

VIRGINIA WOOLF: HER LAST EXPERIMENT

By

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It is said with truth that Virginia Woolf was a tireless experimenter. After *To the Lighthouse*, which is generally considered her greatest artistic success, came four more works of fiction into the world: *Orlando* in 1928, *The Waves* in 1931, *The Years* in 1937, and *Between the Acts*, which was published posthumously in 1941. Although these four novels can be called the novels of her "last period," they contain no common element, except for the crusading of the author for the individual human personality and its independence, and her all-absorbing interest in the individual's essential loneliness.

Apart from *The Years*, in which her method is objective, that is traditional for the first time since the days of *Night and Day*, each of these works of fiction has a peculiar structure of its own. *Orlando* is a historical fantasy, the biography of a family traced through three and a half centuries of English history in the person of one character, and can be called the tailpiece to the progress of the "stream of consciousness" method which began with *Jacob's Room*. *The Waves* strikes the common reader with its very peculiar device, the device by which the whole story is presented through the quoted thoughts of its six characters. It may be said that this device was employed to eliminate the author's omniscience, which had always been the inevitable element in the traditionary fiction, and to Virginia Woolf, the troublesome element which had to be eliminated in order to take the "stream of consciousness" technique nearer to its logical conclusion, but which could not be entirely done away with in the novels of her middle period, *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. R. L. Chambers points out, that the constant repetition of the formula, "Neville said," "Rhoda

said," "Louis said," which occupies practically all of the three hundred and twenty-five pages of *The Waves* does not necessarily mean the elimination of the author's omniscience, if that was the intention behind the peculiar construction of the book. It can be said that the author's omniscience, so far from being eliminated, has been emphasized by the repetition of "so and so said." Truly as Mr. Chambers says, only the omniscient author can tell us what her characters said.⁽¹⁾ But the purpose here is not to dwell on the peculiar method adopted in *The Waves*, but rather, to show the extremes to which Virginia Woolf could go as she sought for her "stream of consciousness." *The Years*, a lengthy novel presenting the fortunes of an English middle class family through eleven stages in their history from 1880 to the present day, contains no technical innovation, unless it can be regarded as innovation in her case to abandon for the moment her previous experiments and go back to the method of her earlier works such as *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*.

Finally came the posthumous *Between the Acts*, which, strictly speaking, does not follow the lines laid down in former experiments but serves as another evidence of the strange perversity of genius which seems to have found satisfaction nowhere but in the unexplored and exotic waterways. It is interesting to note, however, that unlike the other novels of the last period *Between the Acts* may possibly be called a successor, in a way, for the novels of her middle period, in that the author, in the manner of *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, limits the action of the book temporally to a single day in the life of its chief characters, and spatially to a

(1) *The Novels of Virginia Woolf*, P. 44.

single place, Pointz Hall, the country home of the Olivers. In order to follow truthfully what she professes in her frequently quoted essay on Modern Fiction, this limitation of action was inevitable, for who can successfully do the tedious recording of "the incessant shower of innumerable atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall," and "trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness"⁽¹⁾ confronting a host of characters unlimited temporally and spatially in their action?

The limited action, the personalities of the characters, and the essence of their relationship are presented to the reader in the true "stream of consciousness" method by a masterly hand with the same skill in word-painting, the same colour and charm as were shown in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. There are passages in *Between the Acts* where the author shows herself at her best, and which may lead us to judge the book to be one of the author's finest achievements. And yet the book is pronounced "the most baffling of her books" by Mr. Chambers, who could not help saying that "for the sake of another *To the Lighthouse*, of another *Mrs. Dalloway* or even another *Jacob's Room*", he "would have gladly done with out every word of *Between the Acts*, much as it contains which is of the highest interest and the highest beauty."⁽²⁾ What are the destructive elements that "baffle" the common reader and prevent the book from carrying away the palm despite all its claims to first-rate writing? And how is the "stream of consciousness" given a new twist in this novel? The purpose of the present study will be to attempt an analysis of the structure of *Between the Acts* and the author's method of presentation by comparing the book with her two masterpieces, *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*.

The first four pages of *Between the Acts* serve as a head-piece to the entire book,

the action of which is limited to a single day, as already mentioned before, except for these pages which describe how on a certain summer night the inexplicable passion of the chief character, Isabella Oliver, a married woman with two children, is first formed for a stranger. Then from the fifth page onward, for one whole summer day we are with the Oliver family — Isabella; her husband, Giles; Giles' father, Bartholomew; Bartholomew's sister, Lucy Swithin; and their servants. We see them spending the summer morning moving in and out of Pointz Hall each intent on his or her own thoughts and duties, some with a little flutter to indicate the approach of the pageant which is to be held in the afternoon on their grassy terrace.

It is as spectators of this pageant that we see the Oliver family spending the afternoon of our solitary day with them, together with the vivacious Mrs. Manresa and the frustrated William Dodge (who had dropped in for luncheon together) and the audience from village and county society. Between the acts the various chief characters wander off, William Dodge with old Mrs Swithin; Giles with Mrs. Manresa; Isabella with William Dodge; Isabella alone with her imaginings, her poetry and her problems of love and hate. Between the acts we dig deep into their mental world. But we are always led back with them to the pageant; we sit down with them in the audience, follow the cyclostyled program, recognize the village people among its performers, and listen to its words.

Of all the thoughts and feelings which occupy the consciousness of our main characters as they reveal their inner selves before, during and after the pageant, we find that the one emotional centre which demands the special attention of the reader is the irrational passion of Isabella Oliver for a gentleman farmer, who is simply referred to as "the man in grey", and the revengeful show of passion of Giles, her husband, for Mrs. Manresa. This sort of passion will not matter in the long run, being common to married people who have reached that stage in their relation-

(1) *The Common Reader, First Series*, in the essay on Modern Fiction.

(2) R. L. Chambers, *op. cit.*, p. 39

ship when they know too much of each other and yet not enough. Almost every feeling evoked is common to those who are placed in similar situation in actual life: Isabella thinking of Giles with irony as "the father of her children;"⁽¹⁾ there being between the two detachment and dissatisfaction, love and hate. It requires no deep psychological insight to see that the cause for such detachment and dissatisfaction lies in the difficulty of both parties concerned to respect each other's independence of spirit. It requires great imaginative power as well as psychological insight, however, to present this theme, essentially the author's favourite theme of the individuality and its independence, from an entirely new and interesting angle, and to charge every word employed with its full meaning for the whole conception so that there is nothing too much and yet nothing is amiss. In her treatment of the commonplace we find that there is nothing commonplace as we come across such passages as the following:—

"The words made two rings, perfect rings, that floated them, herself and Haines, like two swans down stream. But his snow-white breast was circled with a tangle of dirty duckweed; and she too, in her webbed feet was entangled, by her husband, the stockbroker."⁽²⁾

The central incident of this book is the pageant of English history presented by the villagers on a grassy terrace in the grounds of Pointz Hall. The Pageant consists of fragmentary scenes from English history: maying or nutting in the time of Chaucer; Canterbury pilgrims paying homage to the shrine of the Saint; a scene from an Elizabethan drama played before great Eliza; scenes from a drama after the manner of the 18th century comedy of manners; a scene from a 19th century drama heavily embossed with Victorian prudery and religious enthusiasm. They are presented, cyclostyle, with poetry intervening to indicate the lapse of time. The poetry and the dialogues of the pageant are sometimes presented in fragments

interrupted by the comments, thoughts, and feelings of the audience. Often the words are blown away by the summer breeze, which, together with the clouds floating overhead, produce a sort of airy atmosphere, which impart to the mind of the reader a sense of time passing, and of the fruitlessness of all human efforts.

It is obvious from the space which the pageant world occupies—the pageant words cover a total of between thirty and forty pages, about one seventh part of the whole book—that it is conceived as a necessary part of the construction of the book. It must be remembered here that to Woolf the really interesting occurrences were not the occurrences in the material world but the occurrences in the mind. For her "every feeling, every thought, every quality of brain and spirit," was "the proper stuff of fiction."⁽¹⁾ We have reason to fear, however that even by the hands of a great artist perhaps a too faithful recording of "the myriads of impressions as they fall on the mind"⁽²⁾ may render a voluminous book monotonous. For after a perusal of *The Years* we cannot but agree with Mr. Chambers that "although it is a book with spiritual interest and interesting enough to dip into, it, after all, tells us nothing."⁽³⁾ This accusation is probably due to the fact that there is no central incident in this book to trim it neatly, to accentuate it and to enlarge the spiritual meaning of the book with the effect it has upon the personality. We can see that with the introduction of the pageant as a central incident of *Between the Acts* the monotony of the spiritual experiences of the characters is relieved.

It is easily perceived that each part of the program presents some spirit typical of the period of English history it is designed to indicate; but if the author intended to convey something more than the spirit of the consecutive periods, that is not so easily detected. Beyond that it may be translated into different shades of meaning or it may be easily misunder-

(1) *Between the Acts*, P. 19,

(2) *Between the Acts*, P. 10.

(1) *The Common Reader, First Series.*

(2) *ibid.*

(3) R. L. Chambers, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

stood, as it evidently was by the rector, who, after the pageant is over, stands as representative spokesman of the village to sum up his impressions of the pageants and to praise the ingenious efforts of Miss La Trobe, the director. He ventures an answer to the question, "What message was our pageant meant to convey?"⁽¹⁾ To him at least it was indicated that "we are members one of another;" that "each is a part of the whole;" and that "we act different parts, but are the same." "May we not hold that there is a spirit that inspires, pervades . . . ?"⁽²⁾ That this was intended to be a misinterpretation is not only sensed by the reader but also confirmed by the words, "La Trobe had been excruciated by the Rector's interpretation."⁽³⁾ In the grotesque finale, where the whole caste appears with mirrors of many kinds, holding them up to the audience while the producer, booming through a megaphone, damns her patrons for their general hypocrisy and particular sins, and damns civilization as "the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilization . . . built by orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves,"⁽⁴⁾ we find that here at least is made clear the symbolical import of the pageant. Here we find a message to the modern age with its many diseases and to civilization at large. Whatever message the author intended besides this warning for the modern age, that this message is considered to be important is clear from the space which the pageant words fill.

So the pageant as a central incident is intelligently conceived and is a necessary part of the construction of the book. This is not to be criticized, nor the content of the message. However, as we have already found out, there is another emotional centre in the book, namely, the relationship centering around Isabella. Having discovered two emotional centres in the book, the question that next arises is whether there is any inherent and necessary connection between the two. Is there any serious

attempt made to supply such a connection? In other words, are the chief characters in the book made aware of the coming catastrophe which is suggested by the symbolical pageant and by the strange sense of foreboding it generates—the book was published in 1930, when the whole western world was on the verge of war—and of the ultimate downfall that may come to a world misled by all sorts of modern diseases? That we shall see.

Of all the characters present on the terrace to watch the proceedings on the natural stage there are at least three who are more absorbed in what goes on in their inner selves than on the stage before them. First there is Isabella with her incessant inquiry into the problem of love and hate and her concept of life as being a solitary journey as that of the "last little donkey in the long caravanseraï crossing the desert."⁽¹⁾ She is perpetually aware that life is but a burden and that it is left for the solitary individual to "go your way till your heels blister and your hoofs crack."⁽²⁾ Next there is the desperately frustrated William Dodge who cannot bring himself to say much in the presence of his acquaintances, and generally finds himself "wound tight" in social gatherings. We find that he is one who can read the mind, and understand the meaning of life, for he says to Isabella: "The doom of sudden death hanging over us, there's no retreating and advancing for us . . ."⁽³⁾ With Dodge and with Isabella, theirs are the problems that follow human beings regardless of time and place. The problem of Giles, another character who cannot help his cool detachment from the pageant world, is pertaining to the immediate problem that Europe at that period was beset with. Coming back from work on that particular summer afternoon, his thoughts are, as he changes his clothes and makes his first entrance into the world of Pointz Hall, "Had he not read, in the morning paper, in the train, that sixteen men had been shot, others prisoned, just

(1) *Between the Acts*, p. 223

(2) *Between the Acts*, p. 224

(3) *ibid.*, p. 237.

(4) *ibid.*, p. 219.

(1) *Between the Acts*, p. 182.

(2) *ibid.*,

(3) *ibid.*, p. 136.

over there, across the gulf, in the flat land which divided them from the continent?"⁽¹⁾ Confronting the magnificent view of the distant fields from his terrace he "jerked his chair into position with a jerk. Thus only could he show his irritation, his rage with old fogies who sat and looked at the view over coffee and cream when the whole of Europe—over there—was bristling like . . . He had no command of metaphor. Only the ineffective word 'hedghog' illustrated his vision of Europe, bristling with guns, poised with planes. At any moment guns would rake that land into furrows."⁽²⁾ Thus, Giles alone is made aware of the coming catastrophe, and the shadow which darkens all of the audience and the pageant characters. His awareness, to form the unifying link between the two emotional worlds, should somehow be woven into the fabric of his relationship with Isa, and thread its way through the consciousness of everyone present in Pointz Hall. That unifying link is what the book misses. There is no attempt made in that direction. The world of the pageant and the world of Isabella and Giles are in relation to each other self-contained.

As the pageant characters appear one by one on the stage and pipe out words relating to the history of England, from time to time, it is interrupted by such comments as follows: "What a lovely voice!" "That's England in the time of Chaucer, I take." "Bravo! bravo! There's life in the old dog yet." In these verbal comments there is something cool and detached; something which makes us feel that the utterances were made merely for the sake of trying to appear interested in the pageant. These words do not penetrate into the world of the pageant and its symbolism. The effect is that it splits the purpose of the book into two. It may be said that symbolical writing can only succeed when it is presented *through* the thoughts and feelings and action of the characters—as was done in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. In *Between the Acts* it is presented *to* the characters, instead of *through* the characters.

It would be of some help for us to reflect here on the structure of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, and note the conscious effort of the author to weave the meandering stream of consciousness into a compact form by means of a central incident which helps to hold together the warp and the woof of the fabric. In *Mrs. Dalloway* the central incident was Mrs. Dalloway's party which becomes the springboard from which the mind begins its meandering through many by-ways to scenes of past life and the landing place for all emotions that settle down to distill or dissolve. In *To the Lighthouse* the central incident was, as the title indicates, the boat-trip to the lighthouse, which is the symbol of the complicated emotions which the book evokes, and which finally throws light on the question concerning life and death, brought up in the first half of the book.

As we investigate further, we find that there emerges a point of difference between the function of the central incidents in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* and the function of the pageant in *Between the Acts*. Let us illustrate this point with some reference to the place of the party in *Mrs. Dalloway*. As already mentioned before, the party is, so to speak, a springboard from which the "stream of consciousness" of the main characters makes a dive into the familiar waters of the past and on which it alights in due time again. The significant fact is that the single interest of the author concerning life, love and hate is made to emanate from the characters and the party, contrary to the double purpose which splits the unity of *Between the Acts*. The party in *Mrs. Dalloway* is there to enhance the character and personality of the people connected with it, and their views of life. To illustrate this fully it would become necessary to quote a considerably large part of the book, which is one inseparable whole. The following quotations may not satisfy our purpose but they may be of some help in understanding how neatly the party is drawn in as a necessary element to reveal the character and interests of Peter Walsh, and Richard

(1) *Between the Acts*, p. 58.

(2) *ibid.*, p. 66.

Dalloway, as well as Mrs. Dalloway.

"The sound of Big Ben flooded Clarissa's drawing-room, where she sat, ever so annoyed, at her writing table; worried; annoyed. It was perfectly true that she had not asked Ellie Henderson to her party; but she had done it on purpose. Now Mrs. Marsham wrote: 'She had told Ellie Henderson she would ask Clarissa—Ellie so much wanted to come.' But why should she invite all the dull women in London to her parties? Why should Mrs. Marsham interfere?"⁽¹⁾

"It was a feeling, some unpleasant feeling, earlier in the day perhaps; something that Peter had said, combined with some depression of her own in her bedroom, taking off her hat; and what Richard had said had added to it, but what had he said? There were his roses. Her parties! That was it! Her parties! Both of them had criticized her very unfairly, laughed at her very unjustly, for her parties. That was it! That was it!

Well, how was she going to defend herself? Now that she knew what it was, she felt perfectly happy. They thought, or Peter at any rate thought, that she enjoyed imposing herself; liked to have famous people about her; great names; was simply a snob, in short. Well, Peter might think so. Richard merely thought it foolish of her to like excitement when she knew it was bad for her heart. It was childish, he thought. And both were quite wrong. What she liked was simply life.

"That's what I do it for," she said, speaking aloud, to life."⁽²⁾

The same difficulty is to be faced when one attempts to quote illustrations from *To the Lighthouse* to prove how deftly the trip to the lighthouse is drawn in to expose the human personality and the problem of its relation to time and death. I will jump to the conclusion and emphasize the fact that the lighthouse is there as the 'objective correlative' for the whole complex

of emotions which the book evokes, of the man, the wife, the father, the son, the philosopher, the scientist, and the artist. It is there as the symbol of life and eternity, the concept of which is presented *through* the thoughts, feelings and action of the characters.

So far, we have found out about *Between the Acts* that the pageant as a central incident does not fit itself neatly into the fabric of the book and that the novel thus loses its unity of impression and the singleness of emotional effect. It may be called an artistic failure, for it seems to be the main cause for the failure of the book to demand the reader's sympathy. Speaking of the "singleness of emotional effect," the present writer cannot help feeling that, perhaps the double theme of the book was intended by the author in order to bring about a certain emotional effect which embraces the double theme and which is certainly not expressed explicitly but presented to the reader's imagination and understanding to be sought out eventually. One fact that attracts my attention to this angle is to be found where Mrs. La Trobe, the director of the pageant, failing to compel the sympathy of the audience, curses, "Audiences were the devil. O to write a play without an audience—the play. But here she was fronting her audience. Every second they were slipping the noose. Her little game had gone wrong.....Grating her fingers in the bark, she damned the audience. Panic seized her. Blood seemed to pour from her shoes. This is death, death, death, she noted in the margin of her mind, when illusions fails. Unable to lift her hand, she stood facing the audience."⁽³⁾

Aware of the gap between the genius behind the play and the audience, of the general lack of imaginative power on the part of the audience, the author perhaps had selected for her material a sensitive artist with unusual imaginative power—Miss La Trobe—with her pageant as against a world of uninterested onlookers in order to illustrate her conviction that

(1) *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 130.

(2) *ibid.*, p. 133,

(3) *Between the Acts*, p. 206.

"the little game" of the artist frequently "goes wrong," and that the illusion of the artist is generally lost on the ordinary observer. Whether that was the original intention of the author or not (if one must beware of being too presumptuous), as a result the reader is made to feel the author's pessimistic outlook of life. He feels that the lack of unity in the construction of the book is at least in keeping with the pessimistic outlook of a sensitive human being harrassed by metaphysical problems. He cannot suppress a strange sense of foreboding as he visualizes the breaking down of her own being and of the world of the artist on the eve of the "coming catastrophe."

This departure from unity is in keeping with the inability of the chief characters to unite with one another; Isabella with Giles; Isabella with the gentleman farmer; Giles with Mrs. Manresa. It must be remembered here that one great concern of Virginia Woolf in relation to the nature of human personality was the individual's essential loneliness. Through the whole tenour and tone of her novels her desire to overcome this loneliness, her passionate desire to merge the personality with all that surrounds it, her passion for unity can be most clearly felt. Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* had the capacity to do this. In *The Waves* there is always the desire and inability to merge. Again in *Between the Acts* the desire is there but rejected. It seems that this last book was written to put down in bold letters the answers to all the questions previously raised by the author, to emphasize the essential loneliness of the individual, and to confirm that the artist is the most solitary traveller of all and that in this modern age there is no shape in the midst of chaos.

Having thus acquired an understanding of the general outline of the structure of the novel, let us next focus our attention on the details of its constructional lines and see what twist the author gives to the "stream of consciousness" in this last experiment of hers. In order to gain a full understanding of the method of presentation it becomes

necessary to cast a glance backward to examine its earlier stage and to point out the channels she already explored for her "stream." But to understand her method of presentation at all it is necessary, in the first place, to know how she defines her concept of life and the function of the novel in her essay on Modern Fiction.

"Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it. Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? We are not pleading merely for courage and sincerity; we are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it."⁽¹⁾

Out of the "myriad impressions received by the mind on an ordinary day" she built a new and brilliant novel technique, and it is interesting to trace the processes by which her principle found its actual expression and to see the intractable raw material of life controlled and lead orderly into the waters of an exotic channel. This process is first and last a process of selection, and its pattern determines

(1) *The Common Reader, First Series.*

whether the author succeeds or fails in performing the function of a significant artist. If a novelist were to describe every thought of a single character experienced even during a single day, the novel would necessarily reach immense proportions, far longer than any human being ever succeeded in writing. None of Virginia Woolf's novels written after her adoption of the "stream of consciousness" method are as long as the works of H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy and the like, whom she called "materialists." This goes to show that the "myriad impressions" and the "innumerable atoms" have been reduced to reasonable numbers, through some process of selection. That this process has been a very stringent one will be explained by the constructional lines of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* which will be outlined here briefly before going into the details of those of *Between the Acts*.

Although the action of *Mrs. Dalloway* is encompassed within a single day, the greater part of the action is presented through the minds of the characters, and the mind ranges without limitation of time or space. Accordingly the book is actually concerned with more than what may actually happen to an average person on a single day. Undergoing a stringent process of selection this material comes out with a very interesting pattern of construction. The novel begins with Mrs. Dalloway going out one June morning into a London street to buy flowers for her party. As she steps out a little squeak of the door-hinges of her house reminds her of her past days at Bourton, her parents' home. Through her mind we are introduced to Peter Walsh, once her boy friend, and as we are given a glimpse of his personality, we are back with Mrs. Dalloway on the kerb waiting for a vehicle to pass. This time we meet in the flesh, an old friend of hers, Hugh Whitbread. His presence brings to her mind a picture of his ailing wife and again Peter Walsh, around whom her emotion whirls until we find her this time at the Park gates. As she walks on her thoughts wander back

again to her past and within the first few pages we are given a knowledge of some of her acquaintances, always presented with some peculiarly fitting image which betrays their characters with astonishing economy of words. This movement out of the reality and back again goes on throughout the entire book. This movement, however, is not confined to just one person, Mrs. Dalloway, for when she finally reaches the florist's shop, the violent explosion made by the back-firing of a motor engine attracts the attention, not only of the two persons in the shop, but also of the many people who are out on the street, and for a moment we are called into the inner thoughts of these people who are respectively puzzled as to who may be in the car. Meanwhile a small crowd is gathered at the gates of Buckingham Palace waiting listlessly, yet confidentially, for a car that may arrive with a member of the royal family. But their attention is suddenly attracted by an aeroplane writing smoke letters in the sky, and they do not notice the car, perhaps the car that made the explosion in front of the flower shop and perhaps not, as it makes its much awaited entrance through the Palace gates. Mrs. Dalloway, who by this time has reached her home with the flowers also looks up into the sky and notices the aeroplane and again we follow her action, and more frequently, her thoughts. The movement out and back again becomes complicated for it is now divided into many parts. This complicated "stream of consciousness" is reminiscent of orchestra music of a complicated construction. A young married couple, an insane man and an Italian girl, who have noticed the back-firing of the car before, now look up into the sky to watch the aeroplane as they take a rest in Regent's Park. These people have nothing whatsoever to do with Mrs. Dalloway and yet are important for their orbit of existence come in contact with that of Mrs. Dalloway—they come across Peter Walsh on his way back from a short visit to Mrs. Dalloway; the insane man is a patient of a doctor who is later a guest at Mrs. Dalloway's party. The tragic fate of

this insane man who eventually kills himself has no direct bearing on the life of Mrs. Dalloway, whose primary concern in life is to enjoy it, but it is important for the author and her concept of life as it reveals to the reader what life could be for another being. If the emotional relationship centering around Mrs. Dalloway can be called the first theme of the music, the emotional feud of the young couple may be called the second theme which completes the author's symphony of life.

Many more things happen actually, and in the minds of our characters but it seems unnecessary to take it up further. We have found that the structure of the book has a peculiar pattern—that movement out of reality and back again, that hanging on to chance clues and swinging out again, that impingement of orbits that appear to but never cross one another; everything is carefully prepared and sewn together into a complete whole with astonishing skill so that no crack is visible. As we follow the carefully planned movement we feel that the experience is like watching the skillful feat of an acrobatic performer, who, letting go of the one hold he has on solid matter, makes a magnificent spring into the mid-air, and then, at the very nick of time, regains his hold again. His hold on solid matter, whether it be a swing or a rope, is very brief; he indulges in his swinging motion through the air. The straightforward objective description in *Mrs. Dalloway* serves as the foothold from which the mind sets out for its deliberate meander; the objective element alternates with the subjective element, with the latter predominating. Indeed, the significant thing in the structure of *Mrs. Dalloway* is this happy compromise between the need for formal clarity of presentation and the formlessness inherent in the "stream of consciousness" method. It is owing to this compromise that the peculiar method of Mrs. Woolf becomes accessible to the common reader.

As already mentioned before, *Mrs. Dalloway* is one inseparable whole, with no division into chapters and parts except for the extra spacing between lines which is in-

serted here and there to indicate the move from the consciousness of one character to another. Unlike *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* has chapters with numerical headings to mark the change of scenes. Furthermore the book is divided into three parts: *The Window*, *Time Passes* and *The Lighthouse*. In the first part, *The Window*, Mr Ramsay, a professional philosopher, his wife and their eight children are on holidays on the north-west coast of Scotland. Besides the family their circle includes such friends and acquaintances as they might be expected to ask to join them—Tansley, the atheist, Augustus Carmichael, the poet, Lily Briscoe, who paints, and William Bankes, a botanist. James, the youngest of the Ramsays has been promised by his mother a boat-trip to the lighthouse, which is to be carried out the next day if weather permits. The anxiety of James and his mother for the weather is the central fact of this part and serves as a linking factor which threads its way through the fibre of the book which consists mainly of the thoughts and emotions of the various characters. *Time Passes*, which contains the central fact of the entire book, the death of Mrs. Ramsay, marks the passage of several years in a truly impressive manner. In *The Lighthouse*, the trip to the lighthouse is finally realized after an interval of ten years and here are also to be found the answers to the metaphysical questions presented in the first part.

With the adoption of the traditional convention—the division into parts and chapters, the book appears to move on normal constructional lines from scene to scene, though it is to be remembered that the "stream of consciousness" is still the method employed, so that the change of scene is more a change of aspect, that is, a move from the consciousness of one character to the consciousness of another. Furthermore the movement is easy and natural because in this closely knit, homogeneous world of an intellectual set of people who might be expected to have spiritual interests and experiences there is felt to be no need of artificial bridges to carry the reader from scene to scene,

or from one point of consciousness to another. The constructional lines of this book will not be followed in details, for the attempt may result in a sort of monotonous story-telling, there being no particular pattern as was possible to point out in *Mrs. Dalloway*. The writer feels that it is sufficient for our purpose here to sum up the constructional lines of *To the Lighthouse* as being "normal and natural" compared to *Mrs. Dalloway*, and to add that here again objective description alternates with the interior monologues of the characters. Thus the compromise between the need for formal clarity and the formlessness peculiar to the "stream of consciousness" method is once more achieved, this time much less artificially than in the case of *Mrs. Dalloway*.

The strange sense of fluidity, which is the product of the author's style as well as her method and which is one striking characteristic of her works, is in these two books so marked that even the objective description indicative of the omniscience of the author partakes of the subjectiveness predominant in the "stream of consciousness" method and the reader finds himself in a "luminous halo" where it becomes difficult to distinguish between the actual speech and the represented speech, between the action and the inner thoughts of the characters. Comparing *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* carefully, however we find that there is a little difference between them concerning this point. In the former, such distinctly objective and straightforward passages as "she had reached Park gates," and "she stood for a moment looking at the omnibuses in Picadilly" stand out distinctly and by themselves present a vivid picture of the characters doing this and that, although there is that sense of fluidity mentioned above. But there is more or less a distinct line between what Mrs. Dalloway does and what she thinks. In the latter, objective description is to be found everywhere but it does not stand out so distinctly. Before we know it, it melts into the sea of consciousness.

"'Look!' she said laughing. They were

actually fighting. Joseph and Mary were fighting. Anyhow they all went up again, and the air was shoved aside by their black wings and cut into exquisite scimitar shapes. The movement of the wings beating out, out, out, she could never describe accurately enough to please herself—was one of the loveliest of all to her."⁽¹⁾

In *Between the Acts* the action is again encompassed within a single day and the structure of the book is similar to that of *Mrs. Dalloway*, there being no division into parts except for the extra spacing used to mark the change of scene. Frequently in the latter this extra spacing indicated the move from the consciousness of one character to the consciousness of another, whereas in the former, it clearly indicates the change of scene. Thus, the constructional lines of the former appear much more natural and normal than those of the latter. Guided by such straightforward statements as "Across the hall a door opened" or "Miss La Trobe was pacing to and fro between the birch trees," the reader is led from one scene to another in so orderly a manner that there is little difficulty in finding a footing whence he can observe the drama of life. Each scene is selected with such great care and presented with such transparent clarity that the reader cannot help comparing the structure of the whole book with a well-planned dramatical presentation. The present writer is tempted to say that the author was perhaps directing a drama of life with the Olivers and their friends as the leading characters, the Olivers' country home as the stage, and the pageant directed by Miss La Trobe as an interlude. The last few words of the book reading, "Then the curtain rose.....They spoke"⁽²⁾ seem to justify this point of view.

This drama of life directed and presented by the author to the reader is evidently a work of the present age, being strongly characterized by that persistent consciousness of the individual of its inner self, especially the awareness of the individual of

(1) *To the Lighthouse*, p. 93.

(2) *Between the Acts*, p. 256.

the dignity and tragedy of man. It recalls to the mind of the writer a novel theatrical performance witnessed in the United States in which the inner thoughts of the characters are revealed by "shadow characters" who stand directly behind the characters and constantly speak out their minds. This affinity is owing to that "stream of consciousness" which is still the method employed in this book.

It is to be noted, however, that throughout the book there is an interesting development of technique for whereas the relationship of the main characters emerge through the "stream of consciousness," our knowledge of much that is presented to us comes from objective description. In *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* the "stream of consciousness" was unmistakably a broad and assertive one, frequently overflowing its banks and invading the outer world. This stream is now narrowed and subdued in the last novel, and the contrast between the two methods is not acute or even noticeable; the transition and merging from one into the other is managed without effort. One would like to say that the balance between the two methods is even more perfect than the one achieved in the famous predecessors. We find the author, after being unashamedly omniscient for a stretch of several paragraphs, or at times, several pages, taking the reader into the minds of the characters. The following quotation illustrates how the author, after giving the description of the outer world together with a seasoning of her own point of view, first leads us into Isabella's consciousness, how, after a straightforward objective description calls us, this time, into the inner thoughts of Lucy Swithin, and how she leads us back once more into the thoughts of Isabella.

"There was a fecklessness, a lack of symmetry and order in the clouds, as they thinned and thickened. Was it their own law, or no law, they obeyed? Some were wisps of white hair merely. One, high up, very distant, had hardened to golden alabaster; was made of immortal marble. Beyond that was blue, pure

blue, black blue, blue that had never filtered down; that had escaped registration. It never fell as sun, shadow, or rain upon the world, but disregarded the little coloured ball of earth entirely. No flower felt it; no field, no garden.

Mrs. Dwithin's eyes glazed as she looked at it. Isa thought her gaze was fixed because she saw God there, God on his throne. But as a shadow fell next moment on the garden Mrs. Swithin loosed and lowered her fixed look and said: 'It's very unsettled. It'll rain, I'm afraid. We can only pray,' she added, and fingered her crucifix. 'And provide umbrellas,' said her brother.

Lucy flushed. He had struck her faith. When she said 'pray,' he added 'umbrellas.' She half covered the cross with her fingers. She shrank; she cowered; but next moment she exclaimed: 'Oh there they are—the darlings!'

The perambulator was passing across the lawn.

Isa looked too. What an angel she was—the old woman! Thus to salute the children; to beat up against those immensities and the old man's irreverences her skinny hands, her laughing eyes! How courageous to defy Bart and the weather!"⁽¹⁾

One is tempted to conjecture that the author, having gone to the one extreme with the peculiar device employed in *The Waves* and to the other with her return to the method of tradition in *The Years*, now chose to reach her end by way of two courses—the well-beaten path of objective clarity and the now fully explored, yet curiously shadowed "stream of consciousness." Here we find the author hopping with perfect ease from one course to the other with the dexterity of an amphibious animal.

It is noticeable that *Between the Acts* lacks such long passages of interior monologue as occurred in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, and which made up almost the whole of *The Waves*. As if to substitute for this, we have a sort of a sum expression of the group as a whole.

(1) *Between the Acts*, p. 30-31.

It is the realistic recording of the leisurely idle talk of the old cronies of the countryside and there is no need to point out and recognize the maker of this comment or that. The idle talk of every one but no one in particular runs like the following:

"Mr. Umphelby! How nice to see you! Do come and dine . . . No, no, alas, we're going back to town. The House is sitting . . . I was telling them, the Brookes have gone to Italy. They've seen the volcano. Most impressive, so they say—they were lucky—in eruption'"⁽¹⁾

"There's dear old Mr. Carfax . . . Can't we give you a lift, if you don't mind playing bodkin? We were asking questions, Mr. Carfax, about the play. The looking glasses now—did they mean the reflectoin is the dream; and the tune—was it Bach, Handel, or no one in particular is the truth? Or was it t'other way about?"⁽²⁾

What with the perfect balance she has struck and the adoption of the running commentary referred to above, it appears that the stream of consciousness technique was still capable of adaptation. It may not be too presumptuous for us to say that the author thus intended to give a wider compass and a larger scope of interest to the life she conceived in this last novel, out of her earnest desire to outgrow the limitations of the world of her earlier novels, which were written during the 1920's "an age of irresponsibility and then of apprehension . . . an age of shattered beliefs of which qualities she was a true and just interpreter,"⁽³⁾ to borrow

the words of Mr. Chambers. It seems, however, that technically she could not do justice to her purpose, the main reason for this being the weakness in construction which we have referred to before. Or we may take up the argument the other way round and say that the crack in the structure of the book is due to the purpose of the author whose problems were primarily those of the solitary individual even during an age beset with the problems of the masses.

It may appear that the present writer has found the reason for the failure of Virginia Woolf to compel the sympathy of the readers of *Between the Acts* as completely as she did in its two great predecessors, solely in the structure of the book. It appears, however, that there are other reasons including the continual repetition of poetry as it occurs in the minds of the leading characters. When Isabella thinks in poetry over and over again, and when poetry rises to the consciousness of a most unlikely poet, as it does to that of Cobbet of Cobbs Corner, a minor character, the trick is overworn, and the reader becomes obsessed with an uneasy feeling, a sort of embarrassment.

In the foregoing pages, the writer has tried to concentrate on the structure of Virginia Woolf's posthumous novel and the new twist she gives to the "stream of consciousness" in this last experiment of hers, and in doing so has made some reference to the purpose of the author and thus hit beside the mark. Closing this imperfect study, the writer is aware of many important and interesting features of the art of Virginia Woolf which is left unsaid here and which may turn out to be materials for a future study.

(1) *Between the Acts*, p. 232.

(2) *ibid.*, p. 233.

(3) R. L. Chambers, *op cit.*, p. 101.