NOTES ON TIME IN THE MODERN BRITISH NOVEL (2)

YUKIO ANDOH

CHAPTER II
COSMIC TIME: CONRAD, AND VIRGINIA WOOLF

Scientifically, the interest in cosmic time can be traced back to the researches of modern geologists. Until the early decades of the nineteenth century, the circumscribed time-world of Christian tradition had rested firmly on its scriptural foundations. Then, in 1833, when Sir Charles Lyell published The Principles of Geology, these foundations received their first severe shock. The most shattering idea expressed in this work was not, as one might expect, that of evolution, since this concept—which had been expounded already in the ancient world by Empedocles of Etna—did not necessarily imply a negation of either the spirituality of man or the immortality of the soul. The heretical idea par excellence was that of the stupendous time-scale postulated by Lyell in order adequately to explain the structure of the outer strata of the Earth. This conflicted outright with Christian chronology; it seemed to attribute to time an extension which had hitherto been reserved for eternity. Naturally enough, this expansion of man’s temporal perspective was received neither with pride nor with exultation; mirroring himself in this temporal infinity, nineteenth-century man could not help finding his allowance of three score and ten a subject for lamentation.

The Darwinian theory of evolution did not add anything radically new to the conception of time implied in Lyell’s work; The Origin of Species (1859) merely confirmed and further extended the postulated time-scale. Contrary to expectation, however, the immediate effects of Darwinism were inflating rather than depressing. For however emphatically it might prove the individual’s insignificance in relation to the vast universe of time, the theory, after amalgamating itself with the eighteenth century doctrine of the infinite perfectibility of man, was by sanguine secular minds utilized to provide a scientific proof of the idea of progress. Interpreted in this vein, the theory of evolution found its most universalized expression in the philosophy of Herbert Spencer, a naive and doctrinaire advocate of economic and ethical individualism. Thus, the interpretations depended more on temperament than on features intrinsic to the theory. To the individualist desirous of perpetuating his ego, the dreary stretches of actual past and potential future would, naturally, seem infinitely oppressive; on the other hand, to an expansive sensibility the same cosmic span might be illumined with hope for humanity—in spite of the fact that eternity had been abolished.
Those of the above-discussed novelists who confronted man with cosmic time showed its limiting rather than its liberating or evolutionary possibilities. Hardy, Bennett, and Forster presented it, respectively, as a rigid recurrent pattern frustrating potentialities for human freedom, as a relentless force imperceptibly corrupting strength and beauty, and as a positive evil capable of confusing man's mind and of blunting his moral sense. Even an evolutionist like H. G. Wells, instead of displaying the wonders of a remote future, in The Time Machine created a horrifying vision of cosmic time running out, leaving only a grave-like silence. Joseph Conrad views cosmic time in an equally pessimistic spirit. Only rarely does Conrad suggest that the cosmos—as happens, for instance, in Shakespearean drama—participates in the climactic moments of human experience. In Lord Jim (1900), Marlow, having reassured Jim's girl about the future, reflects in retrospect: "At the time I was animated by an inexplicable ardour, as if before some great and necessary task—the influence of the moment upon my mental and emotional state. There are in our lives such moments, such influences, coming from the outside, as it were, irresistible, incomprehensible—as as if brought about by the mysterious conjunction of the planets."

Because these "cosmic" moments—mementos in which man feels himself drawn into the sphere of larger destinies—enhance both the intensity and the value of life, their customary non-occurrence is thoroughly disheartening. Though Conrad presents life as exciting and venturesome, the indifference of a vast and inscrutable universe frequently subdues the high spirit. This happens particularly when he confronts his characters with the eternity of the cosmos. Its crushing effect can be better imagined when one keeps in mind that, even apart from any belittling contrast with temporal infinitude, human life, as viewed by Conrad, is short and man's chances of achievement few. In Lord Jim again, after dismissing "Justice" as irrelevant to the laws of life, Marlow states that the best one can do is to "leave it to Chance, whose ally is Time that cannot be hurried, and whose enemy is Death, that will not wait." (320-21) When Jim tries to convince himself that "Somebody one's bound to come upon some sort of chance to get it all back again," Marlow answers: "Perhaps. If life's long enough—Don't reckon too much on it." (179) And later Marlow generalizes pessimistically on the unfinished character of our achievements:

Are not our lives too short for that full utterance which through all our stammerings is of course our only and abiding intention? I have given up expecting those last words, whose ring, if they could only be pronounced, would shake both heaven and earth. There is never time to say our last word—the last word of our love, of our desire, faith, remorse, submission, revolt. The heaven and the earth must not be shaken. (200)

Time is short, and its passage is irretreivable. This impression becomes more acute when, actually or symbolically, man faces the vast reaches of cosmic time. In The Rescue (1920), Captain Lingard has the following sensations as he is looking at the turning tide:

The unchecked gentleness of the flow captured the eye by a subtle spell, fastened insidiously upon the mind a disturbing sense of the irretreivable. The ebbing of
the sea athwart the lonely sheen of flames resembled the eternal ebb-tide of time; and when Lingard looked up, the knowledge of that noiseless passage of the waters produced on his mind a bewildering effect.²)

In those novels that heal with life at sea, especially The Nigger of the Narcissus (1897), the effects which the elements of nature produce are not merely bewildering, but horrifying. Conrad makes frequent reference to the stars, cold and "remote in the eternal calm,"³ and to "the immortal sea." relentless in its fury of spoilage. (NN, 90) In the above novel, these elements are a permanent background to the men's doings and reduce them to insignificance by their immenseness. At times they come closer, exposing man in all his pitiful ephemeralness. Conrad uses various devices to bring home the contrast, death, old age, and near shipwreck. From the beginning of the voyage, James Wait, the Negro sailor, is stalking the ship like a living death, "the tormentor of all our moments —" (44) Death, the end of the sailor's puny time spans, in an ever-present reality. Secondly, Singleton, the sailor with a dead past and no future, suddenly realizes, through a trifling accident, that he has grown old; the "disregarded years" have changed him without his knowledge. (99) After the mishap, in effect so terrible. Conrad by a masterly touch shows Singleton contemplating the unchanged sea and the stars. Pitilessly they have been claiming his life, and pitilessly they will end it. Finally, the storm puts the finishing stroke to the picture of the brevity, helplessness, and contingency in general of human life. In Lord Jim the mood of the sea in such a storm is described as follows:

—now and then—appears on the face of facts a sinister violence of intention—that indefinable something which forces upon the mind and the heart of man, that this complication of accidents or these elemental furies are coming at him with a purpose of malice, with a strength beyond control, with an unbridled cruelty that means to tear out of him his hopes and his fear, the pain of his fatigue and his longing for rest: which means to smash, to destroy, to annihilate all he has seen, known, loved, enjoyed, or hated; all that is priceless and necessary—the sunshine, the memories, the future,—which means to sweep the whole precious world utterly from his sight by the simple and appalling act of taking his life. (10-11)

Donkin, the villain of The Nigger of the Narcissus, experiences the transience of time more devastatingly, perhaps, than any other of Conrad's characters. While Donkin, in order to be able to rob the corpse, is watching over the dying James Wait, "the night seemed to go by in a flash; it seemed to him he could hear the irretrievable rush of precious minutes." (154) Coming out on deck after virtually murdering the Negro sailor, he feels "like a wanderer returning after many years" and expects to find all the men dead and gone. (155) As it appears, Donkin feels he has suddenly aged, possibly because James' death has made him anticipate his own. Characteristically, Conrad at this point confronts Donkin with the eternal sea, which makes him realize his pitiful plight even more keenly. In this passage, the variability of time perception and the chasm between eternity and human time have been effectively telescoped: to feel oneself projected against the vast expanses of cosmic time in a moment when time's flight seems preternaturally speeded up grievously exacerbates the sense of life's ephemeral briefness.

Cosmic time is not only a stupendous background in Conrad's fiction; it is also a
corrupting force. A fairly constant phenomenon in the naturaristic novel, this force is most in evidence in his first two novels, Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands. It is not a coincidence that these early works, despite their exoticism, should contain both the average weak man defeated by circumstance who is characteristic of naturalistic fiction and the idea of time as a universal force of attrition. Whereas the sea is the most common vehicle of time as a vast, non-human duration, Conrad uses the land, specifically dense luxurious forests, to evoke the power of decay inherent in time. In Almayer's Folly, it is young Dain Maroola who comes to realize this power. When he walks into the gloomy forest, "an acrid smell of—decaying leaves took him by the throat, and he drew back—, as if he had been touched by the breath of Death itself. The very air seemed dead in there—heavy and stagnating, poisoned with the corruption of countless ages." Willems in An Outcast of the Islands lives habitually with a nature envisioned as corruption and death.

If Ernest Baker is right in asserting that the struggle with cosmic forces in Conrad is presented as "the test of manhood," then Willem's obsession with these features of natural process indicates the depth of his moral failure. Already Donkin's case showed that the awareness of cosmic time is not invariable in Conrad's work; when the cheerless span is opposed by the moral worth of a Singleton, this awareness is actually nonexistent. However, a fallible man of the earth like Willems, containing nothing but mortality, is of a piece with the corruptible substance of nature itself, which he so fearfully loathes. When his anesthetic passion for Aissa is followed by disillusionment, life appears to him a revolting charnel-house:—all at once, it seemed to him that he was peering into a sombre hollow, into a deep black hole full of decay and of whitened bones; into an immense and inevitable grave full of corruption where sooner or later he must, unavoidably, fall." (01, 339) In a later passage, Conrad indirectly points out the psychological reason for Willem's obsession with cosmic decay and death: "Like most men, he had carried solemnly within his breast the whole universe, and the approaching end of all things in the destruction of his own personality filled him with paralyzing awe." (341) Such an extreme egoism can only lead to self-destruction: man becomes swallowed up in the universe which he believes to contain.

Willem's failure can also be differently viewed, namely, as due to a civilized man's surrender to the primitive wilderness. Under the influence of his love for Aissa, Willem is "lulled into forgetfulness of his past, into indifference to his future" (74), concern for both of which characterizes the man belonging to the order of historical time. In this respect, Willem's fate is a pathetic anticipation of Kurtz's tragedy in Heart of Darkness, where the conflict between the acons of prehistory and the short day of civilization is a major theme. No doubt, the particular guise in which Conrad's theme appears is suggested by the theory of evolution; but its treatment is in accord neither with the optimistic nor the pessimistic interpretation of this theory. Rather, Conrad exploits it for an overwhelming statement of the precariousness of civilization, the values of which do not evolve but must be created and tenaciously defended. Deprived of the external restraints imposed by law and police, white man is in jeopardy of alienating himself from his existential and historical past and of becoming dissolved in the "night of first ages, of those
ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign—and no memories.” This is what happened to Mr. Kurtz, the disciple of light, whose ghost it becomes Marlow’s mission to lay “for an everlasting rest in the dust-bin of progress, amongst all the sweepings and—all the dead cats of civilization.” (HD, 119)

The ironical attitude towards progress, par excellence the criterion of historical time, points to a satirical element in Heart of Darkness beside the purely dramatic theme. Progress is here a concept which subsumes all the bustle of surface activities and conscious planning which prevents man from glimpsing the “inner truth.” (HD, 92) This truth opens up to man the sinister depths of a demonic, unconscious mode of being. Though Conrad’s entire work is dedicated to the general theme of moral self-recognition and therefore must reject any descent into such a mode, he often uses its submerged ever-presentness to expose the superficiality of civilization. It is only the sturdiest of men who can face the “timeless” darkness and, without disintegrating, submit to the elemental succession of undifferentiated days and nights which characterizes life in nature. Though Almayer in An Outcast of the Islands reminds himself that he must keep his watch running, “every time, when Lingard went away, he would let it run down and would measure his weariness by sunrises and sunsets in an apathetic indifference to mere hours;—to hours that had no importance in Sambir life, in the tired stagnation of empty days—(308) In An Outcast of Progress, Conrad chooses the effect of a primitive environment on only superficially civilized men for his major theme. As his two characters fall out of touch with their personal pasts, which recede “into distances made indistinct by the glare of unclouded sunshine,” their sense of identity vanishes. Likewise, the external world disintegrates, appearing and disappearing “before their eyes in an unconnected and aimless kind of way.” (OP, 92) In some form or other, this situation appears, with satirical overtones, in several of Conrad’s novels.

One may yet mention one minor, chiefly atmospheric, use of the primitive in Conrad. “Falk,” a story of enforced cannibalism, is appropriately told in an inn described in terms of the prehistorical savagery implicit in its theme. This inn has an:

antediluvian and worm-eaten sideboard; the chipped plates might have been disinterred from some kitchen midden—; and the chops recalled times more ancient still. They brought forcibly to one’s mind the night of ages when the primeval man—scorched lumps of flesh at a fire of sticks in the company of other good fellows; then, gorged and happy, sat him back among the gnawed bones to tell his artless tales of experience—the tales of hunger and hunt—and of women, perhaps!  

Underneath the plainly atmospheric function of this passage, one senses, however, a sardonic parallelism of the contemporary and the primeval. The same effects, both of atmosphere and sardonic irony, appear when characters are described in these terms. Turning murdereress, Winnie Verloc in The Secret Agent puts into her lethal knife-thrust “all the inheritance of her immemorial and obscure descent, the simple ferocity of the age of caverns, and the unbalanced fury of the age of bar-rooms” The juxtaposition of the modern and the primordial, with the effect of equating one with the other, brings out even in these few lines Conrad’s ironical attitude towards civilization. Not too surprisingly Axel Heyst in Victory fails to take appropriate action against the evil intruders
mainly because he is all too "civilized." Here primeval man appears in Pedro and Ricardo, who are both constantly distinguished by epithets evoking a primitive evolutionary stage. Heyst is unable to cope with these men because he is incapable of becoming emotionally aroused; he has "refined everything away—anger, indignation, scorn itself."\(^11\)

The principal change that has taken place between the earlier works—in which the dark, prehistorical past is immanent in the principal characters as much as in their environment—and Victory is that psychological has given place to external drama, some would say melodrama. Nonetheless, there is enough of a modern Hamlet in Heyst to render even this kind of drama continuously absorbing.

In the work of Virginia Woolf, cosmic time is more centrally and variously involved than in that of Conrad. As a background to the human tragicomedy it is present from the first novel, The Voyage Out (1915), up to the last, Between the Acts (1941). Although generally, as in Conrad, the effect of its presence is always to expose the brevity and precariousness of human life, it is in Mrs. Woolf's work exploited for several other purposes as well. When, for instance, she chose for her first subject the account of a sea voyage, this was not, as Mr. Blackstone suggests, only because, being unable to "think in terms of crowds, as Fielding and Dickens can—, she likes to isolate her characters—,"\(^12\) but also because she wanted to strip her main characters of the encrustations of civilization and expose them in a state of spiritual nakedness to the fundamental experiences of life. In Conrad this pristine state is very often implicit in the subject matter, which involves man's battle with the elements, particularly the sea, and with a primitive environment. In the world of Mrs. Woolf, the sea is also the principal instance of the cosmic, although, except for The Voyage out, it exists mostly either as an element contiguous with the land or as an element contiguous with the land or as a mere reverberation.

Before discussing in detail Mrs. Woolf's use of cosmic time, one may relevantly inspect briefly her treatment of space. In a few novels, especially The Voyage Out and To the Lighthouse (1927), spatial distance is a considerable factor. As with cosmic time, its chief effect is to reduce the general stature of man, both physically, morally, and culturally. Seen from the voyaging ship, for instance, civilized London becomes "a circumscribed mound, eternally burnt, eternally scarred—the great city appeared a crouched and cowardly figure, a sedentary miser."\(^13\) After some further distance is covered, the continents have shrunk to "wrinkled rocks" whose very existence seems in doubt. (VO, 32) In a mood of despair, brought on by his fiancée's illness, Mr. Hewet "thought of the immense river and the immense forest, the vast stretches of dry earth and the plains of the sea that encircled the earth;—and in all this great space it was curious to think how few the towns were, and how like little rings of light they were, scattered here and there among the swelling uncultivated folds of the world." (VO, 345) Momentarily, his grief appears to him ridiculous. "What did anything matter? — The nearness of their bodies in this vast universe, and the minuteness of their bodies, seemed to him absurd and laughable." (345-46) Mrs. Ramsay, in To the Lighthouse, envisaging the diminutiveness of man's world in relation to the universe, realizes the essential horror of the human predicament. "—the two senses of that vastness and this tininess (the pool had diminished again) flowering within it made her feel that she was bound hand and foot by the intensity of feelings which reduced her own body, her own life, and the lives of all the
people in the world, for ever, to nothingness. So listening to the waves, crouching over the pool, she brooded.” (44) In another passage of *To the Lighthouse* the perspective is even more startling, although no overwhelming distances are involved. When Mr. Ramsay, Cam, and James are on their way to the lighthouse, they see, on looking back, that the island has a “composed look, as of something receding in which one has no longer any part.” (247) To adolescent Cam, it was just “rubbed out—unreal, and now—all this (the sea) was real.” (248) In the case of Mr. Ramsay, who as a philosopher is able to connect what is separated by distance, the effect is one neither of ironic self-ridicule, nor of horror, but of self-conscious pathos. Having “found the house and so seeing it, he had also seen himself there; he had seen himself walking on the terrace, alone. He was walking up and down between the urns; and he seemed to himself very old and bowed.” (247)

As already stated, the primary effect of confrontation with cosmic time is to bring home the pitiful transience of individual existence and human history. This holds also where space and time are fused in the idea of a temporally unending universe. Miss Vinrace in *The Voyage Out*, who like most of Virginia Woolf’s characters occasionally lapses into states of cosmic consciousness, realizes her evanescence as she is trying to find her temporal and spatial bearings. “—life, what was that? it was only a light passing over the surface and vanishing, as in time she would vanish—The things that existed were so immense and desolate—she continued to be conscious of these vast masses of substance for a long stretch of time, the clock still ticking in the midst of the universal silence.” (125) In several instances, the initial contemplation of spatial distances gradually modulates into a vision of time. Looking at some far away dunes, Miss Briscoe and Mr. Bankes in *To the Lighthouse* “felt come over them some sadness—because the thing was completed partly, and partly because distant views seem to outlast by a million years (Lily thought) the gazer and to be communing already with a sky which beholds an earth entirely at rest.” (34) Katherine Hilbery in *Night and Day* (1919), a novel in Mrs. Woolf’s production which is singularly lacking in a consistent cosmic perspective, has a similar experience, expressed, however, with more power and gall. At Christmas time, as Katherine is dreaming of the Heaven as bending with sympathy over the Earth, her pastoral mood is rudely broken by a disquieting reflection. “—after gazing for another second, the stars did their usual work upon the mind, froze to cinders the whole of our short human history, and reduced the human body to an ape-like furry form, crouching amid the brushwood of a barbarous clod of mud.” (55) To middleaged Mrs. Ramsay the sea conveys an equally devastating, more personally tinged, insight when, in a Conradian moment of intuition, it “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—” (TL, 28) Not even sturdy philosophic Mr. Ramsay is able “to contemplate it fixedly—”; (69) his vision of himself, fame, and human life is vastly troubled by “the waste of the years and the perishing of stars—” (56) In *The Waves*, a novel in which the individual characters are metaphorically reduced to ripples on the cosmic sea of time, the latter swells and surges with an even more intimate destructiveness. Louis, in response to Jinny’s happiness in the suspended moment, asks his friends to “listen—to the world moving through abysses of infinite space. It
roars; the lighted strip of history is past and our kings and queens; we are gone; our civilization; the Nile, and all life. Our separate drops are dissolved; we are extinct, lost in the abysses of time, in the darkness.\textsuperscript{16} Although Bernard, the "phrase-maker," claims that with him these impressions "last but one second,—being ended by my pugnacity—," (W, 277) they are none the less acute as long as they last: "The wind, the rush of wheels became the roar of time, and we rushed—where? And who were we? We were extinguished for a moment, went out like sparks in burnt paper and the blackness roared." (277)

Cosmic time is significant in the work of Mrs. Woolf not only as a temporal infinite reaching back to the beginnings of the world and forward to an endless future, but also as a force operating in nature and in the physical life of man. Man's life, existing in time, is thereby subject to change, of which Mrs. Woolf sees more poignantly the aspects of decay than those of growth and development. No less insistently, although more subtly, than Arnold Bennett does she visualize human life as a ceaseless passage toward old age and death; like Kitty, Lady Lasswade, in The Years (1937) Mrs. Woolf has a sharp "sense of the passage of time and its tragedy."\textsuperscript{17} This sense is present from the beginning of her career as a novelist and persists unto the end. In The Voyage Out, Helen Ambrose, depressed by the tropical forest, has thoughts of "old age and poverty and death—"; (278) the last novel, Between the Acts, is replete with explicit and symbolic references to death.\textsuperscript{18} With the possible exception of Night and Day, this vision of time as basically an agent of physical corruption imbues all the other novels as well. Its effects usually become apparent through changes perceived in friends and acquaintances. Aging Clarissa in Mrs. Dalloway "read on Lady Bruton's face, as if it had been a dial cut in impasive stone, the dwindling of life; how year by year her share was sliced; how little the margin that remained was capable any longer of stretching, of absorbing, as in youthful years, the colours, salts, tones of existence—" (44) Most dramatic is naturally the realization if, as in Proust and, on a minor scale, in Bennett, a separation of considerable length is followed by reunion; Mrs. Woolf uses this device several times in Mrs. Dalloway and The Years.\textsuperscript{19} Most macabre, however, is the effect of seeing and presenting characters as both dead and alive at the same time. Virginia Woolf has the peculiar gift of Julia Eliot in Jacob's Room (1922) of vizualixing the time-span of the human body run through in a moment; to Mrs. Eliot, it was "as if time and eternity showed through skirts and waistcoats, and she saw people passing tragically to destruction."\textsuperscript{20} In the same novel, Mrs. Durrant is at one point described in skeletal terms: "Her hawk nose was thin as a bleached bone through which you almost see the light— The upper lip was cut so short that it raised itself almost in a sneer from the front teeth—" (54) The author compounds her effect by accompanying the picture with a view of eternal nature. "The pale hills were round her, each scattered with ancient stones; beneath was the sea—" (54)

Death, the ultimate fate of the time-bound physical body, is implicit in all of these passages. On the whole, death is an integral part of life in the work of Mrs. Woolf. Actual deaths having profound emotional repercussion occur in all the novels except Night and Day and Between the Acts. Furthermore, even when no one is literally dying, Mrs. Woolf will never allow either her readers or herself to forget the macabre eventuality for very long. By means of a skillfully varied symbolism, chiefly based on organic imagery, she
creates effects similar to those of the Wagnerian *Leit-motif*, except that the reference is more general and abstract. The variety is richest in *Jacob's Room*, which is a veritable store-house of symbolic imagery to be exploited more economically in her later work. Most effectively used is the skull or sheep's jaw, which Jacob picks up on the beach as a little boy. (8) This *memento mori*, which at night rests at the end of his bed as in a grave, accompanies him throughout life; it appears a couple of times as a ram's skull carved in wood over the doorway to his college quarters. A death's head moth casually caught in the kitchen is a nominal repetition of this symbol, although the vehicle is materially different. Graveyards, English and Roman, with their accoutrements of skeletons, wreaths, crosses, and tombstones, repeatedly recall the world of the dead. Even the ringing of the church bell "for service or funeral—was to Mrs. Flanders Seabrook's voice—the voice of the dead." Tombstones and tombs appear apart from the churchyard as well; (64, 111) and mourning is signified not only by wreaths, but also, once, by a trail of drooping smoke. (47) Finally, vegetative imagery, such as dead and falling leaves and fading flowers, resonates with symbolic overtones.

Such a lavish variety of death symbols never recurs in any of the later novels. A subtly elaborated simplicity is the usual pattern, except in *The Years*, where the perpetual recurrence of "falling leaves," however euphonious, defeats any effect the imagery might have when used scrupulously. Of greatest interest are perhaps the devices employed in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. Actually, in *Mrs. Dalloway* literary allusion rather than symbolism is predominant. The book is regularly punctuated with the dirge for Imogen from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* which haunts Clarissa's mind:

Fear no more the heat o' the sun
Nor the furious winter's rages.

More directly, death is one of the great themes of the apocalyptic outpourings of shell-shocked Septimus Smith. (105) In *To the Lighthouse*, symbolism again prevails; specifically, a boar's skull is ingeniously manipulated to convey a complex of meanings. Since some of the children cannot go to sleep because they "thought it was a horrid thing," Mrs. Ramsay "took her own shawl off and wound it round and round." (172) an action which suggests civilized man's endeavors to combat and conceal death. The concealment is completed by Mrs. Ramsay's poetry: "—it the skull was like a beautiful mountain—.,, with valleys and flowers and bells ringing and birds singing and little goats and antelopes—" (172) This expresses a romantically Christian view of death, according to which it is the beginning of our real existence rather than the end. But in the middle section of the book the warring of the cosmic elements lays bare the "horrid thing" which civilization, with its poetry and ceremonial ritual, attempts to conceal: death is not defeated, at least not in this particular way. As the storms beat on the house, the shawl gradually loosens from the skull, revealing the undorned existential fact.

The descending rhythm, that of decay and death, is not, however, the only one precipitated by cosmic time; although for the individual it is absolute, Mrs. Woolf, like E. M. Forster, is conscious of a pattern of death and renewal. She lacks, admittedly, the almost eugenic urgency of her senior fellow-novelist, but this does not diminish the emotional force of her vision. As early as in *Jacob's Room*, the experience of seeing the passing generations as physically intertwined is worded, though it is not central to the book. Mrs. Flanders,
who is reminded of her dead husband by the ringing of the church bell, reflects: "Sounding at the same moment as the bell, her son's voice mixed life and death inextricably exhilaratingly." (21) A similar experience comes to Delia Pargiter in *The Years* as her mother's funeral. As the first shovels of earth strike the coffin, "she was possessed by a sense of something everlasting; of life mixing with death, of death becoming life. For as she looked she heard the sparrow chirp quicker and quicker;—life came closer and closer—" (87) The following reflections of Lady Lasswade in the same book epitomize in a neatly balanced poetical symbolism the death and renewal theme:

The wind seemed to rise as she walked under the trees. It sang in their tops, but it was silent beneath. The dead leaves crackle under foot; among them sprang up the pale spring flowers, the loveliest of the year—blue flowers and white flowers, trembling on cushions of green moss. Spring was sad always, she thought; it brought back memories. All passes, all changes, she thought, as she climbed up the little path between the trees. Nothing of this belonged to her; her son would inherit; his wife would walk here after her. (277)

Although the final note is not very hearty, the image of life emerging from death is vividly conveyed. It is significant that in a book so cluttered up with decay and death, with falling leaves and dying people, the final note should sound the renewal theme. It is a summer morning. "The sun had risen, and the sky above the houses wore an air of extraordinary beauty, simplicity and peace." (435) *The Waves* follows a similar pattern. After his marriage, Bernard feels that life is "mysteriously prolonged—we are not raindrops, soon dried by the wind; we make garden blow and forests roar; we come up differently, for ever." (114) Like *The Years*, this novel also ends with a scene at dawn, in spite of the fact that Bernard by now is an old man. "Yes", this is the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and rise again.” (297)

Most intense is the experience both of death and of renewal in Mrs. Dalloway; it is expressed mainly through Septimus Smith, a figure that suggests a modern Christ. After having mentally suffered death and been resurrected to new life, Mr. Smith declares that "there is on death." (212) Apparently, he has discovered this secret through observation of nature, since somewhat earlier one finds him listening to the song of the birds. "A sparrow—, joined by another sparrow,— sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death.” (36—37) But the greatest paean to eternal life is sung by Mrs. Woolf herself, using a female beggar as her occasion:

Through all ages—the battered woman—stood singing of love—which had lasted a million years, she sang, love which prevails, and millions of years ago, her lover, who had been dead these centuries, had walked, she crooned, with her in May; but in the course of ages—he had gone; death's enormous had swept those tremendous hills—still the earth seemed green and flowery—; still the old bubbling bubbling song, soaking through the knotted roots of infinite ages, and skeltons and treasure, streamed away in rivulets over the pavement—, fertilising, leaving a damp stain.

Still remembering how once in some primeval May she had walked with her lover, this rusty pump, this battered old woman—would still be there in ten million years, remembering how once she had walked in May, where the sea flows now,
with a man who had loved her—and the passing generations—the pavement was crowded with bustling middle-class people—vanished like leaves, to be trodden under, to be soaked and steeped and made mould of by that eternal spring—

The idea of cyclical recurrence, which also appears in the work of Mrs. Woolf, differs from that of death and renewal by relating to individual and cultural rather than to biological—racial sequences. It is most important in the later novels, The Waves, The Years, and Between the Acts: the last novel, indeed, is structurally as well as ideologically based on a pattern of recurrence. In The Years, aging Eleanor Pargiter suddenly feels that the present, with variations, repeats the past, and she asks herself the question: "Does everything then come over again a little differently?—If so, is there a pattern; a theme, recurring, like music; half remembered, half foreseen?—a gigantic pattern, momentarily perceptible?" (369) The question, which remains unanswered, apparently refers both to the single individual life and to history. There are indications in Mrs. Woolf's works that the cyclical pattern which obtains in nature also, according to her, dominates culture. Percival in The Waves, for instance, is presented as an incarnation of the hero, of "Alcibiades, Ajax, Hector—," (181) and Bernard in his last monologue, feeling a spiritual renewal corresponding to that in nature, envisages himself in the same archetypal role:

What enemy do we now perceive advancing against us, you whom I ride now, as we stand pawing this stretch of pavement? It is death—It is death against whom I ride with my spear crouched and my hair flying back like a young man's, like Percival's, when he galloped in India. I strike spurs into my horse. Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death.23

In Between the Acts, Mrs. Woolf has presented the pattern more skilfully; furthermore, it is more inclusive. Although the action takes only one day, the pageant expands hugely by calling up, in epitome, the entire history of England. By the ingenious use of H. G. Wells' The Outline of History, Mrs. Woolf manages to go even beyond the limits of recorded history, to a time when there were "rhododendron forests in Piccadilly—" (8) It is Mrs. Swithin, an old religious lady of a mystical bent, who, ironically enough, enables Mrs. Woolf to perform this fine piece of legerdemain. Since she reads the book both in the morning and at night, present time, with the historical pageant within it, is thus encircled with evocations of prehistory. These evocations, apparently, sound a stronger rhythm than the voices of history, especially since they are vociferously amplified by choruses of birds, dogs, and especially cows. The cow is introduced already on the first page of the book and makes a particular nuisance of itself during the pageant.26 The significance of the bellowing is made clear by the following gloss of Mrs. Woolf's: "The whole world was filled with dumb yearning. It was the primeval voice sounding loud in the ear of the present moment." (140) Beside this "primeval" voice, the voice of history as rendered by the pageant frequently slips away into a vague mumbling. Like the members of the audience themselves, history is a heap of "orts, scraps and fragments," (188) a view affirmed by the jumble of recapitulated phrases from the pageant which the author injects into "present Time." (185) A description by Mr. Oliver, the owner of Pointz Hall where the pageant is given, of the surrounding landscape, rich in the deposits of history, suggests an even more
cynical view of history. "From an aeroplane, he said, you could still see, plainly marked, the scars made by the Britons; by the Romans; by the Elizabethan manor house; and by the plough, when they ploughed the hill to grow wheat in the Napoleonic wars." (4) The ironical juxtaposition of the lowly plough with great historical epochs reduces the latter insignificance; secondly, history has wounded and left "scars" on the landscape; thirdly, this landscape has now been chosen as the site of a cesspool. The "orts, scraps and fragments" of history have found their final resting-place.

The anti-historical bias manifests itself throughout the book, not only explicitly, as, for instance, in a reference to unbelief in history, (175) but also, and chiefly, by implication. The pageant, through somewhat malicious parody, penetrates beneath the shibboleths of successive historical periods and lays bare the real, rather than the merely rationalized, springs of human behavior. Mrs. Giles Oliver, watching, reduce them to three: "Love. Hate. Peace. Three emotions made the ply of human life." (92) These emotions are, accordingly, also exemplified by what goes on between the facts of the pageant. Giles Oliver, an unhappy husband, vents his hate on anything that comes his way, whether perverse animals or innocuous inanimate things. "He kicked—a flinty yellow stone, a sharp stone, edged as if cut by a savage for an arrow. A barbaric stone; prehistoric." (98) The reversion to the primitive past is here repeatedly stressed. At the end of the book, this reversion occurs three times in close succession. First, Miss La Trobe, in imagining the sequel to her pageant, envisages a primordial outdoor scene: "There was the high ground at midnight; there the rock; and two scarcely perceptible figures—She heard the first words." (212) Secondly, Mrs. Swinthin finishes her reading in The Outline of History with the emergence of primitive man. "Prehistoric man she read, half-human, half-ape, roused himself from his semi-crouching position and raised great stones." (218) Finally, in our last glimpse of Giles Oliver and Isa, his wife, their house fades out, and "it was night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among the rocks. Then the curtain rose. They spoke." (219) The basic trinity of emotions which, according to Isa, permeated the variegated scenes of the pageant here finds it ultimate manifestation. "Alone, enmity was bared; also was love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But first they must fight, as the dog fights with the vixen, in the heat of darkness, in the fields of night." (219)

Isa and Giles Oliver are here no less archetypal in their roles of man and woman than Bernard and Percival as heroes and Septimus Smith as suffering savior. Do they also stimulate the same sense of exultation in life in spite of evil and death as those characters do? On the surface, Between the Acts seems to demonstrate, first, that men are animals and, second, that the future will bring cave-dwelling mentality and manners into fashion. Underneath, however, there is an intimation that only by recapturing his fundamental nature, concealed, sometimes suffocated, by the trappings of civilization, can man create a lasting culture. In one of the intermissions voices are heard, saying: "It's a good say, some day, the day we are stripped naked. Ohters, it's the end of the day—none speaks with a single voice. None with a voice free from the old vibrations." (156) Virginia Woolf, no doubt, would agree with the strippers. From this point of view one can look at Between the Acts as a catharsis of old historical vibrations which confuse man's image of
himself; it looks forward to a rebirth of humanism based on a recollection of man’s primeval nature.

This interpretation can also be supported indirectly by bringing evidence from Mrs. Woolf’s other novels of a curious love for the pristine event or act. This love shows itself already in The Voyage Out, in which Miss Vinrace and Mr. Hewet are deeply moved by the idea of being present at the beginning of the world. Looking at the sea, Miss Vinrace reflects: “So it had been at the birth of the world, and so it had remained ever since. Probably no human being had ever broken that water with boat or with body. Obeying some impulse, she determined to mar that eternity of peace, and threw the largest pebble she could find.” (211) Mr. Ramsay in To the Lighthouse imagines a similar experience, (105) and Lily Briscoe, on the day when she finally succeeds in completing the picture of dead Mrs. Ramsay and James, an almost obsessive “sense that everything this morning was happening for the first time, perhaps for the last time—” (288) At other times, the experience is more esthetic in character. Bernard in The Waves finds that “certain fields seem to glow green for ever, and innocent landscapes appear as if in the light of the first dawn—; and all faces are lit up, all conspire in a hush of tender joy; and then the mystic sense of completion—” (27). In these passages Virginia Woolf creates the feeling of a world which, moment by moment, renews its original élan: it is man’s greatest happiness to be able to participate, through his own spiritual renewal, in the self-perpetuating energies of nature.

This glorification of the primordial may have its root in love for the unique, the singular, and, accordingly, in hate for the repeated and the routine. As history suffers at the pen of Mrs. Woolf because of the masking encrustations with which it has overlaid man’s true, original, physiognomy, so repetition and chronological routine, which is the counterpart of history in the life of the individual, are constant objects of vituperation. Projecting this routine, like history, against a background of cosmic time is one of the principal means by which she is able to shock her characters or readers into an awareness of fundamentals. Bernard in The Waves, who has a tendency to lose himself in the fleet succession of days and months, is momentarily saved from complete acquiescence by reminders of the infinite world around him. “—the light of the stars falling, as it falls now, on my head after travelling for millions upon millions of years—I could get a cold shock from that for a moment—not more, my imagination is too feeble.” (W, 268) The tone of this passage, however, is not satirical; in fact, the very method of The Waves would preclude satire. It is an early work, Jacob’s Room, composed by a more objective method, which most forcefully employs cosmic time as a vehicle of satirizing not man’s daily routine alone, but also industrial civilization and Christianity, from which this routine in its modern form originally sprang. The world of routine, which is also called the world of the elderly, is contrasted with that of youth, which is interested in “the reality; the moors and Byron; the sea and the lighthouse, the sheep’s jaw with the yellow teeth in it—” (JR, 34) The moors are superbly contemptuous of chronological time.

The church clock struck ten. Did the strokes reach the furze bush, or did the thorn tree hear them?—A quarter of an hour later, the frail waves of sound broke among the stiff gorse and the hawthorn twigs as the church clock divided time into quarters.
Motionless and broad-backed the moors received the statement 'It is fifteen minutes past the hour,' but made no answer, unless a bramble stirred. (131—32)

The viciousness of the clock, as representing routine, is precisely its tendency to divide time into parts, more or less minute, and measure it like a quantity, and commodity, whereas it is in actuality a fundamental order of continuous passage in which man's entire life is rooted. The commodity aspect of chronological time becomes more explicit where industrial civilization is involved. "The Christians," Mrs. Woolf writes "have the right to rouse most cities with their interpretation of the day's meaning—The steamers, resounding like gigantic turning-forks, state the old fact—how there is a sea coldly, greenly, swaying outside. But nowadays it is the thin voice of duty, piping in a white thread from the top of a funnel, that collects the largest multitudes—" (161)

This passage implies, further, that although church bells are preferable to factory pipes, the routine of worship to that of meaningless work, the odds are not great. The ritual of the church, or official religion, having lost most of its meaning, is merely a chronological schema; thus it is equally a victim of routine, of the repeated act. As with secular routine, it is the cutting up of the continuum of time that is the chief point of Mrs. Woolf's satire. At night, the church often seems full of people, dead and alive. "Their tongues join together in syllabbling the sharp-cut words, which for ever slice asunder time and the broad-backed moors. Plaint and belief and elegy, despair and triumph, but for the most part good sense and jolly indifference, go trampling out of the windows any time these five hundred years." (JR, 132—33) Like any other kind of mechanical pattern, official religion here appears a violation of nature, of the reality that is so dear to youth.

The preceding analysis indicates both the variety of forms assumed by cosmic time in the modern British novel and the multiple uses to which these forms are put. The works of Hardy, Bennett, Wells, and Forster previously treated display basic manifestations which recur with increasing amplitude in the four novelists dealt with in this chapter; besides, several new ones have supervened. Most obvious of the already familiar concepts is that of sempiternity, present in the work of both Hardy and Wells. In Conrad, Woolf, and Joyce, however, it appears with greatly magnified powers of reducing the scale of human time; the transience of life is one of the permanent preoccupations of these novelists. Most intimately affected is the world of Joyce, where, besides, all the forms of life, including man, exist in a perpetual state of transformation. Opposed to astronomical temporal magnitudes, man's life-span becomes a "parenthesis of infinitesimal brevity."

Where cosmic time operates as force or pattern, it displays generally either a descending curve or a static condition in the work of the novelists treated; only in Forster, Mrs. Woolf, and Joyce does it also figure as an ascendant force and pattern. The destructiveness may, as in The Time Machine and Two on a Tower, strike at all creation, a condition which in Huxley manifests itself as counter-evolution; or it may strike at the individual. The latter is by far the most common occurrence. In this respect, Conrad, Mrs. Woolf, Joyce, and Huxley are inheritors of the naturalistic tradition, of which Arnold Bennett is the most faithful exponent among the novelists here mentioned.

The development of the psychological novel has precipitated another important manifestation of cosmic time. If ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, man's psyche contains not only the historical tradition— which may or may not have been appropriated—but the aeons
of prehistory as well. In a latent state, the experience of these aeons may even today affect his thought and behavior. This element of internalized cosmic time is coterminous with the subconscious, the significance of which in the modern novel needs not be restated here. Suffice it just to point out that Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*, as far as I know, created the first drama of racial memory. Mrs. Woolf and Joyce further explore this pre-historical dimension of memory, but without employing it as a dramatic occasion of moral self-recognition. This does not mean that they develop it negatively, merely as a device of satire. In *Between the Acts*, Mrs. Woolf returns to the primordial past as the source of a vitality that is free of the encrustations of history. As compared to Conrad, she has definitely moved in the direction of a positive primitism. In Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, the characters dwell continuously in the realm of the preconscious, into which man’s entire history has been absorbed. The book’s circular form is in complete accord with the resulting dominance of cosmic time.

**Table of Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Works by Joseph Conrad</th>
<th>Works by Virginia Woolf</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AF—Almayer’s Folly.</td>
<td>BA—Between the Acts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AG—The Arrow of Gold</td>
<td>JR—Jacob’s Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C—Chance</td>
<td>MD—Mrs. Dalloway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HD—Heart of Darkness</td>
<td>ND—Night and day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LJ—Lord Jim</td>
<td>O—Orlando</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NN—The Nigger of the Narcissus</td>
<td>TL—To the Lighthouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N—Nostromo</td>
<td>VO—The Voyage Out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OI—An Outcast of the Islands</td>
<td>W—The Waves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OP—An Outpost of Progress</td>
<td>Y—The Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R—The Rescue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RO—The Rover</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA—The Secret Agent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL—The Shadow Line</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T—Typhoon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UWE—Under Western Eyes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**References**

2) (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1924), 200
3) The Nigger of the Narcissus (New York: Doubleday, Page, & Co. 1924) 77
4) (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1924) 167
6) Here one may recall Conrad’s distinction between the men of the sea and the men of the earth, of which Singleton and Donkin are the more extreme examples. In *An Outcast of the Islands*, the former men are described as moving from youth to age and the grave “without needing to open the book of life, because they could look at eternity
reflected on the element that gave the life and dealt the death." (12)

7) "Heart of Darkness," Youth and Two Other Stories (Garden City, N. Y. Doubleday, Page & Co. 1924) 96.


9) "Falk," Typhoon and Other Stories (Garden City, N. Y. Doubleday, Page & Co. 1953) 145-46.


19) See MD, 60, 75, and Y, 199, 346.


21) See JR, 8, 12, 34, 69, 179.

22) JR, 14

23) JR, 17, 21, 61, 82.

24) See TL, 200, 206-07.


26) Some of the references to cows can be found on the following pages 1, 77, 82, 84, 120, 134, 141, 175, 184.