hollow drains lined with yellow light" (65) spread out like the coils of a vast labyrinth carrying passengers through the underworld of the damned. The light on the narrow pavement above the abyss does not "carry far enough" (80) into the heart of the shadows where, "voices, angry, lustful, despairing, passionate, were scarcely more than the voices of caged beasts at night" (80).

In spite of the looming darkness, for Jacob, who "could not dance" (74), the masquerade is impossible. Ironically, although garlanded like a "beautiful" (74) Dionysus with "paper flowers" and "glass grapes" (74), he is unable to find in the illusion of love any promise of life. He seems so "unwordly" (69) to Clara Durrant, who loves him but lacks the courage to rebel against the conventions of society herself. Finding his sincerity "frightening" (70), a threat to her passive acceptance of the illusions, she remains a captive of life, like "a virgin chained to a rock . . . eternally pouring
out tea" (122). Aware that it is impossible to communicate with Clara, although "of all women, Jacob honoured her most" (122), he turns for company to the little prostitutes of London.

With them he finds physical release even while he is repelled by the "indecency" (91) and the mindless passion of the "obscene thing" (91) done behind closed doors. This Jacob realizes, is one of life's "insoluble" problems, that "beauty goes hand in hand with stupidity" (81). Ironically, he rationalizes that behind the simplicity of this kind of love, there is an honesty, "an inviolable fidelity" (93) that gives the relationships some meaning after all. Having been caught up in the illusion in spite of himself, Jacob's feeling of betrayal when he sees Florinda with another man is overwhelming. His face in the light of the street lamp looks "as if a stone were ground to dust, as if white sparks flew from a livid whetstone" (93). A reminder of the bitter truth of life, Jacob's despair seems to be reflected by the harsh sterility of the winter landscape where "clumps of withered grass stood out upon the hill top; the furze bushes were black, and now and then a black shiver crossed the snow as the wind drove flurries of frozen particles before it... The sky was sullen grey and the trees black iron... The day had gone out" (97).

Bitterly disillusioned, Jacob decides to leave the darkness of England. Still hopeful of finding a reason for living, he turns to Greece and the wisdom of the past. However,
his restless wanderings do nothing but increase his feelings of isolation and loneliness. Overcome by "an intolerable weariness" (135), Jacob finds that the "Greek spirit" (137), so long the fabric of his romantic imagination, now seems to be merely another illusion. And yet, still restlessly searching for the beauty in life, he is fascinated by the superficial loveliness of Sandra Wentworth Williams, overlooking the truth of her narcissistic nature.

Although to Sandra, Jacob seems as easily deceived "as a small boy" (169), she is aware of "the seeds of extreme disillusionment" (158) in him, which will eventually force him, like "Alceste" (169), to see reality as it is "in skeleton outline, bare of flesh" (162). But when the astonishing gift for illusion is finally lost and the violence of life overwhelms Jacob, there is only one action possible and that is to die; "to surrender to the dark waters which lap around us" (137) in the midst of "the ebb and flow of the tide of life" (AWD,15). When the voyage out in search of the self fails to reach the shores of understanding, the individual is pulled relentlessly into the vortex of loneliness and isolation until, like the "dozen young men in the prime of life," who "descend . . . into the depths of the sea" (155), he dies.

Thus, with Jacob gone and his room an empty shell, the novel ends where it began, in the wasteland. All that remains are the lifeless relics of Jacob's dreams; love letters and books of poetry, and his "old shoes" (176) looking "like
boats burnt to the water's rim" (37), left on the beach by the receding tide. His friend, Bonamy, sorting through Jacob's possessions feels that this last illusion is the ultimate irony: "did he think he would come back?" (176) But Jacob is dead, a victim of life as the "darkness drops like a knife over Greece" (175), and the quest has come full circle ending as it started with man lost in the wilderness and "such confusion everywhere" (176). All that can be heard as the novel ends, is a "harsh and unhappy voice" crying "something unintelligible" (176)—the name—perhaps of someone with whom to share the loneliness and terror of the journey.

**MRS. DALLOWAY**

The images of violence in *Mrs. Dalloway* once again create an impression of existence as a living death where the individual, enslaved by convention, is no longer able to communicate with others. In an attempt to ease the pain of this isolation it is essential to ignore the bleak reality and accept the illusions of society for the truth. As the novel indicates, to sink beneath the surface and gaze upon the awful void, is to fall "down into flames" like Septimus, and be forced either to accept that nothing is there or to go mad. Clarissa Dalloway, the central figure in the novel, is seen during the course of one day moving through the fashionable streets of London and the cool, shining rooms of her house, outwardly composed and serene.
Although claiming to be exhilarated and sustained by "waves of that divine vitality" (13) which she sees reflected "here, now, in front of her" (16), in reality the demands of life often terrify Clarissa, giving her a sense of being "far out to sea and alone" (15). In a valiant effort to bridge the dark abyss where "death ended absolutely" (16), all her beauty and creative energy is spent maintaining the kind of world in which she feels secure. Her home and servants, her family and friends, all are brought together and carefully interwoven in order to create the exquisite fabric of her parties. They are her "offering" (184) to life, an attempt to achieve order and balance so that she can ignore the chaos which threatens to engulf her. Whenever the truth endangers her security, making it "wobble" (90), she retreats, like Katharine Hilbery, to the cold, vault-like sterility of her room. Terrified of dying, her existence becomes a living death, an emotional suicide, which is mirrored in the actual suicide of Septimus Smith.

Driven mad by the awful reality of life which Clarissa tries to ignore, Septimus flings himself to his death, impaling himself upon the iron railings of the fence, a symbol of separation and imprisonment. Ironically, Clarissa hears about Septimus during her party, her celebration of life. The initial shock and dismay she feels forces her to leave her guests and withdraw to the bare, little room where she relives his death in her imagination. Forced to accept the fact that death lies at the heart of her party,
Clarissa begins to see that death rather than being destructive, is the ultimate creative act. With an almost orgasmic pleasure, she imagines the climax of death as an exquisite embrace and dying itself as a triumphant victory over the terror of life.

Having spent her childhood in the comfortable, sheltered environment of Bourton, isolated from the facts of life by her aunt, Clarissa is at first excited by the arrival of Sally Seton and Peter Walsh in her world. Although fascinated by their fiery, all night discussions about the problems of life, she never allows facts to take the place of her daydreams, caring "much more for her roses than the Armenians" (182). Loving to dance and ride as a girl, Clarissa feels that life is an exhilarating adventure if only one has the courage to take the "plunge" (7). However, as she stands safely inside Bourton looking through the window, she has an intimation of the dangers of the voyage out. Sensing that there is something "chill and sharp" (7) beneath the "kiss of the wave" (7), she has a solemn feeling "that something awful was about to happen" (7).

Turning away from this disturbing vision outside, Clarissa is outraged when Sally and Peter insist on bringing the sordid details of life into her parties. Choosing the safety of the shore rather than brave the uncertainties of the impetuous sea, she rejects Peter Walsh who "made her see herself" (252) and, instead, marries dependable Richard Dalloway with his love for "horses and dogs" (114). With his
help she finds the protection from reality that she needs and her home becomes a sanctuary from the fret outside. Her life seems a shining mirror where, like Narcissus, she gazes enraptured by the endless reflection of order, becoming both supplicant and idol, "blessed and purified" (45) in her isolation like "a nun who has left the world" (45).

The house, "cool as a vault" (45) and remote from the bustle of the street, becomes the magic tower of her childhood where alone, sheltered from the harsh light of the sun, she can barely hear the "thin and chill" (72) sounds of life in the distance. But in the carefully polished crystal and silver of her home, Clarissa Dalloway, like the Lady of Shallot, sees only the pale reflection of life. It is a brittle image easily shattered whenever the violent world, with its "brutal monsters" (20) the Lady Brutons and Miss Kilmans who refuse to be ignored, looms like "those spectres with which one battles in the night" (20). At moments like these, Clarissa is forced to recognize the terrors that lie beneath the glittering surface of her world, feeling as threatened "as a plant on a river bed feels the shock of a passing oar and shivers: so she rocked: so she shivered" (42).

With her confidence shaken, she sees herself suddenly "shrivelled, aged and breastless" (48), conscious that in reality there is a dreadful "emptiness about the heart of life" (48). Reminded once again of the "leaden circles" (9) of time that draw us all, inevitably, into the grave, Clarissa, in
spite of her efforts to maintain the illusion of "gaiety" (72), finds herself left alone to stand "a single figure against the appalling night" (47). As she turns for comfort to the safety of her lighted attic room, it becomes an image of the tomb with candles "half burnt down" (48) and the cold, white sheets "tight stretched" (48) where, like Antigone, she must finally lie while "narrower and narrower would her bed be" (48).

Although she has "always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day" (15), Clarissa is sadly aware that in marrying Richard Dalloway without really loving him "she had failed him" (49). "Turned almost white" (49) since her illness, which has, ironically, affected her heart, she seems increasingly to embody death within her "cold spirit" (49). Intent on preserving her social image, she gazes into the looking glass trying to see in her reflection "one centre, one diamond ... a radiancy no doubt in some dull lives, a refuge for the lonely to come to" (57), so that she is able to ignore the "sudden spasm" (57) and the grip of "the icy claws" (57) which threaten to tear off the mask and reveal "all the other sides of her--faults, jealouslyes, vanities, suspicions" (58). Refusing to look at life, Clarissa becomes its brittle reflection, threatening slowly to "turn to glass" (244) as her aunt has and "die like some bird in a frost gripping her perch" (244).

It is this chill denial of life, "the death of her soul" (91), that Peter relentlessly opposes, opening and
shutting his knife as if subconsciously trying to cut through her "impenetrability" (93) to some hidden warmth beneath. But in their final, terrible quarrel in the garden at Bourton, he realizes, as she remains "contracted, petrified" (98), that "it's no use. This is the end" (98). Ironically, in spite of his desire to fill her life with meaning, Peter is equally guilty of hiding from reality. An incurable romantic, he spends his life chasing an elusive dream of the perfect love. The broken fountain in the garden of their youth, "dribbling water incessantly" (98), becomes a symbol of both Clarissa's and Peter's wasted potential. Preferring the illusion to reality, Peter "had never done a thing that they talked of; his whole life had been a failure" (14), while Clarissa spills her "divine vitality" (13) in an effort to create a fantasy world where she can live like a princess "surrounded by an enchanted garden" (287).

Her party, which lies at the heart of the novel, is Clarissa's "offering" (184) to life and her attempt to "kindle and illuminate" (10) the darkness which is just beyond the "few fairy lamps" (287) in the garden. Determined to make the illusion seem real, she uses her power "to combine, to create" (184) the order and permanence of "a world of her own" (116) where all could see "how unbelievable death was!" (185) But the noise and "roar of voices" (258) fails to drown out the sound of the clock striking the hours and, as the "leaden circles dissolved in the air" (281), Clarissa faces the hollowness of failure. Sensing that Peter finds her "at her worst"
(252), she is overcome with anguish aware that having once exposed herself to the heat of his scorn was to "seek pinnacles and stand drenched in fire" (252). With her "gift" rejected she realizes bitterly that, "life was that--humiliation, renunciation" (253).

However, it is through Sir William Bradshaw, the "great doctor" (278), that death finally comes to Clarissa's party. Listening to him talk about the suicide of Septimus Smith, she knows that there is something "obscurely evil" (278) about Sir William with his devotion to "Proportion" and "Conversion" (151), that makes him "capable of some indescribable outrage" (278). To Clarissa he is a reminder of the "odious Kilman" (20) who, like some spectre, wants to "stand astride us and suck up half our life-blood" (20). Despising the individual who does not conform, Dr. Bradshaw ruthlessly crushes him: "he swooped, he devoured. He shut people up" (154). Once the Bradshaws have dared "to talk of death at her party" (277), Clarissa leaves her guests and in the privacy of the little room, relives in her imagination the exciting reality of the act of death:

He had killed himself--but how? Always her body went through it, when she was told, first, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it. But why had he done it? (277)
Identifying with Septimus Smith, Clarissa Dalloway sees the wasteland of her own life reflected in the demonic landscape of his madness. Septimus, in an effort to escape the agony of memory, tries to convince himself that he feels no pain over the death of his friend, Evans, killed during the war. But as the inescapable truth threatens to plunge him "into the flames" (102) of destruction, he is shaken by "sudden thunderclaps of fear" (132), realizing that by denying reality he is guilty of "the sin for which human nature had condemned him to death; that he did not feel" (138). In his dreadful isolation, "alone, exposed on this bleak eminence" (219), Septimus is shut off from life and seems to be looking out like Clarissa from "behind a pane of glass" (219).

Terrified of exposing himself to the anguish of his feelings, Septimus loses contact with reality until it seems to him as "he looked at people outside," that they seemed happy, "but he could not taste, he could not feel" (133). In his delirium, he descends into the demonic world of the Inferno convinced that, "once you fall" (148), you become the victim of a relentless society: "They scour the desert, they fly screaming into the wilderness. The rack and the thumbscrew are applied. Human nature is remorseless" (148). Lost in this infernal region, where seas of neither fire nor water can redeem him, Septimus feels that he is the "last relic who gazed back at the inhabited regions, who lay like a drowned sailor, on the shore of the world" (140).
Having married Rezia in a moment of terror at being alone, Septimus is certain that, because of the unforgivable sin of not loving, he is now "so pocked and marked with vice that women shuddered when they saw him in the street" (138). As his feelings of guilt increase, he decides to offer his life as a sacrifice, to become "the scapegoat, the eternal sufferer" (40), in an effort to renew society. However, in his moments of clarity he sees the world as a madhouse where "brutality blared out on placards; men were trapped in mines; women burnt alive" (136), and he is suddenly aware that we are all madmen tormenting one another; "a maimed file of lunatics being exercised or displayed for the diversion of the populace" (136).

Unable to bear this vision of reality, Septimus retreats again into delusion, seeing himself as an oracle possessing all the secrets of life and, finally, becoming one with nature so that "his body was macerated until only the nerve fibres were left. It was spread like a veil upon a rock . . . The very earth thrilled beneath him. Red flowers grew through his flesh" (104). But the message he gives to society makes no more sense than the old woman babbling like "an ancient spring from the earth" (123) as if drunk with mephitic vapours. Finally, no longer able to endure a world where those who profess to be the guardians of society, like Bradshaw and Holmes, destroy rather than protect man, Septimus turns his back on "human nature . . . the repulsive brute, with blood red nostrils" (140), and
leaping through the window which has separated him from reality, he offers himself to death.

At last Clarissa understands that his death is a sacrifice of love, an offering to life. He has triumphed over the tyranny of "human cruelty" which "tears us to pieces" (212), destroying individuality and making life intolerable. To give oneself to death and become a part of the endless "ebb and flow of things" (16) she realizes, is a creative act of courage and, like her parties, an effort "to combine . . . to bring together" (185) all the rich variety of life. No longer afraid of dying, Clarissa is comforted by the sight of the old lady in the room opposite putting out the light, aware at last that "Death was a defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate . . . There was an embrace in death" (280).

Although her sacrifice is to go on living, offering her gift to others, Clarissa no longer fears "the heat of the sun" (280) and the inevitable passing of time which turns all to dust. Finally able to face the scorching light of reality without flinching, she realizes that it is the challenge of living "even one day" (15) which gives one the courage to go on with the struggle: "Kilman her enemy. That was satisfying; That was real . . . She hated her: She loved her. It was enemies one wanted, not friends" (263). In choosing to live with the knowledge of death's ultimate victory, she feels it is possible to restore order and meaning to the illusion which "obscured her own life . . . in corruption, lies, chatter" (277). As "the clock began striking"
(280), Clarissa is aware, like Septimus, that it is this acceptance of death which makes life tolerable: "She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it" (281). But she felt that she "must go back" (281) to the party, the necessary illusion which makes bearable the "long, long voyage of life" (245).

TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

Although in Mrs. Dalloway, Clarissa must "go back" to the endless creative process, in TO The Lighthouse the party is over long before the story has finished. With the unexpected death of Mrs. Ramsay, whose "gift" has seemed to offer a beacon of warmth and security for those engaged on the voyage out, the novel plunges into the darkness and confusion of the night. Having lost the glowing "torch of her beauty," \(^5\) with which "barbarity was tamed, the reign of chaos subdued" (74), Mrs. Ramsay's family and friends are no longer able to ignore the fact that life is harsh and "uncompromising" (11) and death, the ultimate victor. In an attempt to restore some direction and order to the lonely confusion of their lives, Mr. Ramsay and his two youngest children finally make the long delayed trip to the lighthouse.

Resenting their father for having imposed his will upon them and destroyed their childhood with his insatiable demands for "sympathy" (225), James and Cam feel it is too late for the expedition to have any meaning for them. Sensing their reluctance to go with him, Mr. Ramsay is suddenly enraged
that they "are not ready" (218), and for a moment wonders himself, "what's the use of going now?" (218) Left behind on the shore, the artists Lily Briscoe and Augustus Carmichael, stand on the cliffs above the sea trying to give some meaning to the quest as Mr. Ramsay and his children are "swallowed up in that blue, that distance" (284) while a "great scroll of smoke" (280) from a vanished ship "drooped like a flag mournfully in valediction" (280) above them. But even after ten years, Lily's picture is still a blur, an ambiguous "criss-cross" of lines and shadows which no one will ever bother to look at. Beside her, the inscrutable Carmichael, reconciled to the fact that all must "pass and vanish" (267), seems to be dropping "a wreath of violets and asphodels" (309) upon the earth in a silent tribute to death. 53

In her obedience to the conventions of her society which insists that, for a woman, marriage and children are the only fulfillment, Mrs. Ramsay, the mother of eight, assumes the image of a fertility goddess, relentless in her dedication to the endless process of renewal. Driven by "this mania of hers for marriage" (261) which she feels is all that gives life any possibility of permanence, Mrs. Ramsay ruthlessly manipulates the lives of those around her. Blithely disregarding their individuality, she bends and shapes people to her will as if they were inanimate patches of paint on Lily's canvas: "clods with no life in them now, yet she vowed, she would inspire them, force them to move, flow, do her bidding" (76). Seemingly unconcerned with the responsibility inherent
in her tremendous capacity to inspire others, Mrs. Ramsay holds their lives in her hands, moulding them to fit her vision as if they were merely an old pair of gloves that she wears. Lily Briscoe, disturbed by Mrs. Ramsay's insistence that "an unmarried woman missed the best in life" (77), is aware that her insatiable desire to "adroitly shape; even maliciously twist" (76) other people's lives, is "the glove's twisted finger" (78). Having "only escaped by the skin of her teeth" (262), Lily becomes somewhat hysterical at the thought of Mrs. Ramsay "presiding with immutable calm over destinies she completely failed to understand" (78).

It is with this willful lack of understanding that Mrs. Ramsay encourages Paul Rayley in his courtship of Minta Doyle, ignoring the basic incompatibility which finally turns their marriage into a disaster. Asking Minta to marry him is, for Paul, the "worst moment of his life" (118), but, ironically, he is grateful to Mrs. Ramsay for she is "the one who made him do it" (119), encouraging him to feel that he has the power to "do what ever he wanted" (119). However, as he comes out of the darkness returning to Mrs. Ramsay and the house "all lit up" (119) like the lighthouse, he seems like a moth drawn irresistibly into the fatal flame. Dazed by the "lights, lights, lights" (119), Paul ignores the "appalling experience he had been through" (118) blinded instead by his vision of the future: "his marriage, his children, his house" (118).

The "astonishing power that Mrs. Ramsay had over one" (262), like the beacon of light with its intermittent
strokes, promising safety one moment and then disappearing into the depths of the night the next, is "frightening" (152) to Lily, for she always "got her own way in the end" (152). With mixed feelings of fear and adoration, Lily watches Mrs. Ramsay "put a spell on them all" (152) until it seems she is leading them like "victims" to be sacrificed on the "altar" (152) of convention in an attempt to appease the appetite of a rapacious society.

Although Mrs. Ramsay appears driven by an insatiable need to impose a sense of order or pattern on the lives of others, "wishing to dominate, wishing to interfere, making people do what she wished" (88), whenever she allows herself to glimpse "the inadequacy of human relationships" (62) she is reminded of the ultimate futility of her efforts. Aware that even the "most perfect" marriage was "flawed" (62), her feelings are painfully ambiguous: "two emotions were called up in her, one profound--for what could be more serious than the love of man for woman, what more commanding, more impressive, bearing in its bosom the seeds of death; at the same time these lovers, these people entering into illusion, glittering eyed, must be danced around with mockery, decorated with garlands." (151).

Mrs. Ramsay's desire to create a sense of permanence is roused most deeply, however, by the need to shield her family from the harsh realities of life. Looking at her two youngest children, James and Cam, she yearns for them to remain innocent forever, "netted in their cots" (91) so that they will
never have to "grow up and lose it all" (91). In spite of her longing to protect them, Mrs. Ramsay realizes that life is a difficult and uncompromising journey we all must make alone:

She took a look at life, for she had a clear sense of it there, something real, something private, which she shared neither with her children nor with her husband. A sort of transaction went on between them, in which she was on one side, and life was on another, and she was always trying to get the better of it, as it was of her . . . but for the most part, oddly enough, she must admit that she felt this thing she called life terrible, hostile, and quick to pounce on you if you gave it a chance . . . And yet she had said to all these children, You shall go through it all . . . For that reason, knowing what was before them--love and ambition and being wretched alone in dreary places--she often had the feeling, Why must they grow up and lose it all? And then she said to herself, brandishing her sword at life, Nonsense. They will be perfectly happy. (92)

Determined to hold back the dark truth and maintain the illusion of a happy ending, Mrs. Ramsay croons a fairy-tale to James in an effort to distract him from the threatening storms which will prevent him from reaching the lighthouse after all. And yet, she is dismayed at herself for having "raised his hopes" (173), aware that he will remember his disappointment "all his life" (95). But when Cam is unable to sleep, terrified of the boar's skull which James insists on hanging on the bedroom wall, Mrs. Ramsay persists in the fantasy, transforming it with her shawl into an imaginary world of beautiful mountains and valleys where it seems possible to live happily for ever and ever. She has created a vision of an innocent garden where it is possible for Cam to take refuge from reality even on the
final trip to the lighthouse when, looking back at the land, all she can see is "a pale blue censer swinging rhythmically this way and that across her mind. It was a hanging garden; it was a valley, full of birds, and flowers, and antelopes" (303). However, Mrs. Ramsay reassures James "who could not sleep without a light" (172), that the skull is still there behind the shawl.  

To Mr. Ramsay, his wife's dishonesty is outrageous; "she flew in the face of facts, made his children hope what was utterly out of the question, in effect, told lies" (50). Insisting that his family face reality, Mr. Ramsay congratulates himself on his own integrity, feeling that, in spite of great temptation, "he was incapable of untruth" (10). Uncompromising when it comes to destroying the illusions of others, he appalls Mrs. Ramsay with his violent disregard for her desire to create a haven "immune from change" (158) for her loved ones. Having dedicated herself to hiding the "sinister" (92) aspects of life from her family, she feels that:

To pursue truth with such astonishing lack of consideration for other people's feelings, to rend the thin veils of civilisation so wantonly, so brutally, was to her so horrible an outrage of human decency that, without replying, dazed and blinded, she bent her head as if to let the pelt of jagged hail, the drench of dirty water, bespatter her unrebuked. (51)

Blithely ignoring other people's fears, Mr. Ramsay tries to convince himself that he has "courage, truth, and the power to endure" (11) life without the illusions. While he
imagines himself standing alone on "some crag of rock" (55) facing the desolate truth "of human ignorance and human fate" (69), in reality, Mr. Ramsay is aware that he has failed to do "the thing he might have done" (70). He realizes, sadly, that his daydreams are "a disguise . . . the refuge of a man afraid to own his own feelings" (70). "So brave a man in thought" but "so timid in life" (70), Mr. Ramsay craves constant reassurance and praise from his wife, wanting "to be assured of his genius, first of all, and then to be taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed, to have his senses restored to him, his barrenness made fertile" (59). Insisting that Mrs. Ramsay tell everyone else the truth, he forces her to hide it from him; to tell him stories that soothe his fears until, like James and Cam, he is "filled with her words, like a child who drops off satisfied" (60).

Exhausted by her tremendous effort to create an image of permanence and maintain the endless flow of life like a "fountain of white water" (34), Mrs. Ramsay is drained of vitality until there is "scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by" (60). But, sustained by the exquisite sense of power which accompanies the "rapture of successful creation" (61), she is willing to become life's victim, sacrificing herself on the altar of society's craving for illusion. Her dinner party, like Clarissa Dalloway's "gift," is Mrs. Ramsay's ultimate creative effort in defiance of the chaos outside. Adorned with jewels in a nightly ritual by her adoring children, she descends, glowing "like some queen
who, finding her people gathered in the hall . . . accepts their devotion and their prostration before her" (124).

As the dinner party progresses, however, she becomes aware of the essential loneliness and isolation surrounding each guest, realizing that beneath the surface, in reality life is "all in scraps and fragments" (136). Wearied with the endless burden of creation, "the whole effort of merging and flowing and creating" (126), Mrs. Ramsay is suddenly exhausted by the futility of it all, seeing that, in spite of her fondest dreams, "people soon drift apart" (133). Like a tired, old sailor, she yearns for the end of the voyage because it means that after "the ship sunk" (127), she would find "rest on the floor of the sea" (127). Appalled by this temptation to surrender to the dark waters, she struggles to stay afloat, aware, like Septimus, that in her despair she is in danger of "drowning in seas of fire" (138) and having her creation "run upon the rocks" (128).

As the party hovers on the brink of disintegration, with Mr. Ramsay unwilling in his impatience to "conceal his feelings" (145) like everyone else, Mrs. Ramsay, once again, triumphs over the darkness. Refusing to submit to the chaos which threatens to overwhelm her, she summons all her energy, fusing it into a force that, "burning and illuminating" (58), provides a sheltered haven for her guests. In the warm light of the candles it seemed that "the night was now shut off by panes of glass" (147) while everything "inside the room, seemed to be order and dry land" (147). Irresistibly drawn
into the glowing circle of light, "they were all conscious of making a party together in a hollow, on an island; had their common cause against that fluidity out there" (147).

In the centre of the table, reflected in the beautiful "yellow and purple dish of fruit" (146), Mrs. Ramsay sees an image of the fairy-tale world she created for Cam, where, "one could take one's staff and climb hills . . . and go down into valleys" (146). Soothed by its exquisite order, she sees in its glowing perfection the serenity of that happy garden of innocence and eternal youth. Although gazing in rapture at the dish of fruit "united" Augustus Carmichael and Mrs. Ramsay, "his way of looking" at its beauty is "different from hers" (146). While she is anxiously "keeping guard . . . jealously, hoping that nobody would touch it" (163), Carmichael, aware that "nothing stays" (267), "plunged in, broke off a bloom there, a tassel here, and returned, after feasting to his hive" (146). Suddenly, as "a hand reached out, took a pear, and spoilt the whole thing" (163), Mrs. Ramsay also realizes, with a pang of regret, that nothing lasts; time relentlessly destroys any assurance of permanence, "like the sea eating the ground we stand on" (69).

Feeling all of a sudden aged and defenceless, "alone in the presence of her old antagonist life" (120), she avoids her face in the mirror. Turning instead to gaze at the beams of the lighthouse, she comforts herself with the thought that within its persistent beauty and strength lies the true reflection of her own relentless determination to withstand
life's challenges: "She was stern, she was searching, she was beautiful like that light" (97). But the sound of the sea, which "like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life" (28), forces her to admit that in the darkness beyond the "pitiless" light, there is "no reason, order, justice: but suffering, death, the poor" (98).

Her determination to create the illusion of order in spite of her awareness that civilization is "a veil only thinly and precariously covering the destructive forces beneath," is at once her triumph and her treachery. In urging her husband and children to feel confident that if they "put implicit faith" (60) in the fantasy world of her imagination nothing in life can harm them, Mrs. Ramsay lies. It is Mr. Carmichael, the poet, who resists her deceit, sensing that "this desire of hers to give, to help, was vanity, for her own self-satisfaction" (65). Having dulled the humiliation of his own failure with drugs, he realizes that her opiate against the chaos is to manipulate the lives of others. Ironically, it is only when Carmichael, a creator of illusion like Mrs. Ramsay, loses "all interest in life" (289) after Andrew's death in the war, that his poetry which is "extremely impersonal" and "about death" (290), achieves success.

Having trusted her completely to "surround and protect" (60) them, the family is left dazed and bereft when Mrs. Ramsay dies "rather suddenly" (194) in the night. As she leaves them, going like Demeter, wreathed in "white flowers . . . across the fields of death" (270), the bleak winter of
reality destroys their innocence forever. In the darkness that remains, the house and garden become a wasteland, defenceless before the ravages of time and weather. Once filled with light and overflowing with gaiety and life, the house becomes an empty husk, left for ten years "like a shell on a sandhill to fill with dry salt grains now that life had left it" (208). Trying to hold back the dark "was beyond the strength of one woman" (207), and with Mrs. Ramsay's death, "the long night seemed to have set in" (208). Like the victim of some evil spell her creation is transformed into a nightmare world where "toads had nosed their way in... A thistle thrust itself between the tiles in the larder. The swallows nested in the drawing-room; the floor was strewn with straw; the plaster fell in shovelfuls; rafters were laid bare; rats carried off this and that to gnaw behind the wainscots" (207).

While outside in the darkness, the "long stroke" (200) of the lighthouse seems to be trying desperately to provide some reassurance in the "chaos and tumult of the night" (203), it cannot prevent the storms from tearing apart the "thin veils" (51) which Mrs. Ramsay has spent her life trying to weave. As the violent darkness of Prue and Andrew Ramsay's deaths overwhelm the family, it seems that with each shock "the rock was rent asunder; another fold of the shawl loosened" (200). Gone with Mrs. Ramsay is her vision, that "crystal of intensity" (199) wherein she vainly looked for some assurance that "good triumphs, happiness prevails, order rules" (199). And in its place is the realization that there is no pattern
or meaning in a world where the "dream of sharing, completing, of finding in solitude on the beach an answer, was but a reflection in a mirror" (202). With Mrs. Ramsay dead, "the mirror was broken" (202); the illusion shattered, for "directly she went a sort of disintegration set in" (168).

In the final scene of the novel, the trip to the lighthouse planned so many years before is finally undertaken. Mr. Ramsay, refusing to allow the "folds of blackness" (214) to stifle his instinct for survival, is determined to complete the voyage. In an attempt to stay "the corruption and the rot" (209) of ten years of neglect, the house is rescued just as it seems about to plunge "to the depths to lie upon the sands of oblivion" (209). But as the two old, cleaning women "bobbled and ambled, dusting, straightening" (205) like energetic gnomes trying to undo a wicked curse; accompanying the renewal of life is an ominous reminder that, within the inevitable cycle there is "a force working; something not highly conscious; something that leered, something that lurched; something not inspired to go about its work with dignified ritual or solemn chanting" (209).

For James and Cam, who no longer have any desire to go to the lighthouse, their father's insistence of reviving memories of the past is just one more instance of the "crass blindness and tyranny" (253) with which he "poisoned" their "childhood" (253). Reminded of the rage he felt as a small boy when his father's demands deprived him of his mother's attention, James is determined to resist Mr. Ramsay's "enormous
need" (225) for sympathy which had "fed on the treasure of the house, greedily, disgustingly" (261). Once again James feels that "if there had been an axe handy, a knife, or anything with a sharp point he would have seized it and struck his father through the heart" (277). No longer a child, however, James realizes that it is not his father he wants to kill, but rather that relentless "despotism" (274) which was like a "fierce sudden black-winged harpy, with its talons and its beak all cold and hard, that struck and struck at you" (273).

Forced to look at the past whether he wants to or not, James peers "into the heart of that forest where light and shade so chequer each other that all shape is distorted . . . . Everything tended to set itself in a garden where there was none of this gloom" (275). Suddenly, in the midst of this happy reflection, another image rises to the surface of the boy's mind: "it was in this world" (276) that he had seen a wagon wheel roll over "someone's foot" leaving it "purple, crushed" (275). To his son, Mr. Ramsay seems to be like that wheel, "ignorantly and innocently" (275) crushing his children's illusions, destroying "the leaves and flowers even of this happy world and making it shrivel and fall" (276).

In spite of his resentment, James recognizes that both he and his father are alike in their desperate awareness of reality, and in that "waste of snow and rock . . . there were two pairs of footprints only; his own and his father's. They alone knew each other" (274). Unable to "flick off these
grains of misery which settled on his mind one after another" (279), James is finally reconciled to the "loneliness which was for both of them the truth about things" (301). As they finally reach the lighthouse, James is at last able to accept the fact that the "silvery, misty-looking tower with the yellow eye" (276) of his childhood dreams, is really "a stark tower on a bare rock. It satisfied him. It confirmed some obscure feeling of his about his own character" (301).

But for his sister, still caught in the world of illusion, the trip to the lighthouse becomes an exciting adventure as she tells "herself a story about escaping from a sinking ship" (283). In her desire for "adventure and escape" (280) all Cam's own anguish has "streamed away" (280) and, like a child, she is confident that her father will prevent her from falling over the "precipice" or being "drowned" (304). And yet, watching him absorbed in reading his book "quite unconscious of what they thought" (302), she suddenly realizes that this was how he "escaped ... You might try to lay hands on him, but then like a bird, he spread his wings, he floated off to settle out of your reach somewhere far away from one on some desolate stump" (302). Unable to understand where her father is "leading them" (303), Cam wonders what he is looking at; "what could he see ... It was all a blur to her ... What was it he sought, so fixedly, so intently, so silently?" (307) As they finally reach the lighthouse and Mr. Ramsay springs onto the rocky shore looking, for a moment, "like a young man" (308), ironically, his children's feeling are still equivocal. To James, his
father, looking in his loneliness "like some old stone lying
on the sand" (301), seems to be saying that "'There is no God'"
(308), while to Cam he appears to be "leaping into space" (308)
as if he were divine himself.

Left behind on the cliffs watching their lonely trip
to the Lighthouse, Lily Briscoe is suddenly overwhelmed with
longing for Mrs. Ramsay: "to want and not to have--to want and
want--how that wrung the heart, and wrung it again and again!"
(266) Without her gift for creating beauty and order, her
ability to make "of the moment something permanent" (241), it
seems to Lily that there is "no safety" (268) left in life.
Having fallen victim, in spite of herself, to Mrs. Ramsay's
vision of a world where, "in the midst of chaos there was this
shape" (241), Lily is once again aware that life is "startling,
unexpected, unknown" (268). Tempted in her anguish to "acqui-
esce and resign" (214) herself to the darkness, Lily feels,
for a moment, as if she has stepped "off her strip of board
into the waters of annihilation" (269).

In spite of her sense of futility at trying to create
any pattern in life when it is apparent "how aimless it was,
how chaotic, how unreal" (219), she is, nevertheless, impressed
by Mr. Ramsay's determination to complete the voyage despite
his awareness of the "bitter waters of despair" (222) which
constantly threaten to engulf him. No longer able to see the
boat or the Lighthouse which have "melted away into a blue
haze" (308), Lily feels that, like Mr. Ramsay, after standing
"on some windy pinnacle and exposed without protection to all
the blasts of doubt" (237) she has finally glimpsed the truth which "evaded her" (287) for so long. Determined to finish her painting and "achieve that razor edge of balance between two opposite forces" (287), she realizes that it is Mr. Ramsay's vision that "she wanted" (300). However, the vision she glimpses is fragile, "as if she saw it clear for a second" (310) before it vanished. Her picture is still a blur of "greens and blues, its lines running up and across" (309), while the line she moves to the centre remains an ambiguous shadow.

Although Lily feels that "it would be hung in attics . . . it would be destroyed" (310), she has found the inspiration to finish her painting. Exhausted but relieved, she realizes that she has had her vision like Mr. Ramsay and landed: "[i]t was done; it was finished" (310). As Augustus Carmichael stands beside her on the cliff, "looking like an old pagan god" (309), it seems to Lily that he is "spreading his hands over all the weakness and suffering of mankind" (309). Resigned to the fact that "'you' and 'I' and 'she' pass and vanish; nothing stays; all changes; but not words, not paint" (267), he appears to be dropping "from his great height a wreath of violets and asphodels which, fluttering slowly, lay at length upon the earth" (309). Having "lost all interest in life" (289), it is "death" (290) that his poetry celebrates. With Mrs. Ramsay gone, and Lily's picture hopelessly "blurred" (310), the ultimate vision which "crown[s] the occasion" (309) is Augustus Carmichael's. When the "thin veils" of illusion are destroyed finally, the only reality in life is an acceptance of death; this is man's "final destiny" (309).
Published in 1937, The Years was to be Virginia Woolf's penultimate novel and one which took all her courage and determination to complete. Deeply saddened by the deaths of several close friends, especially those of Lytton Strachey and Roger Fry, she felt the "inane pointlessness" of life and, filled with despair, was overcome by "the old treadmill feeling, of going on and on and on, for no reason." But the very challenge seemed to give her the strength to fling herself, like Bernard, "unvanquished and unyielding" against death, the relentless enemy.

Determined to still the incessant pounding of the waves, she attempted to create order out of the chaos itself: "the violence and unreason crossing in the air: ourselves small; a tumult outside: something terrifying: unreason." But the incredible effort it required to struggle against the darkness plunged her into a serious breakdown and thoughts of suicide once more, bringing her nearer "the precipice to[her] own feeling since 1913." It is not surprising that the book which she created out of her feelings of "complete despair and failure," should seem to Leonard Woolf a novel of terrible sadness, where death casts its shadow over every chapter until, as Josephine Schaefer maintains, it appears that "in a very real sense, a world has died."

Superficially The Years resembles a chronicle of three generations in the Pargiter family but, in reality,
death is the central character and the novel a portrait of man's struggle to find life meaningful in spite of his tragic awareness, as Swinburne points out, that "the glass of the years is brittle where in we gaze for a span."60 In finally changing the title from "The Pargiters" to The Years, Virginia Woolf confirmed her sense of the futility of looking for any reassurance in the recurring pattern of the family. Even Eleanor Pargiter who has watched over the family like a mother from the beginning of the novel, is unable to see any order in the endless cycle and can only wonder if there is "a pattern; a theme, recurring, like music; half remembered, half foreseen?"61 The answer eludes her, but if there is some great design, who is responsible? "Who makes it? Who thinks it?" (398) The only course for the individual is to join in the endless party until, caught in the coils of the "eternal waltz" (138), he is consumed by life "like a serpent that swallowed its own tail" (138).

The Pargiter family becomes an image of a society where the young, bitter and disillusioned with the present, desperately seek for some assurance that a meaningful pattern existed in the lives of their parents and the past. As the Pargiters reminisce about their youth, however, it is apparent that "under the surface of the outward action of the novel lie the crippling horrors of the past, entombed in memory."62 There is no comfort to be found in the example of the older generation which, having failed to find the answer, is left like Eleanor with "no notion how she was going to finish her
sentence" (398). Meanwhile, time, passing like the "scourging" March wind with "its power to peel off the bark, the bloom, and show the bare bone" (157), relentlessly destroys the present.

In the last chapter, "Present Day," the family finally gathers together at Delia's party, but no real feeling of communication develops. Instead, reflected in each of their lives is the increasing sterility and isolation of modern society where, doomed like Antigone to a living death, they must continue the dance "gyrating in time to the tune . . . as if some animal were dying in a slow but exquisite anguish" (414). But it is Peggy and North, Morris Pargiter's children, no longer friends now that they are adults, who most symbolize the hostility of the younger generation trapped in a modern wasteland, endlessly "toiling, grinding, in the heart of darkness, in the depths of the night" (418). To Peggy it seems utterly futile to look for happiness in a world bursting with misery. On every placard at every street corner was Death; or worse--tyranny; brutality; torture; the fall of civilization; the end of freedom" (418). With the promise of youth revealed as an illusion, the garden becomes a "Hell" surrounded by "those fantastic laughers, the many-clawed gargoyles" (50) who watch with amused indifference mankind "sheltering under a leaf, which will be destroyed" (418). North, recently returned from the African jungle, is equally pessimistic about the darkness of modern life. He realizes sadly that it is hopeless to look for "what he longed for--assurance, certainty" (409), from either family or friends. In a society
where "we are all deformed" (409) there is no way we can help each other. Instead, by making "idols of other people" (410) and giving them "the power to lead us" (410), we merely "add to the deformity, and stoop ourselves" (410).

This image of the individual, mutilated and entombed by society, condemned by birth to a living death, is central to the novel and apparent from the first chapter where the Victorian household of the Pargiters is enveloped in an atmosphere of illness, deceit and death. As the family waits impatiently for their mother to die, Colonel Pargiter, outwardly a concerned and dutiful husband and father, is secretly maintaining a mistress in another part of the city. Ironically, after his death, it is the image of their father's mutilated hand with its "shiny knobs" like "the claw of some aged bird" (12) that his children recall. While their home, Abercorn Terrace, is remembered as a "Hell" (450), a place of confinement which stifled their youthful dreams.

Delia feels particularly resentful as she waits, trapped in "some borderland between life and death" (25), for her mother to die so that she, herself, can begin to live. In her frustration it seems to Delia that her mother, "soft, decayed but everlasting" (22), is deliberately destroying her dreams by staying alive, "lying in the cleft of the pillows, an obstacle, a prevention, an impediment to all life" (22). While Milly, jealous of her sister, feels it is her father who leaves her neglected and "snubbed" (13), as if she were
"a mousy, downtrodden, inefficient little chit, compared with Delia, who always gets her way" (13).

With the rest of the family preoccupied with their own concerns, Rose, the youngest child, ventures out into the forbidden night alone. Filled with childish dreams of the quest as she runs up the street to Lamley's store, she imagines that she is "'Pargiter of Pargiter's Horse . . . galloping across the desert'" (27) to the relief of besieged garrisons. But the glowing street lamp offers no reassurance or protection, revealing instead, the "horrid face: white, peeled, pock-marked" (25) of real danger and evil in the outside world. Although she manages to elude the "leering" (28) pervert and return home, the little girl discovers that the terrors of the darkness remain as her dreams become filled with menacing nightmares where she is "alone with something horrible . . . shuffling in the passage" (41). Meanwhile, her brother, Martin, who has quarreled with Rose, forcing her to go off alone, sits sulking in his room wrestling with ghosts of his own. Enraged by his father's domination and lack of real interest in him, Martin remembers his childhood all his life and how, like Delia, he "hated it too" (450).

Yet it is Eleanor, the eldest daughter, who is victimized most by the home. Assuming the responsibility of caring for the family now that their mother is dying, she unselfishly devotes herself to becoming "the soother, the maker-up of quarrels" (13). Saddened by the dissatisfaction and unhappiness of the others, she is especially distressed
by her favourite brother, Morris, who is already "losing his boyish look" (33) through his "dreary work" in the "vast funereal mass" (115) of the Law Courts. Unable to share their dreams as they did when young, Eleanor realizes sadly that now they "always talked about facts--little facts" (35). Disturbed by his reserve, she remembers Morris as a child "silently bolting his food with nobody making a fuss of him" (34) when his brother Edward brought home all the prizes from school. Suddenly wearied by the endless demands of the family, Eleanor feels crushed by her responsibilities as if "a weight seemed to descend on her . . . . She seemed to be alone in the midst of nothingness; yet must descend, must carry her burden" (44).

The innocence of childhood blighted by a careless adult world is particularly obvious in the lives of Sara and Maggie Pargiter, cousins of the family at Abercorn Terrace. Left in poverty by the sudden deaths of their parents, the two young women are forced to sell their home and move to a tiny flat on a "depressing little street" (185). It is Sara who is most twisted by life. Slightly crippled when her father dropped her as a baby, she tries to ignore the ugly realities of life, living instead in a world of her imagination, "'singing her little song'" (399). Resenting her father for monopolizing her mother's attention, however, Sara can still picture him "pirouetting up and down with his sword between his legs" (154), a tyrant who has deprived her of the chance to live as surely as Creon deprives Antigone. Feeling that she has "no life of her own" (399) left, Sara neglects
herself, staying in a "cheap lodginghouse" (338) on a "dirty . . . sordid" (334) street and wearing tattered clothes until she resembles "an old woman worn out by a life of childbirth, debauchery and crime" (203).

Whenever she stops weaving her dreams or singing her little songs, she realizes bitterly that in this modern wasteland they are all condemned to a living death, buried alive like Antigone in "this cave, this little antre, scooped out of mud and dung" (203). To Maggie it suddenly seems that this dark vision of life is true; "they were nasty little creatures, driven by uncontrollable lusts. The night was full of roaring and cursing; of violence and unrest" (203). Perhaps, as Sara maintains, it is better to "bring up your children on a desert island" (205) or "have none" (205) at all, rather than subject them to the "awful lives children live" (171). For in reality, family life is "abominable" (239) because "we're all afraid of each other . . . of criticism; of laughter, of people who think differently" (447).

Ironically, it is Delia, "ravaged" (380) by the past, who gathers the family together in the 'Present Day', last chapter. However, her party does not resemble Clarissa Dalloway's carefully created "offering"; rather it remains a fragmented and chaotic mixture of people who fail to communicate in the confusion and "babble of voices" (377). For the younger generation of Pargiters, particularly Peggy and
North, it is merely a family obligation which they feel they "must" (376) attend. Peggy, drawn, in spite of her reluctance, by the faint hope that through "sharing things" (379) the pain will lessen, tries unsuccessfully to get her aunt Eleanor to talk about the past: "It was so interesting; so safe; so unreal--that past of the eighties; and to her so beautiful in its unreality" (358).

Eleanor, who has watched them all grow up, refuses to dwell on the past and the burdens which "suppressed" (361) her, preferring to confront "the present" (361) where, as she tells her niece, "'your lives are much more interesting than ours were'" (358). But for Peggy the past seems to hold the only reassurance that life, which as a doctor she is dedicated to preserving, is not utterly futile. Bitter about the death of her favourite brother in the war, she feels "plated, coated over with some cold skin" (377) while she watches the other guests pretending to enjoy themselves, "making believe ... that something pleasant is about to happen" (378). Unable, like Septimus, to endure the anguish of caring so much, Peggy cynically prescribes a remedy for herself to dull the feeling: "Take notes and the pain goes" (378).

Looking at the other members of the family, Peggy realizes that they are all taking part in a "farce" (380) where, in order to maintain the illusion, it is essential "to smile, to bend, to make believe you're amused when you're bored" (382). This is the terrible reality of life she feels, that "pain must outbalance pleasure by two parts to one ...
in all social relations" (381). Watching her aunt Delia, the fiery supporter of "Parnell" and "The Cause" (384), Peggy finds it impossible to believe that she was ever "once in love" (383) with the "battered" (381) looking Patrick who resembles a "faded snapshot" (380) of the past, or that her uncle Martin in his desperate pursuit of "one love after another love--his gallant clutch upon the flying tail, the slippery tail of youth" (384), has succeeded in forgetting his "dread of cancer" (385) and his terrible fear of death.

As she looks at them all going "round and round . . . in a circle" (387), Peggy is aware of the futility of their struggle for "they could only go back and repeat the same thing over again" (387). Certain that "nothing she did mattered" (388), Peggy realizes it is useless to keep on trying to find any meaning in a world where man endlessly repeats the pattern, trapped beneath an "inscrutable, eternal, indifferent" (388) sky in which the stars glitter above like "little bits of frosty steel" (388). The only way to endure the pain is "not to live; not to feel" (382), for "thinking was a torment; why not give up thinking and drift and dream" (419) rather than care about people "who had not even the courage to be themselves, but must dress up, imitate, pretend" (419).

Aware that his sister disapproves of him, North has a "vague feeling of hostility toward her" (425) as well. "She seemed to him bitter, disillusioned, and very critical of everyone, especially of himself" (425). Once he had read her his
poetry and they had shared their dreams for the future, but no longer able to communicate with each other, they must "fall back on childish slang, on childish memories, to cover their distance, their hostility" (426). This sense of isolation, of being an "outsider" (435) leaves North feeling he is still "in the middle of the dark forest" (446) although Africa is far behind him. Surrounded by his family, he has "never felt so lonely" (435) and longs to escape from a world where "human beings reject one" (435) and return to impersonal nature.

Failing to find any reassurance in the lives of the older generation, North, like Peggy, is dismayed by the "contamination of family life" (407) he sees reflected in them. Particularly horrifying to him are his aunt Milly and her husband who have become so swollen with their possessions, so "gross, obese, shapeless" (409), that they no longer seem human but, instead, "a parody, a travesty, an excrescence that had overgrown the form within" (409). Turning with relief to his favourite cousin, Maggie, North is disturbed to find that she is also caught in the coils of domesticity, appearing "glazed" and "insincere" (407) like the Gibbses. As he listens to her talking possessively about "my children" (409), North realizes that "it would be one rip down the belly; or teeth in the soft fur of the throat" (409) as she fought savagely to keep them. He feels this is the destructive "conspiracy" (407) of love, "this is the steamroller that smooths, obliterates; rounds into identity; rolls into balls" (407). People are not interested in others, "only in
their own; their own property; their own flesh and blood, which they would protect with the unsheathed claws of the primeval swamp" (408).

Repelled by this vision of domestic life where even Maggie seems "deformed" (409), North tries to talk to his uncle Edward, the scholar, certain that there is "something behind that mask . . . something that's kept him clear of this muddle. The Past? Poetry?" (440) But there is nothing beneath the cool, detached exterior, because in shutting out life, Edward has become an empty husk resembling an "insect whose body has been eaten out, leaving only the wings and the shell" (437). North realizes that no answers are to be found in the cold and sterile isolation where Edward selfishly hoards his treasures like "a priest, a mystery monger . . . this guardian of beautiful words" (441). Able only to translate the thoughts of others rather than create himself, there is "something final" about Edward, "something sealed up, stated" (439).

Peggy and North, unable to find any promise of happiness reflected in the lives of the Pargiters, are forced to accept the bitter truth that, as "the younger generation following in the wake of the old" (425), they are doomed to repeat the past. United, in spite of themselves, by their feelings of despair, the brother and sister gaze in horror at this fatal image which shatters their dream of meaningful life; "it was over, it was destroyed . . . directly something got together, it broke" (423).
Eleanor seems to be the only one who offers them any reassurance that there is wholeness and meaning at the centre of life. A symbol of continuity throughout the novel, she becomes the central mother-image of the Pargiter family around whom the others radiate. However, although she appears "a fine old prophetess" (352) to Peggy, for Eleanor, herself, life is still an unfathomable mystery: "How did they compose what people called a life . . . Perhaps there's 'I' at the middle of it, she thought; a knot; a centre" (395). Completely unselfconscious, she ignores the reflection of herself in the glass unwilling to look back over "the long strip" that "lay behind her" (395), or worry about the future. It is "the present moment" (395) that engages her; caught up in the exciting daily struggle, "here she was alive, now" (395).

Determined after her father's death "to be quit" (233) at last of the burdens of the past, Eleanor sells Abercorn Terrace, the family home. She is delighted to be free but for Crosby, forced to leave the Pargiter's after forty years of service, it is "the end of everything" (232) that has filled her world with meaning. Watching her as she leaves his flat "like a frightened little animal peering around her before she ventured to brave the dangers of the street" (240), Martin is appalled by the tyranny and deceit of the home. Seeming to offer love and security, instead "it was an abominable system, he thought; family life; Abercorn Terrace . . . there all those different people had lived, boxed up together, telling lies" (239).
Ironically, Eleanor, who has cast off the past and sentenced Crosby to the loneliness and isolation of "solitary confinement, the greatest torture we inflict" (333), seems to Peggy "as if she still believed with passion—she, old Eleanor—in the things that man had destroyed. A wonderful generation" (357). Drifting off to sleep during the party, Eleanor's memories of the past mingle with the present and she is suddenly bewildered by the endlessly recurring pattern; "where was she? In what room? In which of innumerable rooms? Always there were rooms; always there were people: Always from the beginning of time" (460).

Although grateful to be alive, she feels certain there must be another chance at life: "not in dreams; but here and now, in this room, with living people. She felt as if she were standing on a precipice with her hair blown back; she was about to grasp something that evaded her. There must be another life... this is too short, too broken" (461). But for a moment as Eleanor looks at her family sitting with "their heads in a circle" (460), she is unable to recognize them with the "curious pallor on all their faces" (260) which the morning light has cast. Suddenly it seems futile to try to hold it all together or understand what life means when "we know nothing about ourselves" (461). In spite of her courage and determination to live, Eleanor realizes "It's useless... It must drop. It must fall. And then?... for her too there would be the endless night; the endless dark" (462).
Trying to ignore this vision where "she saw opening in front of her a very long dark tunnel" (462), Eleanor watches a young couple in the street below. Standing "for a moment on the threshold" (469) of life as the dawn rises, they seem to contain the promise of the regenerative power of love. But the image of the couple is reminiscent of a disturbing and crucial scene early in the novel where Sara Pargiter sits alone in the darkness of her room looking across her "empty and silent" (143) garden at the party next door. Kept awake by the music she peeks through the window at a couple standing below. Unable to hear their conversation she watches the "black-and-white figures" (143) strolling in the moonlight and, like Eleanor, imagines them talking of love.

Excited by the possibilities of life she sees mirrored in her fantasies, Sara feels like a great, vibrant tree reaching for the sunlight with its leafy branches while its huge roots spread down into the earth. But as she glimpses the tree in the garden, she realizes, with a shock of disillusionment, that "far from being dappled with sunlight, it had no leaves at all. She felt for a moment she had been contradicted. For the tree was black, dead black" (142). Startled out of her dream, Sara no longer finds the music exciting, instead it becomes a "boring and finally intolerable" (144) intrusion, as it repeats "the same rhythm again and again" (143).

With the destruction of her illusions, the moonlit garden becomes a cold and sterile wasteland where amid the "white trees" and "icy hollows" (143) the couple seem to be
hopelessly "calling each other across the valleys" (143) while the mocking music "coarsened" and "destroyed" (143) their words. As Sara watches them going up the "iron staircase" (144) back to the party, for they "scarcely knew each other" (143), she sees in the iron railings, the barriers which separate us all in our search for love. When the young man stoops to pick, not a flower, but a piece of glass from the ground, it seems to Sara that it is really "a fragment of [his] heart" (144) he offers the girl. Bitterly she realizes that what remains of our "wasted youth" (145) when the illusion shatters, is "this broken glass, this faded heart" (145).

Turning from the desolation of the garden, Sara glances through "the litter of broken words" (145) of The Antigone. But reflected in the violence of the play she sees again the dreadful image of life where the individual, condemned to a living death by society, remains like "the unburied body of a murdered man . . . like a fallen tree-trunk, like a statue, with one foot stark in the air" (145). As the laughter of the party mingles with the words of the play, it seems to Sara, finally drifting off to sleep beneath the "cold smooth sheets" (146), that "her body dropped suddenly; then reached ground. A dark wing brushed her mind, leaving a pause; a blank space" (146).

Like Eleanor, Sara is aware that it is death that waits in the dark void at the end of the "tunnel" (462), while the journey, itself, forces the individual into an ever
increasing sense of fear and isolation unable to see any reason for living reflected in either the past or the present. As Delia's party ends, the "old brothers and sisters" (467), standing amid the remnants, "the smeared plates, and the empty wine-glasses; the petals and the bread crumbs" (466), like lifeless relics themselves, look "as if they [are] carved in stone" (467). None of them understands one word of the strange song sung by the little children from the basement. Listening, "it was impossible to find one word for the whole" (465) as the children, looking so "dignified" (465) yet crying with the "shrill . . . discordant" (464) voice of youth, made such a "hideous noise" (465) that "the grown-up people did not know whether to laugh or cry" (464).

Although "nobody wants to listen" (454), Nicholas tries to sum it all up, to give a "peroration" (466) to the party, but he can find nothing to say except that the "dawn" (465) has arrived again. As the other guests echo his words it sounds like an incantation used to ward off the terrors of the night. While the flowers which Maggie has gleaned from the wreckage of the party seem a reminder of the fields of death where "pink, yellow, white with violet shadows . . . They fall and fall and cover all" (457). As she offers them to Eleanor the fatal image rises of the old flower seller with her faded violets and mutilated face "seamed with white patches" and with "red rims for nostrils" (253). For implicit in the birth of a new day is the inevitable darkness of the night as the pattern repeats itself. Looking at the young
couple on "the threshold" (469) of their lives, Eleanor realizes there is no answer to her "And now?" (469) other than to accept the endless process of birth and death while, "slowly wheeling, like the rays of a searchlight, the days, the weeks, the years passed one after another across the sky" (2).
CHAPTER III

BITTER WATERS OF DESPAIR: THE THREE-FOLDED MIRROR

In *Between the Acts* Virginia Woolf's final and most profound novel, according to Northrop Frye, the images of violence well up as if from the layers of mud at the bottom of the cesspool to spread in ever-widening circles, pulling each one of the characters relentlessly into the vortex of loneliness and isolation. The voyage out in search of the self, failing to reach the shores of understanding and acceptance, becomes instead, an endless spiral of senseless repetition. The demonic wasteland of man's dreams lies at the centre of the novel flooding it with images of imprisonment, torture and destructive passion. In this world of bondage and pain the individual sees his suffering reflected in nature where, like an ouroboros coiled in an orgy of self-destruction, there is "life, life, life, without measure, without stop devouring the tree."64

Held in the "bitter glass" of this novel is the fatal image of an existence where the innocence of childhood is destroyed so that the world becomes a "dirty" (90) place, and where adults, bound in chains of their own forging, are forced, like Prometheus, to behold the unending pageant of life between the acts of birth and death. Failing to find some consolation in either blind faith or the cold "caves"
(240) of reason, all that remains for the individual is to attempt to create the illusion of order. However, unable to remain "skimming the surface" (237) indefinitely, he plunges through the murky depths to confront the darkness of the mud beneath. As the thin veils of imagination are torn apart they reveal that the harsh reality of life is death. The inescapable truth that is reflected in the glass "the demons hold," is ourselves, not whole but separate and in fragments.

From the opening line in the novel, the cesspool becomes an image of that mirror in which society, like Narcissus, cannot resist its reflection. Water, instead of being a source of life, "a beaker surrounded by walls of shining glass" (82) becomes a "tangle of dirty duckweed" (10) dragging the unwary swimmer to the bottom to die. "Pointz Hall," the original name of the novel, extends this image of the pool as a mirror reflecting life. Built "in a hollow, facing north" (12) and exposed to the damp rains in winter, the house becomes choked with "dead leaves" (12) like the cesspool, and separated by "a sea of mud" (12), from the world outside. Reflected in these opaque waters is a three-fold vision of life where the individual, society and nature mirror each other in ever-diminishing circles, until, at the centre, "the barriers which should divide Man the Master from the Brute were dissolved" (215). It is here, in the mud beneath, where illusion fails that man must face the darkness in himself and "either be reborn or finally die."65
This cyclical movement in the novel where the innocence of childhood, which seems so secure "isolated on its green island" (20), passes through the dark wood where the "bitter herb" (243) of experience grows, is seen in the lives of the Oliver family of Pointz Hall and their guests at the pageant. It is apparent, however, that although its serenity soothes the terrors of the outside world, the nursery is only a temporary refuge. In spite of the temptation, it is impossible to remain there and live. When curiosity about life entices the individual into leaving the security of the room, the world outside exacts a terrible price. With knowledge comes the awareness that life, with its bitter disillusionment, is a journey man makes alone and in fear to the grave. Beneath its blushing promise, the fruit the great tree bears is "hard as stone" (182), and in the garden below the nursery window "no words grow . . . nor roses either" (243).

To William Dodge, as he tours the house with Bart Oliver's sister, Lucy Swithin, the children's room seems so safe from the cares and fret of living. However, as he looks in, he becomes aware that the children are gone and that the cot is "empty" (88). It seems to him as if the room is "like a ship deserted by its crew" (88) and only the remnants of life, the toys, damp clothes and pictures, and the warm, sweet smell of biscuits and milk, remain like ghostly skeletons. Through the open door there comes an ominous "rushing sound" (88) from the world outside threatening to chill the "warm water" (88) of innocence. For in the real world,
fairy-tales where children get their wishes and horses and dogs remain "Good Friends" (88), have horrible, unhappy endings.

But for the present, her children seem so protected to Isa Oliver as she waves to them from her window above the garden. Blowing them kisses which they do not see, she comforts herself with the thought that they are safely absorbed in a different world; "isolated on a green island, hedged about with snowdrops, laid with a counterpane of puckered silk" (20). And yet, her little son, George, already "lagged behind" (20) anxious to explore the mystery of life at the roots of the great tree. In his eagerness to know the glowing flower he tears it "membrane after membrane" (16) until "it blazed a soft yellow, lambent light under a film of velvet" (16). Like the lighthouse, it fills his world with meaning for a moment as, "all the inner darkness became a hall, leaf smelling, earth smelling of yellow light" (17). For an instant, it seems as if he holds in his hands "the flower complete" (17), when suddenly, the tranquility of the garden is destroyed by the "roar" and "hot breath" of "a peaked eyeless monster moving on legs, brandishing arms" (17).

As George's fantasy world crumbles around him the "monster" turns into his Grandfather, Giles Oliver, lurking behind the tree with his "familiar spirit" (18), Sohrab, the Afghan hound. Gone is the picture of the Newfoundland dog, the "Good Friend" of the nursery, and in its place is reality
with its "hairy flanks . . . sucked in and out" and "a blob of foam on its nostrils" (18).

In the same manner that he "destroyed the little boy's world" (236), Bart Oliver refuses to let his sister, Lucy, take refuge in her memories of childhood. Shattering her daydreams, he reminds her of the realities of that "very different world" (14) where her mother so often scolded her in that very room. Forced to acknowledge the ugliness of the past, she recalls going fishing as a child and her brother growling at her to take the fish off the hook herself. "The blood had shocked her" (28) and she remembers crying, "for the gills were full of blood" (28). Trying to dispel these ghosts rising up in the meadows of her memory, Lucy hums "an old child's nursery rhyme used to help a child" (87) as she shows William Dodge the bedroom where she was born. Suddenly, sensing that she will understand and craving her sympathy, Dodge has the urge to "kneel before her, to kiss her hand" (90) and share the horrors of his childhood with her. He yearns to tell her how, despised for being homosexual, he was tormented at school and held "under a bucket of dirty water" so that when he "looked up, the world was a dirty place" (90), and he saw himself "a flickering, mind-divided little snake in the grass" (90).

This image in the novel of the world of experience as a contagion staining the innocence of childhood is seen in the lives of all the major characters and in the acts of the pageant itself, where youth is exposed to the rapacious greed
of society. Unable or unwilling to discern the difference between illusion and reality, the individual becomes a victim of his fantasies like the young girl who "had gone skylarking with the troopers. She had screamed. She had hit him . . . What then?" (253). As the demonic vision of the wasteland pervades the novel, there is an increasing sense of the futility of the quest. When dreams of the past become a mockery, and attempts to find some reassurance reflected in art or nature fail, then each member of the audience is left to face the inescapable truth, the image of ourselves as we are, "orts, scraps and fragments" (225), alone in the approaching darkness.

However, of all the characters in the novel, Lucy Swithin is most successful in maintaining the fabric of illusion. To Isa, the old lady's courage in the face of her brother's relentless attacks on "her faith" (31) is astonishing; "What an angel she was—the old woman! Thus to salute the children; to beat up against those immensities and the old man's irreverences her skinny hands, her laughing eyes!" (31). With her gaze fixed on some unseen God, Lucy drifts in the misty world of her imagination dreaming about the past. Nicknamed "Old Flimsy" (35), she seems to be out of touch with the flow of life, suspended as if "between two fluidities, caressing her cross" (239), while above her "the air rushed" and "beneath was water" (239). Temporarily protected from reality as she reads her favourite book, "The Outline of History," the world of "heaving, surging, slowly writhing" (13)
monsters appears safely immersed in the swamps of the past. Whenever she lays the book aside, however, they suddenly loom before her startled eyes and, as if awakened by a nightmare, she is unable to distinguish the maid with her tray from a "leather-covered grunting monster" (14) which seems about to "demolish a whole tree in the green steaming undergrowth of the primeval forest" (14).

Like a child herself, Lucy is filled with a tender concern for the helplessness of children, waving to them as they play or peeking in on them while they sleep. It is this awareness of the hurt child in William Dodge which prompts her to take him away from the pain and humiliation of Giles's scorn to the tranquility of the nursery. Yet, when they reach the top of the stairs, she seems suddenly "old and frail" (86) to William, as if after "the stairs" and "the heat" (86) of the journey, the truth overwhelms her; "I was born. In this bed" (86). Dismayed by the terrible reality of birth, she "sank down on the edge of the bed" (86), like a child, "swinging her little legs" (86) while she sings a nursery rhyme to drive the bad dreams away.

It is her brother, Bart, who forces Lucy to face the facts. Respecting his unswerving devotion to logic, she is still torn by the feelings of love and fear that he aroused in her as a child. Seeking to protect her belief in an essential beauty and goodness ordering life, she tries to ignore his voice of reason accusing her of "superstition" (33), as he "once more struck a blow at her faith" (33). In her
effort to protect "her private vision" (240), she seems "virginal" (241) to William Dodge, as if, untouched by the reality of the pageant, she is still playing the role of "a girl in a garden in white, among roses . . . an unacted part" (241). It is only when her brother, who lies "in the depths of her lily pool" (241), rises to the surface forcing her to look at the "grey waters" (240), that she is unable to ignore "the battle in the mud" (237) beneath.

Although their affection for each other remains, brother and sister live in totally different worlds of the imagination, for "what she saw he didn't; what he saw she didn't--and so on, ad infinitum" (33). Impatient with Lucy's distracted gaze, Bart finds her refusal to accept reality mystifying and unforgiveable, feeling that by "skimming the surface" (237) of life, her religion had made her "imperceptive" (237). Determined to "carry the torch of reason till it went out in the darkness of the cave" (240), Bart is unable to believe that Lucy has ever really been married or had children of her own. Failing to find a logical explanation for the mystery, he begins to identify her with the elusive swallows she loves and which return, year after year, to Pointz Hall only to disappear "when winter storms wept its damp upon the panes" (17). As if seeking some kind of answer he keeps repeating the lines: "O sister swallow, O sister swallow, /How can thy heart be full of the spring?" (137), until the tragic image of Philomela descends like the swallows themselves in the gathering darkness of evening.66
This sense of the destructive relationship between parent and child when the world of experience shatters the illusions of innocence, is reinforced as the image of the Afghan hound, Sohrab, old Bart's "familiar spirit" (138), becomes intertwined with the legend of Rustum. The dog, refusing all "ties of domesticity" (25), epitomizes untamed youth rebelling against the restrictions of a society which insists on conformity. While the old man sympathizes with his dog's desire for freedom; his "veins swelled with rage" (238) at the thought of its being chained, still he relentlessly imposes his will on the "wild beast" (18) so that, "as he cringed at the old man's feet, a string was slipped over his collar; the noose that old Oliver always carried with him" (18). Like his sister Lucy, Bart has dreams of the past and himself as a young soldier in India. However, even in his dreams he is unable to ignore the reality of life and it is as if he sees himself "in a glass, its lustre spotted" (24). Just as Rustum in his ignorance destroyed Sohrab in the desert, so Bart feels he has failed his son. Filled with anguish at not knowing how to soothe Giles's pain it seems to him that "he could not find his son. He had lost him in the crowd" (137).

Unable to ease his son's unhappiness, the old man feels that his existence has become the wasteland of his dream where, there is "no water; and the hills like grey stuff pleated; and in the sand a hoop of ribs; a bullock maggot-eaten in the sun; and in the shadow of the rock,
savages" (24). Having spent a lifetime clinging tenaciously to the facts stored in books, he realizes that they provide cold comfort in times of sorrow and that, "compared with his son, he did not give a damn" (138) for all the reason in the world. Old and weary, his veins swollen with only a "brownish fluid now" (24), he knows that he needs the young "to continue him" (24). Although annoyed with Isa when she wakes him, "destroying his dreams of youth" (24), in reality he is grateful that, in caring, she has "persisted in stretching his thread of life so fine, so far" (24). Mrs. Manressa, that "wild child of nature" (52), also embodies for him the beauty and excitement of the past, reminding him for a moment of the sensuous "spice islands" of "his youth" (52). Overflowing with bountiful energy and self-confidence, she is like a fertility goddess possessing the power to renew his life. It seems to Bart that "she stirred the stagnant pools of his old heart even—where bones lay buried" (142).

When the pageant ends, however, he is dismayed to see that the makeup Mrs. Manressa has been putting on her face all day, now looks harsh and "plated" (236) in the "sunset light" (236). Disillusioned, he suddenly feels mutilated, as if, in destroying his vision of life, she has "ripped the rag doll and let the sawdust stream from his heart" (236) leaving him a hollow man. When the bleakness of reality becomes apparent, Bart feels terribly chilled until, with the spark of hope extinguished, "he was left with the ash grown cold and no glow, no glow on the log" (236). Alone
in the gathering darkness, he wanders through the garden pausing to stand under the great tree. It was here, he realizes, where the violets grow among its great roots, that early this morning "he had destroyed the little boy's world" (238).

Unable to protect his vision by "kneeling" like his sister Lucy, Bart Oliver is forced to face the inescapable truth that man's existence is an endless sentence where he is "Condemned in life's infernal mine, condemned in solitude to pine . . . " (138). With no real reason to struggle against the oncoming night, it is only his inherent stubbornness that forces him to go "on with the hobble, on with the limp, since the dance was over" (236).

While the old couple, admitting that "the game's over" (117), become resigned to the inevitable cycle of life, for Giles and Isa, torn between "love and hate" (252), it is still an endless journey through the wasteland of their dreams. Feeling "damnably unhappy" (205) and unable to communicate with each other, they surrender themselves to daydreams about the romantic possibilities of life. For Isa, "pegged down" (25) in a marriage that is disappointing, her fantasies about the elusive "man in grey" (115) help to heal "the rusty fester of the poisoned dart" (243) of jealousy caused by her husband's "infidelities" (132). Giles Oliver, seeing his own sense of failure reflected in Isa's scorn, basks like "a little boy" (133) in the glowing admiration of Mrs. Manressa.
Having out of necessity become a stockbroker in the city, when he would have preferred being "a gentleman farmer" (9), like Rupert Haines, Giles feels entangled by convention just as Isa does. Like an ailing Fisher King, he sees life as an affliction which he is impotent to cure. Without freedom of choice, he realizes that "the conglomeration of things pressed you flat; held you fast, like a fish in water" (59). No longer free to stand casting with "the stream rushing between his legs" (60), he feels, in his helpless frustration, that he is the one caught fast, twisting desperately on the end of the line.

Haunted by the "ghost of convention" (58) which rises to the surface before his horrified gaze, Giles sinks into a nightmare world, where even words "ceased to lie flat in the sentence. They rose, became menacing and shook their fists at you. This afternoon he wasn't Giles Oliver come to see the villagers act their annual pageant; manacled to a rock he was, and forced passively to behold indescribable horror" (74). Disgusted at his inability to act, to be part of the real world which is "bristling with guns, poised with planes" (66), Giles can barely contain "his impatience with the old fogies" (66) he blames for his failure. Ashamed of himself as a man, he projects his disgust onto William Dodge whose homosexuality he instinctively senses. Enslaved by the conventions he despises, Giles feels that Dodge is unnatural, "not a downright plain man of his senses" (75) and is not fit to be mentioned "in public" (75).
Unable to contain his rage any longer, Giles, like a sulky little boy, reverts to the childhood game of "stone-kicking" (118). As he kicks the "barbaric stone" (118) which looks "as if cut by a savage for an arrow" (118), the game takes on the ominous overtones of a ritual sacrifice in which he becomes the victim of his own cowardice and impotence.

Reaching the gate that seems to be locking him in, Giles discovers a snake and a toad linked in a terrible life and death struggle. "There, couched in the grass, curled in an olive green ring, was a snake. Dead? No, choked with a toad in its mouth. The snake was unable to swallow; the toad was unable to die. A spasm made the ribs contract; blood oozed. It was birth the wrong way round--a monstrous inversion" (119). Appalled at the sight of this self-destruction in nature, Giles is shocked into acting at last and "raising his foot, he stamped on them. The mass crushed and slithered. The white canvas on his tennis shoes was bloodstained and sticky. But it was action. Action relieved him" (119).

To the romantic child in Mrs. Manressa, anxious to sample all the sensations that life has to offer, his action seems heroic. She sees Giles as a slayer of dragons, bringing trophies to lay at her feet. However, to his wife, tired of his sulking rages, his "little tricks" (133) are no longer admirable. For Isa he has become nothing more than "a silly little boy, with blood on his boots" (133). She has to keep reminding herself that he is "the father of my children" (19) in an effort to bridge the awful chasms of misunderstanding.
between them, where according to him, "it made no difference; his infidelity--but hers did" (132).

As Isa's feelings of loneliness and despair increase so do the images of imprisonment and suffering. Caught in a marriage which is no longer satisfying, she feels bound "like a captive balloon, by a myriad of hair-thin ties into domesticity" (25). Sitting in the garden after lunch, day-dreaming of the past, she tries to suppress the pangs of regret which, "through the bars of the prison, through the sleep haze that deflected them" (82), were like "blunt arrows, bruising her; of love, then of hate" (82). She remembers Giles as she first saw him, fishing in Scotland, rising from the clear water of the stream like some virile and triumphant God until she was caught as irresistibly as the silver fish and pulled to shore. Yearning now, "above all things" (83), to escape the wasteland and return to the cool freedom of the stream, Isa longs for "cold water, a beaker of cold water" (83). Instead, as she glimpses her reflection in the "shining walls of glass" (82) of the "three-folded mirror" (19) in her bedroom, her romantic dreams become clouded by the filthy water of the cesspool. Trapped like the mysterious Rupert Haines, his "ravaged face" (9) an image of his suffering, Isa feels tangled in the "dirty duck weed" (10), weighed down by the rules of convention until her "desire petered out, suppressed by the leaden duty she owed to others" (83).

Recognizing with infinite weariness the dreadful price of losing her illusions, Isa sees ahead the barren
wastes through which she is doomed to wander; a place "Where
the eyeless wind blows. And there grows nothing for the eye.
No rose. To issue where? In some harvestless dim field where
no evening lets fall her mantle; nor sun rises" (181). She
realizes that to have to remain chained to the endless wheel
of life, tormented by "memories" and "possessions" (182), is
"the burden . . . laid on me in the cradle" (182). The only
escape is to surrender to the "eyeless dark" (Myl3) that
leads eventually to the peace of the grave: "all's equal there.
Unblowing, ungrowing are the roses there. Change is not"
(181). Only death itself can end the lonely journey, "not the
frantic cries of leaders who in that they seek to lead desert
us" (183). For Isa the vision of heaven that she kneels to
in private is "a stone blue sky" where in the flash of "lightn-
ing . . . the thongs are burst that the dead tied" (183).

Left to patter her life out in Pointz Hall like the
butterfly on the window pane, Isa gazes at the old pear tree
in the garden doomed to send its great roots ever deeper in
an endless search for water. Bearing "hard," bitter fruit,
it becomes for Isa a symbol of her futile life; longing for
death, she seems a "withered tree that sighs when the Rider
gallops" (183). Like a child she dreams of finding her
answer in the wishing well but the wish that she makes is
for death: "that the waters should cover me . . . there would
the dead leaf fall, when the leaves fall, on the water" (124).

When the rain falls during the pageant it seems to
Isa that her wish has come true. Drenched in the great drops
she feels they are tears of sorrow shed on the altar of life "for human pain unending" (211). With a sudden feeling of ecstasy, Isa longs, like Septimus, to offer herself to death, feeling it will bring relief from the anguish of living: "O that my life could here have ending . . . if so be tears could be ended" (211). But the sacrifice that she must lay down "on the altar of the rain-soaked earth" (211), is to go on living, to continue the endless journey through the desert of her dreams. Doomed to "patiently stumble" (183) under the burden of life like the "last little donkey" (182) in the caravan, she must force herself to go on: "Rise up, donkey. Go your way till your heels blister and your hoofs crack" (182). All that remains for Isa when the illusion fails is to sit "in the shell of the room" (252) and watch "the pageant fade" (252), as darkness falls.

It is only by maintaining this illusion of order that nature can induce man to go on living. Once we become aware of the truth that, in spite of our desperate struggles, "there's no retreating or advancing" (136) against the "doom of sudden death hanging over us" (136), then life becomes a hopeless "criss-cross of lines making no pattern" (136).

Appalled by the "little strip of pavement" (AWD,29) which man must travel over the abyss, Virginia Woolf felt it was the task of the artist to attempt to weave some meaning into the fabric of life. She realized once we falter and plunge to the bottom, that, faced with the reality that only bones lie in the mud beneath, we must either drown or go mad.
In Between the Acts, it is Miss La Trobe, the artist, who desperately tries to create the illusion with her annual production of the pageant at Pointz Hall. Inevitably recurring "this year, last year, next year" (240), like the seasons, "the pageant and the weather" (29) seem a part of the great design of Nature. However, when the audience, startled from its trance is made to face themselves in the last act, Miss La Trobe realizes with horror that "something was going wrong with the experiment" (209). In spite of her efforts they "were slipping the noose" (210), like the wild beast, Sohrab. Unable to hold the crowd as it disperses between the acts, she can only curse them in her frustration, for "she felt everything they felt" (209). Aware that "reality" is "too strong" (209), she is overwhelmed by the agony of failure: "Panic seized her. Blood seemed to pour from her shoes. This is death, death, death, . . . when illusion fails" (210).

In spite of her suffering, Miss La Trobe, like the Ancient Mariner, seems destined to repeat her tale to anyone who will listen, for "another play always lay behind the play she had just written" (78). Although an "outcast" (247) from society and "set apart from her kind" (247) by nature, she knows that as an artist she is destined to be "the slave of my audience" (247). However, unlike Narcissus, she is aware that to look too deeply into the reflection is to drown in it. Nevertheless, as an artist it is impossible for her to ignore the reality in the "black cushion of mud" (54) beneath the surface. Inevitably it is there that she must plunge "like
a great stone: (79), shattering the "criss-cross" of the "fine mesh" (79) whether she chooses to or not.

It is the artist who becomes the ultimate scapegoat in a society that needs its illusions in order to survive. Thus, standing against the tree in the fading light, Miss La Trobe is seen as a Christ-figure: "She had suffered triumph, humiliation, ecstasy, despair--for nothing" (245). Feeling that her gift of life is a failure, she gazes at the place among the gnarled roots where, in her agony, "her heels had ground a hole in the grass" (245). While, above her, a heedless nature continues the endless pageant; birds, in a hail of "winged stones" (245), attack the tree itself until, "bird-blackened" (245), it resembles "life, life, life, without measure, without stop devouring the tree" (245).

Although she is overwhelmed by "the horror and terror of being alone" (247), Miss La Trobe cannot resist the "voyage away from the shore" (246). Even as the "earth green waters seemed to rise over her" (246), she gazes courageously into the mysterious depths searching for those "wonderful words" (248) in the fertile mud beneath. But the terrible vision she glimpses, sitting in isolation in the ambiguous whiteness of the smoky pub, is the awful reality of man turning like Ixion on the relentless rack of life: "There was the high ground at midnight; there the rock; and two scarcely perceptible figures . . . She heard the first words" (248).
This image of the dark and rocky wasteland as the garden of man's beginning creates a feeling of desolation and the sense that if there is a God, he is remote and indifferent. Only Lucy Swithin, gazing vaguely at the "white summit of cloud" (204), seems able to gain some kind of reassurance of heaven. Although the pageant is being performed in an effort to "illuminate" the church, ironically, the Reverend Streatfield, the church's spokesman, is unable to explain the meaning of the play to the audience. Attempting to see in the pageant an affirmation of the essential unity of man and nature, he finds it impossible to avoid the image of himself and the audience, caught in the mirrors, fragmented and isolated from one another. Disconcerted by having to include the reflection of the idiot in his vision, the Reverend, at a loss for "Whom to thank?" (227), is left speechless. The majority of the spectators, failing to find the light of understanding in the church, are left wondering if there is any meaning to the pageant at all.

The Oliver family and the visitors who return each year to Pointz Hall become an image of society desperately seeking some reassurance of a meaning to be found in the drama of life. Like a congregation hoping for an answer to their prayers, they come to praise the illusion only to become its victims: "all caught and caged; prisoners; watching a spectacle" (205). With the voice of the church silent, the audience can only gaze longingly into the past as it, passes before them on the terrace of Pointz Hall.
"Against a background of sky" (93) and flanked by great trees "like pillars" (93), the pageant begins with all the music and excitement of the Elizabethan Age. But as the play unfolds, it becomes obvious that beneath all the glittering colour lies the darkness of treachery and deceit. In the increasing noise and confusion, "it didn't matter what the words were; or who sang what" (113). As the "Great Eliza" (113) and her courtiers leave the stage with "Albert the idiot playing in and out" (113) among them, it seems to the audience that only death brings peace in the struggle between love and hate as "the corpse on its bier concluding the procession, the Elizabethan age passed from the scene" (113).

Between the acts of the play, the spectators scatter like fragments of broken glass while the music seems to mourn for them in their isolation. Isa realizes sadly that, when the illusion fades: "All is over. The wave has broken. Left us stranded, high and dry. Single, separate on the shingle. Broken is the three-fold ply . . . " (115). As she hums her mournful song, it seems futile to Isa to insist on trying to repair the torn shreds of vision with "this sham lure" (116) when the result is always a failure. But for Miss La Trobe this final anguish is the price that the artist must pay to ease the pain, for "a vision imparted was relief from agony . . . for one moment . . . one moment" (117).

Gathering for the second act, the audience is lured by music which promises the merry dance of May but, as the song ends, it brings instead the ice of winter which fills
"the grate with ashes" (141) but leaves "no glow on the log" (141). Trying to ignore "the infernal, age-long and eternal order issued from on high" (142), the audience gazes eagerly into the Age of Reason, attempting to "see the hidden, join the broken" (143). However, with the assurance that "Where there's a Will there's a Way" (174), the play reveals yet another layer of the corruption at the heart of society. As the scene ends it is obvious that in spite of "all the fine words" (172), they are merely "tinsel wrapped around a Christmas cracker" (172). As the audience disperses once more, it is with the sense that it is all an illusion after all: "There's no trusting man nor woman; nor fine speeches; nor fine looks. Off comes the sheep's skin; out creeps the serpent" (172).

While the artist, Miss La Trobe, works feverishly to hold the crowd lest they slip through her fingers, Lucy Swithin is shaken by this vision of the past. Trying to comfort herself with thoughts of "her childhood" for a moment, she "then gave it up" (178), losing her sense of any purpose in "this daily round; this going up and down stairs" (179). Suddenly "old-aged" (179) again, she is unable to find any meaning in the past and gazes desperately at Miss La Trobe for help. "Their eyes met in a common effort to bring a common meaning to birth. They failed" (179). Art has helped Lucy only to realize how insignificant her life has been and "what a small part I've
had to play'" (179). Suddenly her dreams rescue her once more and she feels, "'I could have played . . . Cleopatra!'" (179)

With the irresistible magic of an alchemist "who seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron" (180), Miss La Trobe gathers her audience with the promise of "a recreated world" (180). Gratefully they return to the dimly remembered peace and security of the Victorian age where the home was a shrine with convention as its God. However, as the scene slowly unfolds, it becomes apparent that the price of this order is the death of the individual, because the "ruler of an Empire must keep his eye on the cot; spy too in the kitchen; drawing room; library; wherever one or two, me and you, come together" (190). And should anyone dare to oppose authority or go against convention: "Let 'em sweat at the mines; cough at the looms; rightly endure their lot" (191). With their nostalgic memory of the past destroyed, the audience is unable to ignore the reality of the decay which festers beneath civilization. The play has revealed the very heart of society, the home, to be "unhygienic" (202) like "a bit of meat gone sour" (202), and they are suddenly able to glimpse, "through the golden glory perhaps a crack in the boiler; perhaps a hole in the carpet" (230).

Nature, as if appalled at providing the setting for a world "filled with dumb yearning" (165), seems for a moment to take a part in the play. While the artistic vision falters, a great storm cloud gathers unnoticed above them. Suddenly, "[t]here it was, black, swollen, on top of them."
Down it poured like all the people in the world weeping. "Tears, Tears, Tears" (210).

Finally forced to gaze into the sorrowful depths, the audience sees themselves, the final act reflected in the cruel glass. They squirm and twist in an effort to avoid the "distorting and upsetting" (214) reflection, while the children, like malicious "imps—elves—demons" (214), hold aloft the broken bits of mirror. In a wild confusion of barking dogs and bellowing cows all seem caught, like the idiot, in the coils of some mad dance where, "the barriers which should divide Man the Master from the Brute were dissolved" (215). It seems impossible that order can be restored while the "mirror bearers squatted; malicious, observant; expectant; expository" (217). Desperate to avoid their fragmented image in the cracked and wavy mirror, the audience becomes resentful, feeling sure "that's cruel. To snap us as we are, before we've had time to assume . . . And only, too, in parts . . . That's what's so distorting and upsetting and utterly unfair" (214).

Softly the music begins again, like the calm after the storm, bringing with its soothing waves, "as they crashed; solved; united" (221), a feeling of security once more. But as the "scrap, ors and fragments" (221) of the audience gather in renewed determination, the waters suddenly recede, revealing the Reverend Streatfield "like a tramp's old boot" left on the shore, a reminder of the fragmented wreckage of their hopes. In his hopeless fumbling for some
words or reassurance, they see reflected their own absurdity:

The whole lot of them, gentles and simples, felt embarrassed for him, for themselves. There he stood; themselves; a butt, a clod, laughed at by looking-glasses; ignored by cows, condemned by clouds which continued their majestic rearrangement of the celestial landscape; an irrelevant forked stake in the flow and majesty of the summer silent world (222).

As the roar of war planes shatters the calm evening with the reality of man's violent nature, the audience finally realizes that the world is without meaning and asks: "Whom could they make responsible? Whom could they thank for their entertainment? Was there no one?" (227) Alone in the coming darkness of evening, they long for "a centre. Something to bring us all together" (231). However, as they disperse for the last time, the gramaphone, like an exhausted oracle, creates an image of Dante's dreadful city of death as with its last breath, "It gurgled Un . . . dis . . . And ceased" (235). Reluctant to stop, it seems to be playing upon the words, sighing that life is a disease or, at best, merely a case of being undeceased.

With the pageant over, the family, alone at last, is encased in the "shell of the room" (252) as evening comes on once more. The circle of light above them offers no warmth or comfort as they sit like insignificant insects, each alone in the desert of his or her dreams: "that hollow of sun-baked field where congregated the grasshopper, the ant, and the
beetle, rolling pebbles of sun-baked earth through the glistening stubble" (253). Suddenly the creaking, old house seems "very brittle, very dry" (253), as if it is the skeleton of some relic from the grave. Framed in the great square of the open window" (255) which is dark now, "drained of light, severe, stone cold" (255), old Bart Oliver sits like a corpse shrouded in his "great hooded chair" (251). As the shadows cover him, he appears "leafless" and "spectral" (255), an old "withered tree" (255) longing for the sound of the "Rider" (183) to gallop past.

Meanwhile, his sister Lucy in an effort to reassure herself, sits beside him "like a child" (251), gently caressing her cross and drifting off into her dreams of the past once more. However, as her "circular tour of the imagination" (204) relentlessly returns her to the beginning, where man "half-human, half-ape roused himself from his semi-couching position and raised great stones" (255), she appears to Isa "like the tragic figure from another play" (251). Suddenly, as the image returns to Isa's mind of the screaming girl dragged down and raped by the troopers, it seems to her that she is also an innocent victim of the relentless violence of life. In her anguish, she feels torn "asunder" by "love" and "hate" (252) as if helplessly caught in a tide which "rushed out embracing" and then "contracted" leaving her cast aside like an "old boot on the shingle" (251). With her romantic dreams swept away, Isa sits watching the "pageant fade" as the "flowers flashed and faded" (252), in
the shadows of the garden, feeling that "it was time someone invented a new plot, or that the author came out from the bushes . . . " (252).

Alone at last in the darkness, Isa and Giles confront each other in silence across the sea of bitterness which separates them. With the play over, they face the reality that "before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace" (255). In spite of their frantic struggles they are bound in the fatal coil of life from which "another life might be born" (256). Out of their reluctant merging with the darkness, the inevitable cycle will be renewed in the barren wasteland of man's beginning where, under a "sky without colour, the house had lost its shelter. It was night before roads were made, or houses" (256). As the curtain rises once again, it reveals man circling in a great void where "nothing's solid" (232), until lured by his reflection in the "bitter glass" he plunges to the bottom, aware, too late, that the "fatal image" of life is "the eclipsing Curse of birth."^70
NOTES


9 Richter, p. 18.


Leonard Woolf, The Journey Not the Arrival Matters, p. 73.

W. B. Yeats, p. 21.


Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p. 156. Woolf herself called The Waves a "mystical, eyeless book," noting in her diary that it had "such a vague yet elaborate design; whenever I make a mark I have to think of its relation to a dozen more" (p. 146). Critics have been intrigued and challenged by its density and ambiguity which James Hafley argues is Woolf's "furthest extension of the form of the novel proper" (p. 105). Frank McConnell calls it her "strangest and richest novel" (p. 118). While, James Naremore, stating that it is "one of the most personal and idiosyncratic books in English literature," feels that it is a "failure" where the reader "almost drowns in the language" (p. 189).

Richter, p. 93.


Richter, p. 92.


Richter, p. 25.

Richter, p. 25.

Virginia Woolf, The Voyage Out (London: Hogarth Press, 1965), p. 259. All other quotations from this novel will be followed by a page reference within the text.


30 Malm, p. 15.


32 See The Voyage Out, p. 347 and pp. 404-405, for a recurrence of this image of nightmare.

33 The "Dance of Death" is an allegorical representation of the power of death over all ages and ranks and was a favourite subject with artists of the Middle Ages.


40 Virginia Woolf, Night and Day (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), p. 358. All other quotations from this novel will be followed by a page reference within the text.

41 Hafley, p. 27.

42 Forster, p. 16.

43 Virginia Woolf, Jacob's Room (London: Hogarth Press, 1954), p. 28. All other quotations from this novel will be followed by a page reference within the text.


Violets and asphodel are a consistent image of death in Romantic and Victorian poetry and also appear as an image of death in every one of Woolf's novels.


Alceste is the hero of Molière's Le Misanthrope and is depicted as a frank man distressed at the duplicity of society.

Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway (London: Hogarth Press, 1929), p. 102. All other quotations from this novel will be followed by page numbers within the text.

Mephitic vapours which are intoxicating and foul smelling fumes rising from openings in the earth, supposedly, inspired the oracular utterences of the Pythian priestess of Apollo at Delphi.

Virginia Woolf, To The Lighthouse (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1927), p. 64. All other quotations from this novel will be followed by page numbers within the text.

Virginia Woolf, Between the Acts, p. 79. Miss La Trobe, the artist, refusing to be involved in the illusions of society while desperately trying to create the illusion of order through art: "splashed into the fine mesh like a great stone into the lily pool. The criss-cross was shattered."

Tennyson in his poem "Demeter and Persephone" in Victorian Poetry and Poetics, pp. 146-148, depicts Demeter's sorrowing search for Persephone in images which reflect death and society without faith or hope as the young girl leaves the world barren without her: "When here thy hands let fall the gathered flower," (1.9) and went "Along the silent field of Asphodel."

Whitehead, pp. 401-415. See Mr. Whitehead's excellent article on To The Lighthouse and his discussion of Mrs. Ramsay's awareness of and attraction to "the all-pervading darkness that lies behind the veils of life" (p. 407).

Foreshadows Between the Acts and Virginia Woolf's sense that beneath the surface of society in reality all was "Scraps, orts and fragments" (p. 225).

Whitehead, p. 403.

Schaefer, p. 176.

Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p. 272.

Schaefer, p. 177.

Algernon Charles Swinburne, "Hymn to Proserpine" in Victorian Poetry and Poetics, p. 646.
Virginia Woolf, *The Years* (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), p. 398. All subsequent quotations from this novel will be followed by page references within the text.

Richter, p. 178.

Frye, p. 62.


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SECONDARY SOURCES


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