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Curves and arabesques : rhetorical strategies in Virginia Woolf's fiction and non-fiction

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.7ba2-57mc>
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**Curves and arabesques: Rhetorical strategies in Virginia
Woolf's fiction and non-fiction**

Browne, Clare, M.A.

San Jose State University, 1989

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300 N. Zeeb Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

CURVES AND ARABESQUES: RHETORICAL STRATEGIES IN
VIRGINIA WOOLF'S FICTION AND NON-FICTION

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By

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August 1989

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go to Sybil Weir for stepping in at the last moment and giving her time so generously; to Cathy Blecki, whose thoughtful suggestions and instructive comments were immensely appreciated; and finally to Selma Burkom, who has helped me chart my course from the beginning--thank-you for guiding me through the rocks.

For Mark and Ben

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
<u>Chapter One</u>	
The Crouching Beast: The Rhetoric of Control.....	13
<u>Chapter Two</u>	
The Dome Upturned: Images of Fullness and Hollowness.....	29
<u>Chapter Three</u>	
One Stable Moment: The Paradox of Life and Art.....	49
Conclusion.....	69
Works Consulted.....	82
Works Cited.....	85

Introduction

Virginia Woolf has fascinated me ever since I read Mrs. Dalloway. I had never read anything like it. I didn't need to know the term "stream of consciousness" to be swept away by the fluidity of Woolf's prose and the sharp mental images she was able to create. When she ended her life on 28th March, 1941, Woolf not only left behind her such innovative novels as Mrs. Dalloway, To The Lighthouse and The Waves, which pay tribute to her special genius as a creative writer, she also left behind "autobiographical" writings-- letters and diaries--which reveal the equally remarkable woman behind the artist. Reading this non-fictional material set me thinking about the relationship between Woolf's life and the art she produced.

Many critics have asked themselves what impact writers' lives have had on their subsequent writings; the interest in the relationship between life and art is not a new one. Pointing out the importance of biographical data for readers and scholars alike, Phyllis Rose says that "although [Woolf's] novels can stand alone, their full resonance only emerges when they are seen in a wider context of [her] experience and beliefs" (xv). These "experiences and beliefs" are amply documented in Quentin Bell's biography of Woolf, which seems to have become the standard reference

critics turn to when they wish to observe the parallels between Woolf's life and art.

Relying largely on Woolf's letters, diaries, and other papers from Leonard Woolf's estate, Bell pieces together his aunt's life, hoping to present "a clear and truthful account of the character and personal development of [his] subject" (xv). He begins with an outline of the family's history, sketching a picture of the young Virginia Stephen's life in a Victorian household. It is perhaps because Woolf's early life was so traumatic that critics tend to focus on it the most. Woolf was just thirteen when her mother died in 1895, and this was to be the first in a swift succession of deaths--Stella's in 1897, Leslie's in 1904, and Thoby's in 1905--which affected her greatly. Woolf's first breakdown occurs soon after her mother's death, and a few months after her father's death, her second breakdown begins. Yet despite the mental instability that dogged her all her life, Woolf achieved astounding success as a writer. Bell charts her growing fame as a literary artist along with details of her hectic social life: she was a central member of the talented, if somewhat eccentric, Bloomsbury Group, and was also much in demand by society hostesses such as Lady Colefax and Ottoline Morrel. On the whole, Bell does an admirable job of providing the reader with important information about the world in which Woolf moved and worked.

Bell's biography has been immensely useful to a variety of critics interested in life/art comparisons. Jean Love, for example, roots her literary criticism firmly in the biographical data; in her book, Virginia Woolf: Sources of Madness and Art, Love contends that Woolf's early history is both the foundation of her madness and the springboard for her art. She sees the death of Woolf's mother as having immense impact on Woolf's development as a woman and as a writer, attributing the lack of Woolf's relationship with her mother as the root of Woolf's dependence on others. She describes it as

one of Virginia's deepest and most persistent hurts. It left her unprepared for an independent existence and endowed her with a lifelong need for a mother-daughter relationship that, next after her needs to be a writer and artist and to fight against madness, was the strongest motive in her life. (Love 16)

This loss of the mother was so disturbing to Woolf, Love argues, that she sought to give it shape and form in Part 2 of To The Lighthouse. Love calls this "Virginia's poetic and mythic representation of her own emotional disturbance after her mother's death" (233).

The emotional effect of Woolf's early loss of her mother is seen also by Mark Spilka as crucial to the development of her personality and subsequent writings. He argues that To The Lighthouse contains an echo of what the young Virginia Stephen faced at thirteen years of age and

that Lily Briscoe's working out of grief for Mrs. Ramsay in Part 3 of the novel is a representation of Virginia Stephen's loss of her mother--a loss which Woolf had never come to terms with before then. Woolf's own anger at her mother's leaving her is given expression in Lily's sufferings:

Lily at 44, divided between life and art, is like Virginia Woolf in her forties as she writes this novel, trying to convert her ungrieved grief into a lasting portrait of the lost beloved. (Spilka 25)

It is only when Woolf has completed To The Lighthouse, Spilka says, that she finally manages to exorcise her "parental ghosts."

While Bell's biography sparked much critical interpretation, and while no one doubts that, as Virginia Woolf's nephew, he has insights into the familial aspects of his aunt's life, much of what he says is opinion, not fact. Stephen Trombley, for example, feels that some of Bell's comments are biased and misleading. Taking the title for his book from a quotation by Bell (All that Summer she was Mad), Trombley sets out to uncover "the presuppositions behind the attribution of [Woolf's] madness," maintaining that Bell has a tendency to confuse medical and moral judgements (2). Bell's close proximity to the subject of his biography could also cloud his objectivity; his attitude to one of Woolf's most important relationships struck me as curious. He seems singularly reluctant to talk about

Woolf's affair with Vita Sackville-West: "Of her, who must for convenience' sake be referred to as Vita, something has to be said" (Bell 2: 115). He then proceeds to deflate their relationship, suggesting if there were a physical aspect to their "affair," he doubts "whether it was of a kind to excite Virginia or to satisfy Vita"; Bell finally clinches his argument by stating that Woolf "could not really love without feeling that she was in the presence of a superior intellect" (2: 119).

Perhaps it was this sort of reasoning that Harold Fromm had in mind when he cautioned on the dangers of manipulating biographical data:

Before legitimate use can be made of biography to bolster literary criticism, one needs to ask what is the relationship between an artist's life and an artist's work. And immediately that such a question is raised, we are faced with the dilemma that there is no consistently observable and reliable equation between life and art. (445)

So it seems we must be alert to the temptation to see echoes, if not exact replicas, of an author's life in the fictional text. Other critics have avoided using biography to substantiate their theories and have turned instead to material Woolf herself wrote. Jean Guiguet, for example, in Virginia Woolf and Her Works, relies heavily on A Writer's Diary¹ for insights into the fictional texts, although it could be argued that a selectively edited work of this sort is bound to produce a slightly lop-sided result. Louise

DeSalvo in turn tries a different tack. Instead of relying on biographical details or the edited version of Woolf's diaries to formulate her theories about Woolf's work, she goes directly to the diary entries Virginia Stephen wrote when she was fifteen. DeSalvo argues that the regime forced upon the young Virginia after her mother's death (the doctor advised plenty of fresh air, exercise, and no Latin or Greek lessons) did nothing to prepare her for a "meaningful adult life" (79), and certainly did not calm the anxiety attacks Woolf was suffering. She had lost her mother at thirteen, and now, just on the brink of womanhood, Woolf's life was further complicated by the sexual advances of her half-brother George Duckworth. DeSalvo says that this made it doubly hard for Woolf to establish a "healthy sexual identity" (96). Later in Woolf's fifteenth year, when her half-sister Stella dies shortly after her marriage to Jack Hills, DeSalvo suggests that Woolf's early view of the male world affected her greatly:

One of the archetypes Woolf lived with, therefore, was the archetype of the male as polluter, as despoiler of a woman's life. Stella's death in that year probably reinforced Woolf's fears about the dangers of sexuality. (96)

DeSalvo then goes on to argue that many of the scenes in To The Lighthouse are a direct working out of the events that happened to Virginia Woolf in 1897. She suggests that the novel, with its workings out of emotional conflict between

the "life-giving yet stifling" mother, and the "lovable yet irritatingly infantile" father, reflects Woolf's own situation in 1897 when she was struggling to "construct an identity derived from each yet separate from both" (DeSalvo 93).

DeSalvo's theories are persuasive; by studying what Woolf herself wrote, rather than relying on biography, she is able to make her case sound extremely convincing. But even she is doing what other critics have done before her--making implicit connections between the fiction and non-fiction, connections whose logic is neither questioned nor spelled out.

The question remains then: can any link be seen between life and art? If I were to focus on Woolf's language per se, what connections might I discover between the "life-writing" and the "art-writing"? Is the writing Woolf does for herself (the diaries), or writing she addresses to a specific person (the letters), markedly different from the prose she produces when creating a novel? What if I were to look at the non-fictional texts Woolf wrote and compare them with the fictional text she was writing *at the very same time*? Would I have the more concrete connection that has eluded both the biographical and the literary critics? Framed by these questions, I selected To The Lighthouse as my fictional text, and then compared its language with that of the diary and letters Woolf produced in the years 1925 to

1927 inclusively--the period Woolf was involved in creating To The Lighthouse.

The diaries, edited by Anne Olivier Bell, and covering the years 1915 to 1941, were published in five volumes--the first in 1977 and the last in 1983. The third volume, which I will be concentrating on, spans the years 1925 to 1930, and documents what Olivier Bell calls "the most fruitful and satisfying years of [Woolf's] life" (Diary Vol. 3: vii).²

At this period, the diary entries reveal Woolf eager to begin the novel which had been simmering in her mind, worrying already that it might be "sentimental," planning its structure, and anticipating the challenge of compressing time in Part 2 of the novel. We also see Woolf expressing her more desolate personal feelings. During 1925, her relationship with Vita Sackville-West, which had slowly been growing more intimate, finally turned into a love affair when she stayed with Vita for three days before Christmas. Woolf confesses to her diary (after Vita has gone to Persia), "I shall want her, clearly & distinctly" (Diary 57). Yet Woolf throws herself into working on her novel, writing "fast & freely" (Diary 59), and on 18th April, 1926, she starts the difficult second part of To The Lighthouse:

I have to give an empty house, no people's characters, the passage of time, all eyeless & featureless nothing to cling to: well, I rush at it, & at once scatter out two pages. Is it nonsense, is it brilliance? (Diary 76)

At the end of July, Woolf catalogues "a whole nervous breakdown in miniature" (Diary 103) as she struggles with bouts of depression finishing her novel. She begins thinking about death, feeling that life is "more desperate . . . as the river shoots to Niagara" (Diary 117). By January, she has retyped her novel and Leonard has declared it a "masterpiece" (Diary 123). By the time To The Lighthouse is published on 5th May, Woolf is already planning Orlando and The Waves. Though her novel receives good reviews, and she spends the autumn preoccupied with writing Orlando, she ends the year struck by a "ravaging sense of the shortness & feverishness of life" (Diary 167).

In contrast to the inward-looking intensity of the diary, Woolf shows herself to be more light-hearted when writing to other people, as the publication of six volumes of her letters shows. Covering the years 1888 to 1941, the letters are composed with a definite reader in mind, thus Woolf often excels herself in her witty, detailed descriptions of events and people.

According to editors, Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, Woolf's "delight in writing, and the pain of it, her artistic loneliness, are seldom reflected in her letters"; she wrote instead about "other things, unpremeditated, uninhibited, unrehearsed" (Letters Vol. 3: xv).² Possibly the only person Woolf did write to about writing was Vita Sackville-West, a fellow writer. Volume 3,

which spans from 1923 to 1928, begins and ends with a letter to Vita; Woolf wrote to her almost exclusively when Vita was away in Persia (from January to May 1926). Snippets of social gossip are juxtaposed with insights into Woolf's creative process and the more technical aspects of her craft: "I'm dazed, I'm bored, I'm sick to death: I go on crossing out commas and putting in semi-colons in a state of marmoreal despair" (Letters 333).

Of course, there was always time to write to her sister Vanessa, who, Woolf felt, did not return her feelings as strongly. "Everything in the way of affection is always left to me" (Letters 255) she writes in gentle complaint, but Woolf kept her sister well supplied with gossip when Vanessa was abroad and many of the letters reveal Woolf's admiration and love for her. Their correspondence when To The Lighthouse was published is particularly illuminating. Woolf writes:

I'm in a terrible state of pleasure that you should think Mrs. Ramsay so like mother. At the same time, it is a psychological mystery why she should be: how a child could know about her, except that she has always haunted me, partly, I suppose, her beauty; and then dying at that moment, I suppose she cut a great figure on one's mind when it was just awake, and had not any experience of life-- (Letters 383)

Clearly, then, there are substantive links between the fiction and non-fiction, but rather than using Woolf's life as a backdrop for analysing the fiction, or assuming that

the relationship between the two is deterministic (as Guiguet and Love have respectively), I will focus my study simply by concentrating on these pairs of subjects: control/lack of control, fertility/sterility, and life/art. Not only do these themes interest me as a reader and make a fascinating study, but they also appear repeatedly in Woolf's writing, revealing areas of immense conflict in her life. These topics will serve as lenses through which I can examine Woolf's use of language per se in the fiction and non-fiction. In my conclusion, I will cull the language which I have focused on and attempt to analyse Woolf's rhetorical strategies. By deliberately narrowing my focus in this way, I hope to offer new insights into the relationship between "autobiography" and fiction.

Notes

¹ Leonard Woolf, ed., A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts From The Diary of Virginia Woolf (London: Hogarth, 1953).

² Anne Olivier Bell, ed., The Diary of Virginia Woolf, vols. 1-5: 1915-41 (New York: Harcourt, 1977; 1978; 1980; 1982; 1983). Subsequent diary references in parentheses in my work refer to Volume 3: 1925-1930 of the Diary unless otherwise indicated.

³ Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, eds., The Letters of Virginia Woolf, vols. 1-6: 1888-1941 (New York: Harcourt, 1975; 1976; 1977; 1978; 1979; 1980). Subsequent letter references in parentheses in my work refer to Volume 3: 1923-1928 of the Letters unless otherwise indicated.

Chapter One

The Crouching Beast: The Diction of Control

Order, though ordinarily a force bringing about harmony, is not inevitably so. In art it may be mechanical; in life it may be tyrannous. Disorder, although commonly destructive, is not always so. In art it can offer vital force; in life it may be the creative chaos necessary to the individual. (Novak 52)

Virginia Woolf's letters and diaries reveal her constant battle to maintain, and sometimes regain, control over her life. Nowhere is that struggle for control more evident than when she was ill, and according to Quentin Bell, his aunt "knew that she had to be sensible and to exert self-control if the horrors of 1895 and 1904 and 1910 were not to be repeated" (2: 11). When one thinks of the delicate balancing act Woolf had to perform most of her life trying to maintain her equilibrium between order and chaos, sanity and insanity, it is not surprising that she found life itself unsettling in its very unexpectedness.

Writing a letter to Gwen Raverat on 8 April, 1925, she says:

. . . I went out early this morning to see Nessa's new house [37 Gordon Square], and saw a woman killed by a motor car. This pitches one at once into a region where there is no certainty and one feels somehow, abject and cowed--exalted (Letters 177).

The experience of witnessing the motor accident is personalized by Woolf's use of the first person pronoun; she is directly involved. Immediately after this though, she makes the statement, "This pitches one at once into a region where there is no certainty. . . ." Woolf moves from the active into the passive voice, and the first person singular pronoun becomes a third person singular pronoun; this use of "one" often has the effect of generalizing the statement. It is possible that Woolf was trying to distance herself from the emotion--she often used "one" in her diary, when she meant no-one else but herself. Her use of the verb "pitches," a verb with forceful overtones, suggests being thrown headlong into that place where there is "no certainty." She goes on to say that "one feels somehow, abject and cowed"; both adjectives convey a sense of subjection before a large and hostile presence. Yet her use of "somehow" seems tenuous, as if she were searching for adequate expression of her feelings. This is further evident in her surprising use of the word "exalted," which occurs after the dash, almost as an afterthought. The effect of this adjective is an uplift of feeling from the crouched stance of "abject" to a soaring sort of defiance.

Woolf's treatment of the topic of control is similar in the fiction. In the third section of To The Lighthouse, Lily is attempting to finish her painting when she is suddenly struck by the temporary nature of their lives--

hers, Mr. Carmichael's, and Mrs. Ramsay's--and how "nothing stays; all changes" (TTL 267). Then this passage appears:

She had perfect control of herself--Oh, yes!--in every other way. Was she crying then for Mrs. Ramsay, without being aware of any unhappiness? She addressed old Mr. Carmichael again. What was it then? What did it mean? Could things thrust their hands up and grip one; could the blade cut; the fist grasp? Was there no safety? No learning by heart of the ways of the world? No guide, no shelter, but all was miracle, and leaping from the pinnacle of a tower into the air? Could it be, even for elderly people, that this was life?--startling, unexpected, unknown? For one moment she felt that if they both got up here, now on the lawn, and demanded an explanation, why was it so short, why was it so inexplicable, said it with violence, as two fully equipped human beings from whom nothing should be hid might speak, then, beauty would roll itself up; the space would fill; those empty flourishes would form into shape. . . . (TTL 267-68)

The feeling of uncertainty and insecurity in the world is phrased in more general terms in the fiction. Woolf begins with a declarative sentence, "She had perfect control of herself," starting naturally enough with the third person pronoun "she" which is immediately more distanced than her non-fiction use of "I." Woolf gives Lily's assertive "Oh, yes!" an ironic tone, then promptly reverses this stab at certainty with a string of questions which suggest Lily's underlying insecurity. The movement from the non-fiction to the fiction is from the concrete to the abstract: Woolf's fear of the uncertainty of life in the non-fiction is echoed in Lily's question, "Could things thrust their hands up and

grip one; could the blade cut; the fist grasp?" The term "things" is all the more terrifying by its very vagueness, accompanied as it is by verbs of physical violence. Lily asks herself was there "No guide, no shelter, but all was miracle, and leaping from the pinnacle of a tower into the air?" This is similar to the non-fiction where Woolf used the word "exalted" after "abject and cowed," for there is a corresponding upward movement in the word "leaping," which suggests, not diving headfirst into the abyss, but an energetic surge skywards. In the fiction, the word "miracle" is a similar sort of reversal, with overtones of uplifted emotion, and it is expanded in the fiction in a prolonged defiant stance against the inexplicable aspects of life. The only hope Lily feels she has to combat life's "startling, unexpected, unknown," moments, is if she "demanded an explanation . . . with violence." Then, maybe "beauty would roll itself up," and life would be given some form, some shape, some meaning. While Woolf's use of the word "exalted," in the non-fiction expresses a feeling of desperate defiance against the unknown, in the fiction Woolf intensifies this defiance in Lily's violent emotional responses.

If we consider the language Woolf gives Mrs. Ramsay, a character who is seen, for the most part, in control, we see that she views life as an adversary:

. . . she must admit that she felt this thing that she called life terrible, hostile, and quick to pounce on you if you gave it a chance. There were the eternal problems: suffering; death; the poor. There was always a woman dying of cancer even here. And yet she had said to all these children, You shall go through it all. (TTL 92)

Life's insecurities have been captured in the suggestion that, for Mrs. Ramsay, life is like some dangerous jungle beast waiting to pounce on its helpless prey. Woolf wrote in her diary, "A great sense of the brutality & wildness of the world remains with me" (Diary 6). The adjectives "terrible" and "hostile" in the fiction are very close to the "brutality" and "wildness" of the non-fiction, yet Woolf seems to suggest, by having Mrs. Ramsay say that her children "shall go through it all," that there is a confident hope of emerging triumphant. In fact, the whole tone of this passage is very similar to a diary entry for 22 December, 1927, where Woolf expresses admiration for the way Vanessa has handled all the troubles that life has dealt her:

[I] think of her now with an admiration that has no envy in it: with some trace of the old childish feeling that we were in league together against the world; & how proud I am of her triumphant winning of all our battles: as she [battles?] her way so nonchalantly modestly, almost anonymously past the goal, with her children round her; & only a little added tenderness (a moving thing in her) which shows me that she too feels wonder surprise at having passed so many terrors & sorrows safe-- (Diary 168)

If life is seen in the fiction as a crouching beast waiting to pounce, then in the non-fiction it is seen as a kind of war with all its attendant hostilities. Woolf uses imagery of conflict in the non-fiction; she talks about their being "in league together against the world," and Vanessa has had to "battle" through the hazards of life. In both the fiction and the non-fiction, Woolf depicts life in terms which suggest its danger, yet in both, a sense of optimism ultimately prevails--with one small difference. In the non-fiction, Vanessa has already managed to come through the trials "safe"; in the fiction, Mrs. Ramsay's children have yet to "go through it all," so there is a greater sense of security in the non-fiction and an added tension in the fiction.

Woolf expressed her admiration for Vanessa's ability to control her life, and at the same time berated herself for not possessing these qualities. Woolf's exasperation is obvious when she takes herself to task for not having had the control that she thinks would have enabled her to have children:

Charleston & Tilton knocked me off my perch for a moment: Nessa & her children: Maynard & his carpets. My own gifts & shares seemed so moderate in comparison; my own fault too--a little more self control on my part, & we might have had a boy of 12, a girl of 10: This always rakes me wretched in the early hours. (Diary 107)

She talks of being "knocked off [her] perch" when she compares herself to Maynard Keynes and Vanessa, acknowledging that she has neither surrounded herself with luxury nor adoring children. Carpets and children are, of course, not seen as equally important by Woolf, but the gaps in her life suddenly seem more obvious; the anguish she suffers is reflected in her sleepless nights, and she loses her grip. The image of being "knocked off [a] perch" seems to suggest that possibility of uncontrollable violence: this echoes Woolf's horror in the non-fiction when the motor car killed a woman (Letters 177), and likewise in the fiction, where "There was always a woman dying of cancer. . . ." (TTL 92).

In the fiction, consider the language Woolf gives to Lily to suggest the difficulty of gaining control over her art: Lily has to "inspire [her paints], force them to move, flow, do her bidding. . . ." (TTL 76). In the third section of the novel, when she is trying to finish her painting, yet acutely aware of her aching need for Mrs. Ramsay's presence, we are shown just how hard Lily has to strive to keep control over herself:

'Mrs. Ramsay!' Lily cried, 'Mrs. Ramsay!' But nothing happened. The pain increased. That anguish could reduce one to such a pitch of imbecility, she thought! . . . Heavens be praised, no one had heard her cry that ignominious cry, stop pain, stop! She had not obviously taken leave of her senses. No one had seen her step off her strip of board into the waters of annihilation. She

remained a skimpy old maid, holding a paint-brush. (TTL 269)

The idea of life as a balancing act is present in the fiction too: Woolf, in the non-fiction, is on a perch and can be either knocked off or fall off herself; in the novel, Lily is walking precariously along a "strip of board" and beneath are the "waters of annihilation." Woolf's image of the perch suggests that narrow foothold, that teetering balance between sanity and insanity; in the novel, the "perch" is transformed to a terrifying image of "walking the plank," with its nightmare threat of self-destruction under duress. Woolf seems to be suggesting, in both fiction and non-fiction, that the foothold of sanity was narrow indeed, and that one jolt could send one spinning into chaos. In both extracts, Woolf chooses images which suggest that the pain is being inflicted from without, rather than from within. Both pieces have an almost torturous description of pain: in the diary, Woolf says that her lack of control was enough to "rake [her] wretched"; in the novel, Lily's "pain increased. That anguish could reduce one to such a pitch of imbecility." Woolf uses only three words in the non-fiction and yet they can conjure up an image of a victim being tortured on the rack. In the fiction, we have no such metaphorical descriptions--just a graphic representation with the words "pain," "anguish," "reduce," "pitch," and "imbecility," to spell out expansively the torture Lily

undergoes. What is sketched out in the non-fiction becomes even more threatening in the fiction, for the implication is that by stepping into "the waters of annihilation," such pain in chaos is enough to cause mental breakdown--even death.

If Woolf felt that not having that elusive power of control somehow denied her the chance of having children, then it becomes apparent why she admired Vita and Vanessa so much. In comparison to her they were women who managed to control all the random threads of their lives, not only with success, but especially in Vita's case, with style.

Virginia expresses her admiration for Vita saying she is:

. . . so much in full sail on the high tides,
 where I am coasting down backwaters; [there
 is] her capacity I mean to take the floor in
 any company, to represent her country, to
 visit Chatsworth, to control silver,
 servants, chow dogs; her motherhood. . . .
 (Diary 52)

Vita is depicted as a mature and competent woman who is equally at ease whether playing the society hostess or mother. Woolf chooses the contrasting metaphors, "in full sail on high tides" and "coasting down backwaters" which highlight the difference between the two women. The language Woolf selects to describe Vita suggest that she saw Vita controlling her life as if she were steering a ship--implying that she does it with style and complete confidence even when the tides are high: Woolf, on the other hand, is "coasting," which suggests passivity; she lets the current

take her where it will, without direct intervention on her part.

In the fiction, Woolf gives the character of Mrs. Ramsay the diction of control. At the dinner party in Part 1, a scene in which she most demonstrates her control, the guests sitting round the table are disparate entities, with no coherence or harmony. It is up to Mrs. Ramsay to pull all the separate parts together. She alone can do it:

Nothing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate. And the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her. (TTL 126)

It is Mrs. Ramsay who must create order out of this chaos. In the diary entry, Woolf describes Vita as being "in full sail on high tides" (Diary 52), and in the novel, once Mrs. Ramsay has begun to exercise her control over the disseminated elements around the table, Woolf uses the same type of imagery she used in the non-fiction: ". . . it was as if the ship had turned and the sun had struck its sails again" (TTL 127). Woolf depicts both Vita and Mrs. Ramsay as powerful ships, striking out over the waves: in both fiction and non-fiction a sense of energy and direction is evident with both women in control. Once Mrs. Ramsay has achieved this coherence with the dinner party, she can relax for a while, having set everything in motion, she now "need not listen" (TTL 160). Yet when she does leave the room, somehow the controlling force has gone:

And directly she went a sort of
disintegration set in; they wavered about,
went different ways. . . . (TTL 168)

Woolf gives the character of Mrs. Ramsay an almost magical power of control over the proceedings at the dinner party. The words "disintegration" and "wavered" suggest that she is like some mesmerising conductor holding her orchestra together--once she leaves, the music no longer has any unified direction.

Perhaps this almost overpowering control which Woolf depicts in Mrs. Ramsay suggests Woolf's ambivalence towards the control which she saw as an integral part of motherhood. She wrote to Vanessa:

I'm sure, to return to your letter, that I should make a vile mother. For one thing (though this I try to hide from you) I slightly distrust or suspect the maternal passion. It is obviously immeasurable and unscrupulous. You would fry us all to cinders to give Angelica a days pleasure, without knowing it. You are a mere tool in the hands of passion. . . . In fact what you feel about marriage I feel about motherhood, except that of the two relations motherhood seems to me the more destructive and limiting. But no doubt I'm merely trying to make a case out for myself: there's some truth in [it] though; I don't like profound instincts--not in human relationships.
(Letters 365-66)

Woolf seems to be suggesting that it is the very force of the maternal instinct which she finds disquieting. She finds it "immeasurable and unscrupulous," adjectives which convey both the power of motherhood and also perhaps its corrupting influence. Woolf suspects that Vanessa would

"fry [them] all to cinders," a remarkably violent image which suggests that she sees maternal passion controlling even Vanessa, reducing her to "a mere tool in the hands of passion." Woolf describes maternal passion as "profound" which suggests that she saw it as another emotion that she could not control and was therefore afraid of it.

Consider the language Woolf uses in the fiction to express Lily's apprehension of Mrs. Ramsay's power--it is clear that along with her admiration, Lily also divines something chilling about her hostess. At the dinner party, she suddenly sees Mrs. Ramsay in a different light:

How childlike, how absurd she was, sitting up there with all her beauty opened again in her, talking about the skins of vegetables. There was something frightening about her. She was irresistible. Always she got her own way in the end, Lily thought. Now she had brought this off--Paul and Minta, one might suppose, were engaged. Mr. Bankes was dining here. She put a spell on them all, by wishing, so simply, so directly. . . . (TTL 152)

Mrs. Ramsay is in control again, but this time her power is seen as indomitable; her "childlike[ness]" points to a deceptive strain in her power, and we are reminded of Woolf's telling Vanessa in the letter that she "distrust[ed] or suspect[ed] the maternal passion." In both extracts, the power of women is seen as tainted. The adjectives "frightening" and "irresistable," are strangely reminiscent of the words "immeasurable and unscrupulous" which Woolf used to describe the power of Vanessa's maternal feeling.

And the words "immeasurable" in the non-fiction, and "irresistable" in the fiction are both adjectives which convey a sense of power which cannot be netted down or resisted. Mrs. Ramsay's power is likened to that of a witch casting a spell, with the implication that those bound by her are helpless to control their fate. No wonder, then, that Augustus Carmichael and Lily Briscoe, artists both, resist being swept away by her. In fact, Lily can only complete her painting when she has "overcome Mrs. Ramsay's ability to dominate her emotionally" (Proudfit 33).

Lily's struggle is not an easy one though. It is only when Mrs. Ramsay is dead that Lily thinks her control over others has diminished, and, of course, in some areas it has. Lily feels a bitter kind of exultation:

For a moment Lily, standing there, with the sun hot on her back, summing up the Rayleys, triumphed over Mrs. Ramsay, who would never know how Paul went to coffee-houses and had a mistress; how he sat on the ground and Minta handed him his tools; how she stood here painting, had never married, not even William Banks. Mrs. Ramsay had planned it. Perhaps, had she lived, she would have compelled it. (TTL 260-61)

Again, the power of Mrs. Ramsay is reflected in the active verbs "planned" and "compelled." She is like a female Prospero, making things happen simply by seeing what she wants and arranging them accordingly. Only when Mrs. Ramsay is dead can Lily feel this absurd triumph, yet even this is

short-lived. A few pages later, Lily feels despair wash over her in an aching need for Mrs. Ramsay's presence:

Oh, Mrs. Ramsay! she called out silently, to that essence which sat by the boat, that abstract one made of her, that woman in grey, as if to abuse her for having gone, and then having gone, come back again. It had seemed so safe, thinking of her. Ghost, air, nothingness, a thing you could play with day or night, she had been that, and then suddenly she put her hand out and wrung the heart thus. (TTL 266)

Lily had thought that Mrs. Ramsay's death had reduced her to "ghost, air, nothingness," things of no consequence, but she was wrong. There is no safety, even in death. Lily discovers that Mrs. Ramsay's power extends from beyond the grave, for she had "put her hand out and wrung the heart thus." The verbs used for Mrs. Ramsay, such as "having gone," "come back," "wrung the heart," are verbs of motion and activity compared to the passive silence of Lily.

Compare this passage from Woolf's diary:

Woke up perhaps at 3. Oh its beginning its coming--the horror--physically like a painful wave swelling about the heart--tossing me up. I'm unhappy unhappy! Down--God, I wish I were dead. Pause. But why am I feeling this? Let me watch the wave rise. I watch. Vanessa. Children. Failure. Yes; I detect that. Failure failure. (The wave rises). Oh they laughed at my taste in green paint! Wave crashes. I wish I were dead! I've only a few more years to live I hope. I cant face this horror any more--(this is the wave spreading out over me). . . . Why have I so little control? It is not creditable, nor lovable. It is the cause of much waste & pain in my life. (Diary 110-11)

This excerpt takes on a nightmarish quality as Woolf describes the horror which threatens to stifle her. She has no control: she is helpless and passive. It is the wave of horror that controls the action, "tossing" her up, "spreading" over her, "swelling" around her heart. Woolf herself is a mere observer: "Let me watch the wave rise. I watch." All she is actively able to do is to repeat the word "failure," which falls like a hammer blow as she laments her childless state. In the face of this overwhelming horror at not having the power to control her own life, Woolf can only feel wasted, despairing, unloved.

Lily, too, is helpless in the fiction, unable to control the coming or going of Mrs. Ramsay. The action in the fiction belongs to Mrs. Ramsay: it is she who has the power to "[wring] the heart." In the non-fiction, it is the wave controlling the action while Woolf is a helpless onlooker; in the fiction, the coming and going of Mrs. Ramsay is very much like the motion of a wave--a wave that can reach out and bring pain, just as the wave in the non-fiction can cause Woolf to say, "I wish I were dead." Even the cry "Oh" in both passages is a silent protest. The use of commas in the fiction and dashes in the non-fiction gives both pieces a similar kind of broken rhythm.

The images Woolf uses in the non-fiction, of "coasting down backwaters" (Diary 52), and being "knocked off [her] perch" (Diary 107), for example, suggest that she saw life

as a haphazard sort of journey over which she could not exercise sufficient control. In the fiction, though Woolf chooses words and images for the character of Mrs. Ramsay which portray her dominance and power, there is an undercurrent of reservation about Mrs. Ramsay's total control which Woolf reveals, for the most part, in Lily's duality of feeling for her. Woolf's doubts about the maternal passion and control of Vanessa in the non-fiction are transformed into the elemental female force of Mrs. Ramsay in the fiction. It seems that within the wider scope of the fiction Woolf is able to express more fully her ambivalence towards something which she had always struggled for in her own life--control.

Chapter 2

The Dome Upturned : Images of Fullness and Hollowness

Having examined Woolf's treatment of the topic "control" in both fiction and non-fiction, I now focus my lens on the paired subjects "fullness/maternity" and "emptiness/sterility." The conflict between these opposites is a theme to which Woolf repeatedly returned, perhaps because she never rid herself of her feeling that, being childless, she was somehow not a "real woman" (Diary 52).

In the non-fiction, Woolf uses rich imagery when describing the fertility and abundance of other women. Vanessa, for example, is described in images of fruition: she is like a queen bee, "humming & booming & flourishing" in contrast to Woolf, who sees herself as "rather an elderly dowdy fussy ugly incompetent woman vain, chattering & futile" (Diary 111). The words Woolf chooses to describe her sister's munificence as a woman are all highly charged with action; the onomatopoeia emphasises Vanessa's pulsating life, whereas Woolf selects adjectives which convey the emptiness of hers: "chattering & futile" express her feeling of lack of direction and action in comparison with the full life of her sister.

Woolf compared herself to Vanessa throughout her life and usually suffered as a result. When she returned from visiting Vanessa in Cassis, she wrote to her:

I have thought of you as a bowl of golden water which brims but never overflows. . . . you are beautiful, beloved, chaste: and I am none of these things. (Letters 363-64)

Woolf captures the richness and fullness of Vanessa in her description of her as "a bowl of golden water which brims." The water itself is "golden," like honey, almost magical in its richness; the water "brims," suggesting a luxury of fullness; and the very roundness of the bowl is reminiscent, perhaps, of the fullness of the womb--a state for which Woolf had envied Vanessa a great deal. Woolf's choice of the word "chaste," which seems so surprising after these fertile images of beautiful roundness, is perhaps understandable if we take them to mean that Woolf saw Vanessa as somehow "apart" from her, venerated by her for all those attributes that Woolf herself did not possess. Woolf says immediately afterwards, "I am none of these things," for she had been haunted all her life by the feeling that motherhood would somehow have made her complete.

When Woolf turns to the fiction, Lily's similar admiration is expressed thus:

What art was there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into those secret chambers? What device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably

the same, one with the object one adored?
(TTL 79)

In the non-fiction, Woolf admired Vanessa at a distance, as it were, as a "bowl of golden water"; in the fiction, Woolf renders Lily's attraction for Mrs. Ramsay in terms that suggest she seeks some kind of union with her, wanting to become "like waters poured into one jar." In the letter, Woolf described Vanessa as a "bowl" which is as round and as expansive as a womb, yet in the novel, though Woolf chooses a "jar" as the receptacle for the water, which is certainly a narrower vessel with less womb-like associations, the waters are "poured into one jar," suggesting that mixing and union so earnestly hoped for by Lily. Indeed, Woolf's choice of the image of water, which symbolises life-giving properties in both fiction and non-fiction, is an indication of both Vanessa's and Mrs. Ramsay's powers of creation--they are able to give life just as water gives life.

Though both women are described as beautiful--Vanessa is "beloved" and Mrs. Ramsay is "adored"--in the fiction, Woolf selects images which suggest that Mrs. Ramsay's beauty is not all it seems to be, for Lily asks:

Was it wisdom? Was it knowledge? Was it,
once more, the deceptiveness of beauty, so
that all one's perceptions, half way to the
truth, were tangled in a golden mesh? (TTL
78)

In the non-fiction, Woolf chose "golden" to describe the purity of Vanessa's beauty, its richness and lusciousness (Letters 363). In the fiction, Woolf links this same powerful adjective with the noun "mesh," to suggest the falsity of Mrs. Ramsay's beauty--no matter how shining the surface is, the reality underneath is a trap, and is all the more dangerous for seeming not to be. Lily then surmises that the only way to apprehend that reality is to be:

. . . like a bee, drawn by some sweetness or sharpness in the air intangible to touch or taste, one haunted the dome-shaped hive. . .
 . For days there hung about [Mrs. Ramsay], as after a dream some subtle change is felt in the person one has dreamt of, more vividly than anything she said, the sound of murmuring and, as she sat in the wicker arm-chair in the drawing-room window she wore, to Lily's eyes, an august shape; the shape of a dome. (TTL 79-80)

This passage reminds us of the words Woolf used to describe Vanessa, "humming, booming, and flourishing" (Diary 111), just like a bee herself. Here, it is Mrs. Ramsay who inhabits the hive. Woolf uses the same onomatopoeiac device in the "sound of murmuring," which recreates the richness and creativity of Vanessa's life in the non-fiction. Woolf creates a similar aura of worship in the fiction as she does in the non-fiction with her use of the word "chaste" (Letters 364) to express her sense that Vanessa was somehow above her; Woolf's use of the adjective "august" in the fiction expresses Lily's feeling of venerability for Mrs.

Ramsay. Both adjectives convey a sense of distance, but that remoteness is more marked in the fiction, coupled as it is with a sense almost of awe. In the fiction, Woolf gives the character of Mrs. Ramsay images of roundness and fullness; she has "the shape of a dome": in the non-fiction, she chooses to describe Vanessa as a "bowl of golden water" (Letters 363). The roundness of both hive and bowl, with their womb-like connotations, suggest creativity, while the golden water and the honey-making properties of the bees suggest that richness which the non-fictive and the fictive character both possess. For a dome is, visually, a bowl upturned.

In the diary too, Woolf describes femaleness and maternity in terms of fruition and richness. Consider this extract where Woolf expresses her admiration for Vita Sackville-West:

There is her maturity & full breastedness . . .
 . her capacity . . . to control silver,
 servants, chowdogs; her motherhood . . . her
 being in short (what I have never been) a
 real woman. Then there is some
 voluptuousness about her; the grapes are
 ripe. . . . [She] lavishes on me the maternal
 protection which, for some reason, is what I
 have always most wished from everyone.
 (Diary 52)

Woolf gives an image of fertility as well as a powerful picture of her nurturing ability in her description of Vita's "full breastedness." She can also suggest Vita's luxurious ability to fulfil each of her functions, hostess

and mother, in the single word "capacity." Expressing her admiration for Vita's maternity, she chooses words with connotations of richness: "lavishes" suggests a sense of abundance, "voluptuousness" and the image of the ripe grapes suggest an almost Keatsian excess. Vita was seen by Woolf as the "real" woman that she felt herself not to be.

In the novel, Woolf begins with the topic of what it is to be female and then develops this into an expression of powerful fertility. In Part 1 of To The Lighthouse, for example, in the scene where Mr. Ramsay debates with himself about the importance of his work and how long his fame will last, he comes to the realisation that he will never be able to complete his work. Feeling a failure, he turns to his wife, wanting to be:

. . . taken in the circle of life, warmed and soothed, to have his senses restored to him, his barrenness made fertile, and all the rooms of the house made full of life. . . .
(TTL 59)

If we consider the diction in which Woolf has a male character experience this female fertility, we find that the imagery used to describe the fictive character's fertility is strikingly similar to that used for the real person, Vita, in the non-fiction. Woolf emphasises images of roundness and fullness: it is Mrs. Ramsay who is the "circle of life"; it is she who can make the house "full." That fullness reminds us of the "full-breastedness" of Vita, only in the fiction, the nurturing qualities are spelled out: Mr.

Ramsay wants to be "warmed and soothed," much as a child is soothed by his mother.

However, on the very next page, a warning note is sounded:

So boasting of her capacity to surround and protect, there was scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by; all was so lavished and spent; and James, as he stood stiff between her knees, felt her rise in a rosy-flowered fruit tree laid with leaves and dancing boughs into which the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of his father, the egotistical man, plunged and smote, demanding sympathy. (TTL 60)

In the non-fiction, Woolf used the word "capacity" to describe Vita's ease with the many roles she had to play in society, including that of mother: in the fiction, Woolf's choice of the same noun has come to stand solely for Mrs. Ramsay's maternal ability to "surround and protect." Though there is still that image of ripe fertility, as in "a rosy-flowered fruit tree," which echoes the noun "voluptuousness" used to describe Vita in the non-fiction, Woolf's ambivalence about motherhood is revealed in her choice of expression. In the diary, for example, Woolf uses the word "lavishes" to suggest the bounteous profusion of maternal care that Vita was able to give her; in the novel, the word "lavished" is quickly followed by the word "spent," which conveys a sense of draining and emptiness.

In the fiction, Woolf reiterates that maternal giving exacts a price:

They came to her, naturally, since she was a woman, all day long with this and that; one wanting this, another that; the children were growing up; she often felt she was nothing but a sponge sopped full of human emotions. (TTL 51)

Here the word "full" has a different connotation: no longer is it associated with powerful fertility; it suggests instead the despair and weariness experienced by a woman who has given everything and is left with nothing. Woolf reduces Mrs. Ramsay's god-like power of motherhood with the image of a "sponge sopped full of human emotions." This is very different from the rich imagery of the "bowl of golden water" (Letters 363) Woolf employed to describe Vanessa.

Woolf's ambivalence towards motherhood is also expressed in the language given to Mrs. Ramsay when she considers the waves which seem to represent two things at once. Mrs. Ramsay is sitting with James, listening to the sound of the children playing cricket and the conversation between her husband and Charles Tansley, when she hears:

. . . the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach, which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts and seemed consolingly to repeat over and over again as she sat with the children the words of some old cradle song, murmured by nature, "I am guarding you--I am your support," but at other times suddenly and unexpectedly, especially when her mind raised itself slightly from the task in hand, had no such kindly meaning, but like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life, made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea, and warned her whose day had slipped past in one quick doing after another that it was all

ephemeral as a rainbow--this sound which had been obscured and concealed under the other sounds suddenly thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror. (TTL 27-28)

Woolf chooses a caressing mother image to convey how protective and consoling the waves are with their "measured and soothing" beat; the rhythm of the waves themselves is like a cradle song, lulling the mind to sleep. It is only when Mrs. Ramsay actually listens to the waves, rather than hearing them simply as a background for her tasks, that the sound of the waves becomes ominous. The beat which was so soothing before becomes "like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat[ing] the measure of life," reminding Mrs. Ramsay of the shortness of life. The regularity of the beating waves "thundered hollow" in her ears because they represent the terrible power of reality. We are reminded of an equally dramatic image of waves in the non-fiction:

Woke up perhaps at 3. Oh its beginning its coming--the horror--physically like a painful wave swelling about the heart--tossing me up. . . . Wave crashes. I wish I were dead! I've only a few more years to live I hope. I cant face this horror any more--(this is the wave spreading out over me). (Diary 110)

Neither Woolf nor Mrs. Ramsay can control the waves' impact on them: Woolf, in the diary entry, sees them suffocating her, "swelling about the heart," and "spreading out over [her]"; Mrs. Ramsay, in the novel, cannot shut out the "ghostly roll of drums," or the fact that the waves "thundered hollow" in her ears. In the non-fiction, Woolf

suggests that the horror of reality is so great that she hopes she does not have too many years left to live so that she can escape; in the fiction, Mrs. Ramsay's terror of life is that it is brutally short and "ephemeral as a rainbow." Woolf, in the diary, seems to be looking forward to death as an escape, whereas the fictive character of Mrs. Ramsay views it with horror.

So perhaps it is in the fiction, in the multi-layered prose she creates, that Woolf can express more freely her duality of feeling for motherhood. However ambivalent she felt though, she reveals a feeling of inadequacy both in her letters and in her diary, often using terms which suggest her poverty in comparison to the richness she sees in others. In a letter to Vita she wrote:

. . . I will not let you make me such an egoist. After all, why don't we talk about your writing? Why always mine, mine, mine? For this reason, I expect--that after all you're abundant in so many ways, and I a mere pea tied to a stick. (Letters 232)

Woolf suggests that it is only her writing which can make her feel "such an egoist"; the implicit suggestion being that compared to Vita, whose writing skills are just one of her many talents, Woolf has nothing else to depend on. Woolf chooses the metaphor of a "pea tied to a stick," to describe herself, which gives an impression of narrowness, dryness and rigidity--a complete reverse of the fullness and fluidity of the adjective "abundant" which she selects to

describe Vita's ample talents. Woolf's choice of the word "mere," doubly emphasises her feeling that that is all she is and nothing more.

In the fiction, Woolf makes a similar comparison between Mrs. Ramsay and Lily. At the dinner party, Lily is admiring Mrs. Ramsay for her great beauty ("she looked radiant"), and the way she has managed to organize everything so well--getting William Bankes to stay to dinner, bringing off the engagement of Paul and Minta--and she thinks:

She put a spell on them all, by wishing, so simply, so directly, and Lily contrasted that abundance with her own poverty of spirit. . .
 . (TTL 152)

In the non-fiction, Woolf uses the adjective "abundant" to describe Vita: here in the fiction, Woolf chooses exactly the same word, only changing the adjective to an abstract noun, to describe the bountiful qualities of Mrs. Ramsay. Again, moving from the metaphor of a "pea tied to a stick," in the letter, Woolf uses a more abstract phrase in the novel to describe Lily's "poverty of spirit."

Woolf also reprimands herself in one of her diary entries where she again compares herself with Vanessa. In this entry, she says that her sister is the "most humane of the two of us," and warns herself of her own faults: "So easily might I become a hare brained egotistic woman, exacting compliments, arrogant, narrow, withered" (Diary

168). The adjective "narrow" echoes Woolf's earlier image of a "pea tied to a stick" (Letters 232), as does the adjective "withered," which suggests dryness and sterility. In comparison to Vanessa, who is "humming & booming & flourishing," Woolf sees herself as "an elderly dowdy fussy ugly incompetent woman vain, chattering & futile" (Diary 111). Woolf's emptiness and sterility, as she sees them to be, are captured in the words "chattering & futile," and contrasted with the resonance of "booming," used to describe Vanessa's fertility.

In the fiction, Woolf chooses images of smallness, dryness and sterility when describing the character of Lily Briscoe. Mrs. Ramsay, for example, feels sorry for Lily, for with "her little Chinese eyes and her puckered-up face, she would never marry" (TTL 29). To Mr. Ramsay, Lily seems "to have shrivelled slightly. . . ." She is "skimpy" and "wispy" (TTL 225). Lily is described, for the most part, in terms that suggest she lacks, rather than possesses, certain attributes; no wonder she feels angry when Mr. Ramsay approaches her, expecting to be given bounteous sympathy:

Why be always trying to bring up some feeling she had not got? There was a kind of blasphemy in it. It was all dry: withered: all spent. (TTL 224)

The adjective "withered," which Woolf used in the non-fiction to describe herself (Diary 168), has been expanded in the fiction to a whole string of desiccated adjectives:

"puckered," "shrivelled," and exactly the same adjective, "withered," to describe Lily's sterility. That sense of narrowness linked to the stick image in the non-fiction becomes a kind of shrinking in the fiction: Lily is seen as "skimpy," "wispy," and "little." She is compared to Minta Doyle, one of "these golden-reddish girls" (TTL 149) and the contrast between the lacklustre Lily and the resplendent Minta in the fiction is reminiscent of the contrast between Woolf and Vanessa in the non-fiction:

She faded under Minta's glow; became more inconspicuous than ever, in her little grey dress with her little puckered face and her little Chinese eyes. Everything about her was so small. (TTL 156)

Woolf repeats the word "little" three times, as if to stress the meagreness of Lily: compared to the glow of vitality that Minta seems to carry with her, Lily is "faded" and "inconspicuous," very much like the word "dowdy," which Woolf used to describe herself in the non-fiction (Diary 111).

In yet another diary entry, Woolf again expresses inferiority in the face of greater "femaleness." Vita has come back from her first trip to Persia, and, since it has been some months since the two women have seen each other, Woolf confesses a feeling of vulnerability:

So Vita came: & I register the shock of meeting after absence; how shy one is; how disillusioned by the actual body; how sensitive to new shades of tone--something 'womanly' I detected, more mature; . . . I

chattering, partly to divert her attention from me; & to prevent her thinking "Well, is this all?". . . (Diary 88)

Notice how easily Woolf slips into using the third person singular pronoun in "how shy one is" immediately after she has used the more direct first person singular pronoun in "I register the shock." It seems that Woolf often turns to the more generalized "one" when she needs to put some distance between herself and the strong, "body" emotion she is feeling. Woolf's comment, "how disillusioned by the actual body," suggests her disenchantment with reality, though her meaning is not clear. She could mean that it was an anti-climax to see Vita again after imagining for so many months what their first meeting would be like--or it could mean that Woolf is disappointed that her own body does not function in the way she wishes it would, for she is "shy" and covers her commotion by "chattering." That Woolf projects her feelings of inadequacy onto Vita and imagines that she will find her disappointing is obvious in her suspecting that Vita will think "Well, is this all?"

Compare the previous passage with an extract from the third section of the novel, where Mr. Ramsay's demand for sympathy suddenly becomes a test of Lily Briscoe's womanhood:

Instantly, with the force of some primeval gust . . . there issued from him such a groan that any other woman in the whole world would have done something, said something--all except myself, thought Lily, girding at

herself bitterly, who am not a woman, but a
 peevish, ill-tempered, dried-up old maid,
 presumably. (TTL 226)

Woolf turns the focus away from Mr. Ramsay's idea of what Lily should do as a woman (give him sympathy), to Lily's own idea of herself as somehow lacking because she is "not a woman." Lily derides herself in the same derogatory way that Woolf used to describe herself in the non-fiction--"an elderly dowdy fussy ugly incompetent woman vain, chattering & futile" (Diary 111). In both fiction and non-fiction a similar sense of emptiness, sterility and uselessness is present: the non-fictive adjectives "dowdy," "futile," and "fussy," correspond very closely to the fictive "dried-up" and "peevish." Woolf's choice of "dried-up" to describe Lily's sterility in the fiction echoes her metaphor describing herself as a "pea tied to a stick" in the non-fiction (Letters 232). And Woolf's choice of "girding," though it stands for Lily's jeering at herself, contains at the same time, the idea of encircling, which links back to the "pea tied to a stick" image in the letter. Once again, Woolf's treatment of the topic of female inadequacy is rendered more explicitly in the fiction than the non-fiction, with a movement from metaphor in the letter to a factual statement in the novel. The word "presumably" in the fiction implies, however, that this is what others think of Lily rather than what Lily thinks of herself, so that we get a similar shift of focus as in the non-fiction, where

Woolf seemed to be inventing thoughts for Vita out of her own sense of inadequacy (Diary 88).

Along with images of dryness and sterility, Woolf expresses female inadequacy using imagery of hollowness or emptiness--evident particularly when she wrote to Vita and Vanessa. Writing to her sister she says:

. . . really, you'll be touched to hear, I
pine for a cup of tea with you: I am starved;
I wake in the night crying your name. . . .
(Letters 269)

Her longing for Vanessa is expressed in purely physical terms of eating and drinking--perhaps the unconscious suggestion here is that Vanessa is as necessary as food and drink to Woolf. Her emptiness is so great, "I am starved," that it can wake her at night with its pangs.

To Vita, away in Persia, she writes:

. . . part of my misery is not having you.
Yes, I miss you, I miss you. I dare not
expatiate, because you will say I am not
stark, and cannot feel the things dumb people
feel. . . . I haven't said anything very
much, or given you any notion of the terrific
high waves, and the infernal deep gulfs, on
which I mount and toss in a few days.
(Letters 237)

Again Woolf expresses pain and emptiness because she feels she lacks something. She repeats "I miss you," as if to underline her misery, yet fears that she will not be understood by Vita even if she does expand on her feelings. Woolf suggests, using the phrase "dumb people," that speech is somehow a barrier blocking the intensity of her

expressions. More than fearing she will not be understood, she fears she will be criticised for not being "stark," that is, resolute in her feelings. Was she afraid that Vita would think her incapable of strong emotions? As if to dispel these doubts, she moves into metaphorical sea imagery, assuring Vita in almost hyperbolic images that she has not painted a true picture of the "terrific high waves" and "infernal deep gulfs" she is experiencing.

In the third section of To The Lighthouse, note the language Woolf gives to Lily as she faces a similar problem of emptiness and its expression:

For how could one express in words these emotions of the body? express that emptiness there? (She was looking at the drawing-room steps; they looked extraordinarily empty.) It was one's body feeling, not one's mind. The physical sensations that went with the bare look of the steps had become suddenly extremely unpleasant. To want and not to have, sent all up her body a hardness, a hollowness, a strain. And then to want and not to have--to want and want--how that wrung the heart, and wrung it again and again! . . . Suddenly, the empty drawing-room steps, the frill of the chair inside, the puppy tumbling on the terrace, the whole wave and whisper of the garden became like curves and arabesques flourishing round a centre of complete emptiness. (TTL 265-66)

Woolf repeats the idea of emptiness four times in this extract, using words like "bare" and "hollowness" which emphasise that emptiness. In the non-fiction, Woolf expressed her need for Vanessa in physical terms, emphasising the body ("I pine," "I starve"); with Vita too,

Woolf suggested that "dumb people," without having to make the effort at speech, could express more easily what she wanted to say. Similarly, in the fiction, Lily cannot "express in words," the emptiness she feels; she can only experience it as a "body feeling," which is felt as a "strain." The emptiness of the steps echoes the emptiness Lily feels inside her own body. Indeed, the repetition of "to want and not to have," is very similar to Woolf's complaint to Vita ("I miss you, I miss you") except that in the fiction, Woolf does "expatiate," repeating over and over images of emptiness and pain: "how that wrung the heart, and wrung it again and again!" In the letter, Woolf turned to the metaphorical image of the "terrific high waves, and the infernal deep gulfs" to express her emptiness. In the novel, Woolf uses the wave metaphor to express Lily's emptiness: "the whole wave and whisper of the garden became like curves and arabesques. . . ." Certainly the movement from the non-fiction to the fiction is from the particular to the abstract, yet the imagery Woolf chooses of the "curves and arabesques flourishing round a centre of complete emptiness," points even more starkly to the contrast between the fullness of Mrs. Ramsay's creation and the hollowness Lily feels aching inside herself.

The fear of feeling nothing but hollowness is expressed by Woolf in the non-fiction when a childhood friend, Madge Vaughan, dies:

Sometimes I felt old, & spent. Madge died. Rustling among my emotions, I found nothing better than dead leaves. Her letters had eaten away the reality--the brilliancy, the warmth. Oh detestable time, that thus eats out the heart & lets the body go on. (Diary 46)

Madge's death makes Woolf stop and think about the meaning of life, yet in her numbness, Woolf can summon up anger against "detestable time." In To The Lighthouse, when Lily returns to the house in Part 3 and is thinking about the death of Mrs. Ramsay, she asks herself:

What does it mean then, what can it all mean? . . . she could not, this first morning with the Ramsays, contract her feelings, could only make a phrase resound to cover the blankness of her mind until these vapours had shrunk. For really, what did she feel, come back after all these years and Mrs. Ramsay dead? Nothing, nothing--nothing that she could express at all. (TTL 217)

In the non-fiction, Woolf expresses a feeling of exhaustion (she feels "old and spent"), and in the image of the "dead leaves" there is aura of decay and erosion which is carried through to the idea of time "eat[ing] out the heart." In the fiction, Woolf emphasises emptiness rather than decay with the words "contract," "blankness," and "shrunk," all suggesting a shrivelling of feeling, a hollowness, a death. In the diary, Woolf can say "Oh detestable time" to express her anger--not so much at Madge's death--but at her own inability to summon up any real feeling. Woolf, using an almost sacrificial image of horror, describes how time can "eat out the heart," and leave an empty shell of a body--

suggesting the hollowness Woolf felt herself. In the novel, Woolf describes Lily as feeling "nothing," using exactly the same word she chose in her diary.

In both pieces, the sense of emptiness is the same, except that Woolf's tone in the fiction is more positive, for Lily "could only make a phrase resound to cover the blankness." Woolf seems to be suggesting, in the fiction at any rate, that Lily's art has the power to fill up the vacuum she feels is inside her. Perhaps, for Woolf, artifice can provide what emotion and life lack or destroy.

Chapter Three

One Stable Moment: The Paradox of Life and Art

It is the special attribute of works of art, the secret of their permanence and of the need for their perpetual renewal, that they bring us only a reflection, an echo, a symbol of that reality of which the artist has been granted a glimpse during a moment of vision. (Guiguet 464)

Some critics, such as Hoffman, Whitehead, Marder, and Novak, have argued that Woolf synthesises apparent opposites such as art and life, feeling and form, in her fiction. In this chapter I will examine the language in which Woolf renders such paradoxical pairs--both in the novel and in the diaries and letters.

Woolf led a fairly unrestricted working life; even when she married Leonard Woolf she managed to have "escaped from solitude without renouncing her independence" (Guiguet 70). The Woolfs' joint venture, running the Hogarth Press, was a trial for her at times, but it gave her the independence which came from being "the only woman in England free to write what I like" (Diary 43). No-one was more aware than she, that, had she led a different life, her work would have suffered tremendously. Her father's influence, for example, shaped Woolf a great deal, but his continued presence would have stifled her life as a writer:

Father's birthday. He would have been 96, 96, yes, today and could have been 96, like

other people one has known: but mercifully was not. His life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books;--inconceivable. . . . (Diary 208)

In that one sentence, "His life would have entirely ended mine," is expressed Woolf's horror of dominant relationships; the overshadowing presence of her father would have snuffed out her creativity.

In the fiction, Woolf has Lily fight for her independence. At the dinner party, Lily does for a moment wish that she too could be swept away by the emotional haze that seems to envelope the newly engaged Paul and Minta, but then she sees the cruelty behind the love and thinks:

. . . she need not marry, thank Heaven: she need not undergo that degradation. She was saved from that dilution. She would move the tree rather more to the middle. (TTL 154)

Woolf's use of the noun "degradation" to describe the marital relationship suggests that she saw it as somehow reducing one's position and sense of self; Woolf seems to perceive dependent relationships as somehow falling into a dominant/submissive pattern. She moves from the negative impact of "she need not undergo that dilution," which suggests how dependent relationships have the power to lessen one's creativity and render it less pure, to the more positive "She would move the tree," suggesting that Lily turns away from issues of the self to issues of her art. It is precisely her artistic independence which enables Lily not to "need" those damaging dependent relationships.

While Woolf makes artistic independence a virtue, the artist's experience of freedom is not entirely positive. Freedom becomes dreadful because, at the extreme, its possessor is also totally independent of all other people. Woolf expresses an intense feeling of alienation from the ordinary flow of human life, noting in her diary after she had visited her sister-in-law, Freda Woolf, "She is nearer humanity than I am: eats her way into the heart of it, as I cannot" (Diary 64). Likewise, when Woolf returns from tea with friends, Walter and Charlotte Leaf, she is sufficiently roused by the animation and affection in the family to write:

Only I am exiled from this profound natural happiness. That is what I always feel; or often feel now--natural happiness is what I lack, in profusion. I have intense happiness--not that. It is therefore what I most envy; geniality & family love & being on the rails of human life. (Diary 73)

The "only" is a little ambiguous here: does Woolf mean that she is the only person in exile, or does she mean that she cannot enjoy happiness because she is in exile? Either way, she feels on the outside, lacking "natural" happiness, which seems to stand for that ordinary everyday happiness that Woolf sees might be hers were she part of the family, as opposed to "intense" happiness, which possibly only comes from Woolf's own efforts--her writing. Nor is she "on the rails of human life," which suggests she is standing by the

tracks and watching life go by without her: as an artist she is not part of life; she views life in order to create art.

Compare the language Woolf uses in the fiction to express Lily's sense of alienation. Lily's art sets her apart from the rest of the household, and she has difficulty in making any connection at all. On her first morning back in the house after Mrs. Ramsay has died, she feels distanced:

Sitting alone . . . she felt cut off from other people, and able only to go on watching, asking, wondering. The house, the place, the morning, all seemed strangers to her. She had no attachment here, she felt, no relations with it, anything might happen, and whatever did happen . . . was a question, as if the link that usually bound things together had been cut, and they floated up here, down there, off, anyhow. How aimless it was, how chaotic, how unreal it was, she thought. . . . (TTL 219)

Woolf used the word "exiled" in the diary to suggest a feeling of banishment; in the novel, she chooses the phrase "cut off," which conveys more of a severance of a life-line. In both passages there is a sense of passivity--Lily watches everything as if she were totally removed from its effect; Woolf expresses the feeling that she is not "on the rails" and so views events from an outsider's standpoint. The metaphor in the non-fiction of "being on the rails," which implies at least some sort of direction and movement, is expanded in the fiction to a description which is even more terrifying in the lack of direction implicit in Woolf's

water imagery, "floated up here, down there, off, anyhow." In both pieces the suggestion is that the artist needs that freedom and independence, needs to stand outside ordinary human existence--even if it brings isolation--to be able to observe, then create.

Woolf describes this state of dissociation in a letter to Vita, telling her how, at a party in Bloomsbury, she is "sitting outside, the glass between me and everybody; hearing them laugh; and seeing, as through a telescope. . . ." (Letters 236). Woolf expresses her sense of dissociation by selecting the image of seeing "through a telescope": she can still see and hear, but everything is distorted, as objects in a telescope sometimes appear to be. In the fiction, Lily has a corresponding feeling of being out of things, and she contrasts her solitary state with Paul Rayley's:

How inconspicuous she felt herself by Paul's side! He, glowing, burning; she, aloof, satirical; he, bound for adventure; she, moored to the shore; he, launched, incautious; she, solitary, left out--and, ready to implore a share, if it were disaster, in his disaster. . . . (TTL 153)

Woolf emphasises even more in the fiction a sense of alienation: Lily is so distanced that she feels "inconspicuous." Woolf's use of the boat metaphor highlights the contrast between the action of Paul Rayley and Lily's inaction: she is, in fact, so distanced from the flow of life, that she is "moored to the shore" in a kind of stationary helplessness. Lily's sense of alienation is so

acute that she is ready to risk danger, just to be a part of, rather than an observer of, the glorious halo of adventure surrounding Paul. However, it is precisely because of Lily's ability to step back and observe from a distance, as the critic Hoffman puts it, that Lily is later able to experience loss (Mrs. Ramsay's death), and "push that experience into art" (194). Thus, Lily transforms her subjective emotion into an objective art form.

Woolf sought through prose, in both fiction and non-fiction, a means of connection which would somehow resolve her sense of fragmentation and alienation. She saw the problem as one of form:

At this moment I'm casting about for an end. The problem is how to bring Lily & Mr. R. together & make a combination of interest at the end. . . . I had meant to end with R. climbing on to the rock. If so, what becomes [of] Lily & the picture? Should there be a final page about her & Carmichael looking at the picture & summing up R.'s character? In that case I lose the intensity of the moment. (Diary 106)

This passage is fascinating because it echoes Woolf's earlier intentions confided to her diary about the pivot of the novel: ". . . the centre is father's character, sitting in a boat, reciting We perished, each alone, while he crushes a dying mackerel. . . ." (Diary 18-19). The novel, then, is "meant to end with R. climbing on to the rock" and a "summing up [of] R's character." Yet Woolf says immediately afterwards that she will "lose the intensity of

the moment" if she does this. This suggests that the real pivot of the novel is elsewhere; to have Lily and Mr. Carmichael looking at the canvas together at the end would be to dilute the central importance of the relationship between Lily and Mrs. Ramsay.

When Woolf turns to the fiction, the problems of balance in Lily's own painting are couched in similar terms; the artist, too, has to find a means of connection:

It was a question, she remembered, how to connect this mass on the right hand with that on the left. She might do it by bringing the line of the branch across so; or break the vacancy in the foreground by an object (James perhaps) so. But the danger was that by doing that the unity of the whole might be broken. (TTL 82-83)

Woolf maps out the problem in much the same way as she does in the non-fiction, using similar language: in the diary, the problem is seen to be one of "combination," or how to mix things together; in the novel, the problem becomes "how to connect," suggesting a link between two separate objects. Lily then suggests a way in which she might resolve that vacancy in her painting, as Woolf suggested how she might bring harmony to her ending.

Woolf's paradoxical attitude about maintaining balance is reflected in her thoughts about To The Lighthouse confided to her diary. Woolf was "in dread of 'sentimentality'" (Diary 110), yet the novel exhibits both her artistic vision and a firm structure. She describes it

as both "soft & pliable," (Diary 132), and "a hard muscular book" (Diary 123). Obviously Woolf was successful in her efforts to achieve balance in her work and her sense of "qualitative unity" has been much admired (Naremore 122), yet she worried about it--even after the novel was published.

The lyricism of Woolf's writing, which went hand in hand with her insistence on structure in the novel, is evident in the fluid style of To The Lighthouse. Woolf wrote to Vita, explaining what style meant to her:

Style is a very simple matter; it is all rhythm. Once you get that, you can't use the wrong words. . . . A sight, an emotion, creates this wave in the mind, long before it makes words to fit it; and in writing (such is my present belief) one has to recapture this, and set this working (which has nothing apparently to do with words) and then, as it breaks and tumbles in the mind, it makes words to fit it. . . . (Letters 247)

Woolf is describing the creative process in this passage, but it is not such a "simple matter" as she makes out, for she fills the passage with a volley of pronouns like "this" and "it" which render her meaning far from clear. But if style for Woolf is all "rhythm," a regular measured beat, or an ebb and flow, then her choice of wave imagery is perfect to describe the creative process. The visual or emotional experience sets in motion an unconscious wave which "breaks and tumbles in the mind" and seems to carry on independent of control.

In the fiction, Woolf describes how this same kind of rhythm helps Lily to triumph over the blankness of her canvas. Lily wills herself to create, but is too distressed by the fact that she has not given Mr. Ramsay the sympathy he wanted. She is suddenly aware of herself as a person who has to deal with her own inadequacies, and the thought of placing a brush stroke on the empty canvas fills her with doubt, simply because it will commit her to so much. She finally takes the risk, gaining a "dancing rhythmical movement," yet doubt still lingers and Woolf conveys this in the threatening image of the wave: "Down in the hollow of one wave she saw the next wave towering higher and higher above her" (TTL 236). Notice that in the non-fiction, the wave's direction was downwards, it "breaks and tumbles"; in the fiction, the wave is climbing upwards above Lily, so that we have both the trough and the crest of the wave--the full rhythmic measure of a beat. The demands that her art makes are almost too much for her at first, but Lily finds a way to begin:

Then, as if some juice necessary for the lubrication of her faculties were spontaneously squirted, she began precariously dipping among the blues and umbers, moving her brush hither and thither, but it was now heavier and went slower, as if it had fallen in with some rhythm which was dictated to her . . . by what she saw, so that while her hand quivered with life, this rhythm was strong enough to bear her along with it on its current. Certainly she was losing consciousness of outer things. . . . (TTL 237-38)

The rhythm which was present in the non-fiction is still very much in evidence in the fiction, but there is a greater sense of linking the creativity of the artist with sexual creativity, reflected by Woolf's first sentence. Woolf selects pairs of words such as "blues and umbers," "hither and thither," which suggest the lilting rhythm Lily is after. In both extracts, the creative process is described in terms which suggest its fluidity and movement. Woolf's image of the wave in the non-fiction, which "breaks and tumbles in the mind," becomes first a wave of doubt, which is "towering higher and higher," conveying a sense of threat and destruction, then it is suddenly transformed into Lily's means of salvation, "strong enough to bear her along with it on its current." Lily, paradoxically, has to die to the consciousness of the world and find creative power in her state of unconsciousness.

Both in fiction and non-fiction, then, Woolf seems to be saying that art provides a means of achieving coherence and is a way to shape fragmentary aspects of life. Art was also a way for Woolf to search for truth and knowledge, something solid and permanent that could illuminate the darkness in which she sometimes lived. All her life, Woolf was fascinated by the idea of the truth of human personality and what scant knowledge of others we really have. She writes to Vita:

I try to invent you for myself, but find I really have only 2 twigs and 3 straws to do it. I can get the sensation of seeing you--hair, lips, colour, height, even, now and then, the eyes and hands, but I find you going off, to walk in the garden, to play tennis, to dig, to sit smoking and talking, and then I cant invent a thing you say--This proves, what I could write reams about--how little we know anyone, only movements and gestures, nothing connected, continuous, profound. (Letters 205)

Here, Woolf perceives Vita as a series of different motions, almost random snapshots. The outward appearance is easy to apprehend, but final knowledge of others is impossible. Woolf examines this phenomenon in the fiction too. Lily is fascinated by Mrs. Ramsay and wants to know her--even after she had died, she continues to exert a powerful influence over Lily:

One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with, she reflected. Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with, she thought. Among them, must be one that was stone blind to her beauty. One wanted most some secret sense, fine as air, with which to steal through keyholes and surround her where she sat knitting, talking, sitting silent in the window alone; which took to itself and treasured up like the air which held the smoke of the steamer, her thoughts, her imaginations, her desires. (TTL 294)

In both extracts, Woolf describes the difficulty of really knowing someone: in the non-fiction she stresses her inadequacy--she has only "2 twigs and 3 straws" to make her measurement; in the fiction, Woolf emphasises Lily's inadequacy of perception by using exaggeration instead--"Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one

woman." In the non-fiction, Woolf emphasises the negative, for she says there is "nothing connected, continuous, profound"; in the fiction, the rather abstract adjectives of the non-fiction become the more explicit nouns, "thought, her imaginations, her desires" in the fiction. Woolf expresses her sensory perception of Vita in the letter; she sees her walking, smoking, talking, but cannot make the atoms of her experience hang together. In the novel, Woolf suggests that it is a "secret sense" that will bring the knowledge so dearly wanted. For the artist Lily, this "secret sense" is the artist's power to render life as art--which can be "known" because it is limited.

Woolf suggests, in the extract from the fiction above, that Mrs. Ramsay's beauty is almost a barrier to the truth of her personality or identity. Yet Lily does manage to capture the truth of Mrs. Ramsay's being on her canvas--she represents Mrs. Ramsay's essential being, her "wedge-shaped core of darkness" (TTL 95) exactly as she saw it: as a purple triangle (TTL 81). And it is Lily's distance, her sense of alienation, that leads her to this perception:

Here she was again, she thought, stepping back to look at it, drawn out of gossip, out of living, out of community with people into the presence of this formidable ancient enemy of hers--this other thing, this truth, this reality, which suddenly laid hands on her, emerged stark at the back of appearances and commanded her attention. (TTL 236)

Woolf emphasises Lily's distance in the repetition of "drawn out of gossip, out of living, out of community." That this is something that happens to Lily, rather than her instigating it herself, is made obvious by Woolf's choice of the words "drawn out." In the diary, where Woolf is analysing her "glooms," she explains that it is only when she is away from external pressures that the real truth about herself emerges:

One goes down into the well & nothing protects one from the assault of truth. Down there I cant write or read; I exist however. I am. (Diary 112)

This extract is very similar to the passage in To The Lighthouse, quoted above, where Lily is "losing consciousness of outer things. . . (TTL 238). Woolf describes her comprehension of the truth as a journey inwards "into the well," which is undertaken at her own volition. Going down into the self is frightening, however, because it is so chaotic--there is no order because there is no discursive part of the mind aware to measure the experience. Woolf makes the journey into the unconscious completely independently of the consciousness: "I exist however. I am." In the fiction, the words Woolf chooses to describe Lily's perception of the truth have a war-like ring to them; truth is seen as a "formidable ancient enemy," which conveys not only hostility but strength. In the non-fiction, the language Woolf uses to describe the

onslaught of the unconscious is even more graphic with the brutality conveyed by "assault," and the helplessness implicit in "nothing protects one."

Certainly Woolf hints, in both fiction and non-fiction, that not only was writing a way to perceive the truth, it was also a way of achieving some kind of permanence in a constantly shifting world. At times, Woolf's need to write became almost obsessive. Consider this diary entry:

This insatiable desire to write something before I die, this ravaging sense of the shortness & feverishness of life, make me cling, like a man on a rock, to my one anchor. (Diary 167)

Woolf describes her intense desire to write almost as if it were an illness. Her choice of the word "ravaging," with its connotation of plunder, suggest that Woolf viewed life as hostile and threatening. The precariousness of her position is expressed in her simile "like a man on a rock," which echoes Lily's comment about being "moored to the shore" (TTL 113). For just as a man in peril of drowning clutches that small solid hope of salvation, Woolf balances her hopes of survival on the "anchor" of her writing--and the ship's anchor is, of course, the only thing that prevents the ship from floating away altogether.

If we look at the language Woolf selects in To The Lighthouse, when she has Lily use her art as a defence, certain similarities become obvious. Mr. Ramsay is bearing down on Lily in order to elicit her sympathy, and she uses

her easel first "as a barrier, frail, but she hoped sufficiently substantial to ward off Mr. Ramsay" (TTL 223), and when this doesn't deter him, she is angry because his presence means she cannot possibly paint:

One can't waste one's time at forty-four, she thought. She hated playing at painting. A brush, the one dependable thing in a world of strife, ruin, chaos--that one should not play with, knowingly even: she detested it. (TTL 224)

As in the non-fiction, there is a sense of the passing of time, but Woolf is more explicit in the fiction with her matter-of-fact statement, "One can't waste one's time at forty-four." What Woolf described as the "ravaging sense of the . . . feverishness of life" is transformed to a series of nouns, "strife, ruin, chaos," in the fiction, to spell out the conflict and destruction of life. In the same way, the simile and metaphor of "cling like a man on a rock, to my one anchor" in the non-fiction is made more explicit in the fiction by Woolf's choice of "A brush, the one dependable thing. . . ." Woolf states that Lily's art, her brush, becomes the medium through which she expresses her vision to the world; it is her solidity, her reality, functioning in much the same way that Woolf's "anchor" does in the non-fiction.

One critic has suggested that Woolf's writing was perhaps "the means whereby she confronted and tried to resolve the discrepancies and conflicts in her world" (Love

271). Certainly Woolf most often asks herself what life means to her (as do other people) when she is ill or depressed. Reading a book by a friend, Beatrice Webb, makes her think about the contrast between their two lives:

But then there were causes in her life: prayer; principle. None in mine. Great excitability & search after something. Great content--almost always enjoying what I'm at, but with constant change of mood. I don't think I'm ever bored. . . . I enjoy almost everything. Yet I have some restless searcher in me. Why is there not a discovery in life? Something one can lay hands on & say "This is it?" My depression is a harassed feeling--I'm looking; but that's not it--that's not it. What is it? And shall I die before I find it? (Diary 62)

In contrast to Webb's life of stability and calm, Woolf's is "harassed." Maintaining that she is contented, Woolf fills the passage with qualifying "buts" and a string of questions.

In the fiction, Woolf expresses her query about the meaning of life in a similar way. Lily has been thinking of Mrs. Ramsay's ability to simplify things, so that when Lily thinks back to the scene on the beach, where she and Charles were throwing stones into the water, the scene stays in her mind, "like a work of art" (TTL 240). And as she is looking at her canvas, resting for a moment, this question floats into her consciousness:

What is the meaning of life? That was all--a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little

daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one. (TTL 240)

In both passages, Woolf offers the hope that the search for something permanent will somehow explain the workings of life. Woolf, in the non-fiction, expresses her doubt about whether she will find the answer before she dies; in the fiction, Woolf describes more tellingly the claustrophobic pressure of time, how it "tended to close in on one with years." Perhaps the biggest difference in the two extracts is that Woolf fills the non-fictive passage with words like "but," "yet," "none," and "not," along with four questions which lend a negative and doubtful tone. By comparison, Woolf follows up the negativism of the repeated word "never," in the fictive extract, with the more optimistic statement, "Instead there were little daily miracles, illumination, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark. . . ." Woolf's metaphor of light flaring in the dark is far more positive than the thoughts she expresses about depression and death in the non-fiction; she can accept both the darkness of the unlit match and its light when illuminated.

That Woolf understood not only life's paradoxes, but art's as well, is evident from a passage in her diary where she admires another writer's style:

The thing about Proust is his combination of the utmost sensibility with the utmost tenacity. He searches out these butterfly

shades to the last grain. He is as tough as catgut & as evanescent as a butterfly's bloom. And he will I suppose both influence me & make me out of temper with every sentence of my own. (Diary 7)

The quality Woolf admires so much in Proust is so hard to define that she is driven to using the noun "thing," hoping that this will somehow convey what she means. Proust's excellence lies in his ability to combine two complete extremes, underlined by Woolf's repetition of the word "utmost." Perhaps borrowing an image from her lepidopterous days, Woolf emphasises Proust's technique using the metaphor of the butterfly's wing under the magnifying glass--which reveals the "grain" underneath the blur of colour. This combination of gentleness and strength was something Woolf aspired to in her own writing--how to achieve that visionary quality with a form that was structured in steel. Compare the corresponding language Woolf gives to Lily in the fiction:

Beautiful and bright it should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent, one colour melting into another like the colours on a butterfly's wing; but beneath the fabric must be clamped together with bolts of iron. It was a thing you could ruffle with your breath; and a thing you could not dislodge with a team of horses. (TTL 255)

Woolf chooses exactly the same adjective, "evanescent," in both fiction and non-fiction to describe the idea of melting or fading, the blurring of boundaries. The image of the butterfly captures Woolf's feeling that the visionary

aspect of art should be light and delicate, capable of depicting even the multiple shades of a butterfly's wing. Yet in both the fiction and non-fiction, there is strength beneath the fragility: the "bolts of iron" in the fiction suggest more strength of construction than the non-fiction, but the toughness of design in both images is implicit. Woolf expands the abstract nouns "sensibility" and "tenacity" of the non-fiction into "a thing you could ruffle with your breath" and "a thing you could not dislodge with a team of horses" (TTL 255). Just as in the non-fiction, Woolf chose the noun "thing" because Proust's quality defied description, here too the same word stands for two things at once: it can be both a vague noun signifying anything, and at the same time, it can be thought of as expansive for exactly the same reason. Woolf's paradoxical images of gentleness and strength are startlingly effective.

For Woolf, becoming established as a writer meant, among other things, that she was taken seriously. She writes, "They dont laugh at me any longer" (Diary 137). This in itself gave her a kind of permanence and a sense of achievement. Writing in her diary she says:

What is then the abiding truth in this phantasmagoria, I ask myself, seeking as I often do some little nugget of pure gold. I think, often, I have the happiest of lives, in having discovered stability. Now one stable moment vanquishes chaos. But this I said in The Lighthouse. (Diary 141)

Woolf is searching for a truth which will endure in a world which is filled with images as deceptive as those of a "phantasmagoria." From the non-fiction, it is evident in life she continues to search for that "little nugget of pure gold" in amongst the daily dross--yet it is clear that in the fiction Woolf achieves what she has set out to do: "Now one stable moment vanquishes chaos. But this I said in *The Lighthouse*." Even here, though, Woolf ends with a paradox. A moment, by its very nature, is transitory, not stable; yet, perhaps Woolf is suggesting that it is exactly that paradox, and the acceptance that there is no enduring stability--only moments--which is the key to the meaning of life.

Conclusion

What have I discovered by narrowing my focus in this study to the topics control/lack of control, fertility/sterility, and art/life? When I began...this study, I expected that Woolf's non-fiction would reveal the most about her innermost thoughts and feelings on these themes. And certainly Woolf does use her diary, for example, as a kind of confessional: she can confide her jealousy of Vita and Vanessa, her longing for children, her feelings of inadequacy as a woman, as well as expressing her doubts about the meaning of her life. I expected that the letters would be more transparent, simply because Woolf used them to exchange information--sometimes on technical matters such as writing style, sometimes on subjects more personal, such as her intense longing for Vita away in Persia. What was surprising was the discovery that in the medium of fiction Woolf revealed her deepest feelings--about herself, about her relationships with women, about art.

Perhaps the most note-worthy difference between the non-fiction and fiction is that in the former, Woolf can confide her deepest, most introspective thoughts, often detaching herself from the very emotion she is expressing: in the fiction, though these harsh realities of life are still present, Woolf makes it clear that art can be a saviour, granting her the freedom of space to express

herself with all the attendant ambiguities of feeling. I had expected that Woolf's prose style in the "life-writing" and the "art-writing" would contrast starkly: I expected the non-fiction to be casually phrased in simple language and the fiction to be replete with numerous figures of speech. I now find that this is not so. The strategies Woolf employs in her non-fiction appear with remarkable frequency in her fiction.

Turning, then, from the topics themselves to assess Woolf's use of language per se in the fictive and non-fictive texts, consider, for example, three of Woolf's rhetorical strategies: expansion of metaphors, methods of rendering movement, and shifts in focus.

If we look at the first strategy, expansion of metaphor, it seems that the medium of fiction allows Woolf the space to render more graphically those figures of speech used in the non-fiction. For example, in her diary, Woolf confides her feelings of alienation, saying that she misses "being on the rails of human life" (Diary 73). Adeptly, Woolf creates an image which conveys her sense of lack of direction and involvement in life. Yet, when she expresses Lily's alienation in the fiction, she chooses simple phrases to emphasise her point:

Sitting alone . . . she felt cut off from other people, and able only to go on watching, asking, wondering. . . . She had no attachment here, she felt, no relations with it . . . as if the link that usually bound

things together had been cut, and they
 floated up here, down there, off, anyhow.
 How aimless it was, how chaotic, how unreal,
 it was, she thought. . . . (TTL 218-19)

This is quite an expansion of Woolf's non-fictional four word metaphor "being on the rails"; it is though the whole extract is a clarification of Woolf's original statement ". . . she felt cut off from other people." Woolf further underlines Lily's lack of direction with a series of phrases, "they floated up here, down there, off, anyhow"; the movement from the non-fiction to the fiction is a transition from the "tight" imagery of the rails, to the "loose" imagery of the water.

On confiding her feelings of torment, Woolf says: "This always rakes me wretched in the early hours" (Diary 107). The image Woolf creates by this succinct metaphor is of a victim on a rack; yet, when we turn to the fiction, Woolf gives us a more complete rendition of torment:

'Mrs. Ramsay!' Lily cried, 'Mrs. Ramsay!'
 But nothing happened. The pain increased.
 That anguish could reduce one to such a pitch
 of imbecility, she thought! . . . stop pain,
 stop! (TTL 269)

Woolf conveys Lily's pain in more explicit simple language in the novel, expanding the three powerful words of the non-fiction ("rakes me wretched") into three graphic sentences in the fiction, which build up into Lily's cry "stop pain, stop!" The abstract "this" of the non-fiction is transformed to the more concrete "pain" of the fiction;

Woolf spells out Lily's torment so convincingly that it is almost possible to imagine the rack being slowly tightened. In the non-fiction, pain is embodied through metaphor; in the fiction, the emotions caused by the pain are described. Thus, through repetition and clarification, it seems that Woolf is often able to render her ideas more completely in the fiction.

Along with surprisingly powerful images like those offered, Woolf often selects, both in fiction and non-fiction, violent verbs which reveal her anger. This is particularly obvious when she is writing about things over which she has no control and which therefore induce fear.

Talking about the sometimes brutal, unexpected aspects of life, for example, Woolf says, "This pitches one at once into a region where there is no certainty. . ." (Letters 177). There is a real threat of force behind the verb "pitches," conveying, as it does, an image of being thrown downwards into a gulf. In the fiction, where Woolf expresses Lily's reaction to her lack of control over life, she uses similarly harsh verbs: "Could things thrust their hands up and grip one; could the blade cut; the fist grasp?" (TTL 268). Woolf creates a sense of power and aggression by choosing the verbs, "thrust," "grip," "cut," and "grasp," all of which suggest pain inflicted on a victim, all of which imply pain on contact. It is here, in the violence of her verbs, that the anger underneath rises to the surface.

This anger is also revealed in a letter Woolf writes to Vanessa. Although Woolf has, on occasions, fretted about, and regretted not having children (Diary 107, 110; Letters 329), she tells Vanessa: "You would fry us all to cinders to give Angelica [Vanessa's daughter] a day's pleasure. . . (Letters 366). Woolf seems to convey, with the graphically violent verb "fry," her real ambivalence towards the dominating power of motherhood. In the fiction, too, where Woolf describes Lily's feeling on not being able to control the coming or going of Mrs. Ramsay, she says:

Ghost, air, nothingness, a thing you could play with day or night, she had been that, and then suddenly she put her hand out and wrung the heart thus. (TTL 266)

It is the unexpectedness of the action which is so traumatic for Lily, and Woolf conveys this in her choice of the verb "wrung." In this single verb, Woolf suggests not only the agony of a squeezing torture, but the almost tyrannical power of Mrs. Ramsay.

One of Woolf's strategies which is particularly effective is the way she renders movement in her prose by juxtaposing opposites, and this movement in fiction and non-fiction is remarkably similar. Describing the motor accident, Woolf says: ". . . one feels somehow abject and cowed--exalted" (Letters 177). The movement from the crouched stance of "cowed" to the surprising upsurge of feeling in Woolf's use of the adjective "exalted" suggests

the thrill and exhilaration accompanying her sense of danger. Woolf creates a similar scope of movement in the fiction when Lily asks:

Was there no safety? . . . No guide, no shelter, but all was miracle, and leaping from the pinnacle of a tower into the air?
(TTL 268)

The image here is much more terrifying somehow, as Woolf moves from comforting adjectives like "safety" and "shelter" to the graphic description of "leaping from the pinnacle"; but the movement upwards is the same as in the non-fiction, evident in Woolf's choice of the word "leaping."

Note also how Woolf uses sailing imagery to juxtapose two ideas. Describing the contrast between herself and Vita, she says Vita is ". . . so much in full sail on the high tides, where I am coasting down backwaters" (Diary 52). Woolf's choice of language emphasises the power and direction of Vita's life compared to what Woolf sees as the passivity and aimlessness of her own. She effects a similar contrast in the fiction when Lily compares herself with Paul Rayley:

How inconspicuous she felt herself by Paul's side! He, glowing, burning; she aloof, satirical; he, bound for adventure; she, moored to the shore; he, launched, incautious; she solitary, left out. . . .
(TTL 159)

The imagery Woolf chooses in the novel heightens the contrast even more between the fully-fledged Paul, "bound for adventure" and the static Lily, "moored to the shore."

Woolf turns to yet another effective technique--shift of focus--when she wants to distance herself from the emotion she is expressing. She does this both in fiction and non-fiction, particularly when dealing with emotions of fear, inadequacy, or desire. One of the ways she achieves this shift is in her choice of whether to use the first person singular pronoun or the third person singular "one."

When Woolf expresses her fear about the unexpectedness of life and her lack of control over it, for example, she writes:

I went out early this morning . . . and saw a woman killed by a motor car. This pitches one at once into a region where there is no certainty. . . . (Letters 177)

The fear caused by the sudden violence of the accident is too much for Woolf, so she defuses the disturbing conflict created by her feelings of fear by selecting the third person singular pronoun in the following sentence, even though it is quite clear that she is speaking of her own reaction. Likewise in the fiction, Woolf uses a similar rhetorical device when she describes Lily's emotions of fear:

She had perfect control of herself. . . .
What was it then? What did it mean? Could things thrust their hands up and grip one. . .
. ? (TTL 267-68)

Although Woolf starts with the pronoun "she," once she has conveyed, by use of words like "it," and "things," the vague

terror life can cause, she immediately switches to the more distant use of "one," as she did in the non-fiction.

Woolf similarly switches pronouns in yet another section in her diary:

I don't think I'm ever bored. . . . I enjoy almost everything. Yet I have some restless searcher in me. Why is there not a discovery in life? Something one can lay hands on & say "This is it?" (Diary 62)

Woolf's realisation that it is her own life which is depressingly empty prompts her to slip, almost effortlessly, into the comforting use of "one," as if consoling herself that she could not be alone in feeling the weight of meaninglessness. In the novel, Lily asks herself a similar question:

What is the meaning of life? That was all--a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. (TTL 240)

The question is phrased in a more direct fashion than it was in Woolf's diary, and thus is made more stark by its very simplicity. And immediately after this disturbing question, Woolf chooses the phrase "tended to close in on one," the pronoun offering the same small comfort that Lily is not alone and that the claustrophobic passing of time affects everyone. This use of the pronoun "one" certainly has the effect of diminishing the intensity of the emotion.

Alternately, Woolf sometimes uses the first person singular pronoun in the non-fiction but shifts to the third

person singular pronoun in the fiction. This is most obvious when she is expressing desire:

. . . I have thought of you as a bowl of golden water which brims but never overflows. . . . you are beautiful, beloved, chaste; and I am none of these things. (Letters 363-64)

Woolf heightens the contrast between Vanessa and herself by her natural use of the first person singular pronoun, making their difference even more obvious and personal. Yet when Woolf turns to the fiction and describes similar feelings of adoration that Lily has for Mrs. Ramsay, she chooses the more distant pronoun "one":

What art was there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into those secret chambers? What device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored? (TTL 79)

Paradoxically, by selecting the more detached form "one," Woolf is able to paint a more intimate picture of the relationship Lily seeks with Mrs. Ramsay, underlining the point with her final phrase "one with the object one adored."

It is when Woolf underlines her own sense of inadequacy that she seems to use the more personal pronoun "I," as she does here, writing to Vita:

I try to invent you for myself, but find I really have only 2 twigs and 3 straws to do it. I can get the sensation of seeing you . . . but I find you going off . . . and then I can't invent a thing you say. . . . (Letters 205)

For when we look at the fiction, where she is describing Lily's desire to "know" Mrs. Ramsay, Woolf shifts again into the use of "one":

One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with, she reflected. . . . One wanted most some secret sense, with which to steal through keyholes and surround her. . . . (TTL 294)

In the non-fiction, Woolf's emphasis falls on her own inability to perceive anything more than an external apprehension; in the fiction, the emphasis is on Lily's desire for a more intimate knowledge of Mrs. Ramsay. Ironically, it would seem that Woolf best creates the intimacy of "secret sense" by using the more impersonal pronoun "one."

Let me offer a final example in which a similar transition from non-fiction to fiction occurs, making the emotion even more obvious. Writing to Vita away in Persia, Woolf says, ". . . part of my misery is not having you. Yes, I miss you, I miss you" (Letters 237). Woolf's use of the first person singular pronoun is natural here, yet it does emphasise, as does her use of repetition, her intense feelings. In the fiction, however, where Lily is battling with her intense desire for Mrs. Ramsay's presence, consider how Woolf conveys this desire:

For how could one express in words these emotions of the body? express that emptiness there? . . . It was one's body feeling, not one's mind. (TTL 265)

If the raw emotion of fear prompted Woolf in the non-fiction to shift into the impersonal third person singular pronoun (Letters 177), in the fiction, the stark emotion of desire makes her do the same. It is clear that she is uncomfortable with feelings of the body, as is made obvious in this extract from her diary:

So Vita came: & I register the shock of meeting after absence; how shy one is; how disillusioned by the actual body. . . . I chattering, partly to divert her attention from me; & to prevent her thinking "Well, is this all?" (Diary 88)

Woolf begins, naturally enough, with the first person singular pronoun, yet, feeling the awkwardness arising from "the actual body," she takes refuge in the use of "one," thus creating a safe detachment from her emotions. As if to underline this detachment, Woolf utilises another strategy and displaces the emotion on to Vita. Even if the thoughts are not flattering to Woolf, imagining them is less disagreeable than being faced with uncomfortable feelings of inadequacy.

In the fiction, when Mr. Ramsay and Lily meet again after a long separation, Woolf similarly displaces the focus away from Lily:

. . . there issued from him such a groan that any other woman in the whole world would have done something, said something--all except myself, thought Lily, girding at herself bitterly, who am not a woman, but a peevish, ill-tempered, dried-up old maid, presumably. (TTL 226)

Woolf's strategy in the fiction is different from the non-fiction in that she does not use the pronoun "one" to achieve the distancing effect she wants: instead, she carries the focus away from Lily by her phrase "any other woman in the whole world," and follows this by a list of adjectives which the reader supposes Lily has created for herself, until we come to the final word, "presumably," dropped neatly in after the last comma, which cleverly twists the passage around to make it seem as though these are the thoughts of Mr. Ramsay. It seems that Woolf, whether in her non-fictive or fictive writing, effects a shift of focus which acts as a shield for emotions that are too uncomfortably close, and thus reduces the intensity of those feelings.

So, in the final analysis, the strategies Woolf employs in her fiction and non-fiction are strikingly similar. Woolf's letters and diaries prove captivating in themselves, not only because we see her remarkable imagination and wit at work, but also because they are written, at times, with the same skill and soaring style that have made her novels part of our literary tradition. It would seem that, contrary to expectation, there is no unbridgeable gap, no difference in kind but only in degree, between the "curves and arabesques," between Woolf's "life-writing" and her "art-writing." Yet, in the medium of fiction, Woolf does

finally what she cannot do in the non-fiction: she renders complex emotions more completely, better resolves ambiguities of feeling, and achieves that harmony she long sought in the elusive "stable moment."

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