NOTES ON TIME IN THE MODERN BRITISH NOVEL (4)

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CHAPTER Ⅳ

EXISTENTIAL TIME : Time As Transcended

In Conrad's world, there are two main sources of value—heroism and art. In heroism, man wrenches from an indifferent world moments of endurance, fidelity, and loyalty which are immune to the onslaughts of time. In art. man accomplishes comparable values, by snatching "vanishing phases of turbulnce, disguised in fair words, out of native obscurity into a light where the struggling forms may be seen, seized upon, endowed with the only possible from of permanence in this world of relative values—the permanence of memory."1) As in the case of inarticulate heroism, exemplified by old Singleton's silent challenge to, and near contempt of, a universe that will outlast him perhaps for millons of years, Conrad also pits the artist against a vast universe. Even if confronted by a dying earth, and the last day, the artist must create. "It is safe to affirm that, if anybody, it will be the imaginative man who would be moved to speak on the eve of that day without tomorrow—whether in austere exhortation or in a phrase of sardonic comment, who can guess?"2) These two sources of value express Conrad the sailor and Conrad the artist respectively.

Though Conrad's novels abound with moral uncertainty and ambiguity, one senses in the background an ethical code in all of them. This is an absolute code, permanently valid, like that of Singleton. In *The Nigger of the Narcissus*. the author-narrator complains that "the men who could understand his (Singleton's) silence were gone—those men who knew to exist beyond the pale of life and within sight of eternity." (25) But Conrad's books belie his statement that today, after "the everlasting children on the mysterious sea" have disappeared, they have been succeeded by the "grown-up children of a discontented earth," (25) children who are both less grandly vicious and less greatly virtuous. The Conradian character, even when an intellectual, has a heroic mold and some of the villains recognize the moral order they have violated.

Endurance is the most elementary of the principles by which time can be defeated, if not tsanscended, in Conrad's work. It can be such a principle because. since change and irretrievable passage are basic qualities of time, endurance, which implies stability, will to a certain extent counteract these qualities. Fidelity and loyalty are, of course, principles of a higher order.3) They imply endurance, but their demands are spiritual rather than physical. All the greatest of Conrad's characters believe in these ideals. As examples one may mention Marlow, Jim, and Stein in *Lord Jim;* Lingard in *The Rescue;*

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Lena in *Victory;* and Kurtz's fiancèe in *Heart of Darkncss.* Marlow probably believes in fidelity and loyalty because he hates mortality. In *Heart of Darkness* he makes the following confession: "You know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not beccause I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because it appalls me. There is a taint of death, a flavor of mortality in lies—which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world—what I want to forget. It makes me miserable and sick, like biting something rotten would do." (82) He utters a similar sentiment in *Lord Jim,* where he cannot help looking on Jim as a reminder "of our folly, of our weakness, of our mortality." (174) Yet, Jim himself, through his "romanticism," his consuming desire, in Stein's words, "to follow the dream, and again to follow the dream—and so—ewig—usque ad finem," (214-15) transcends mortality through his "eternal constancy" to an ideal, however shadowy. (416)

Captain Lingard's situation is more problematic. Though, like Marlow and Jim, he believes in fidelity, realizing it in action will bring havoc upon others. In general, nothing merely passing, even if embodied in people, is a serious obstacle to his plans. He would, for instance, without compunction sacrifice Mr. Travers, the arrogant philistine; about D' Alcacer he is undecided. Only when his loyalty to the native prince is opposed by love does a real conflict arise. As Mrs. Travers' past has been scattered like smoke by Lingard, so Lingard's past, with all its promises and commitments, is tirned into a heap of dust by Mrs. Travers. A moment's vision, and the memory of that vision, has intro duced him to a world which transcends in power of suasion any loyalties, whether to himself or to sworn friends. (R, 415) From now on, he is no longer capable of action; "events, necessities, things" are meaningless to him. since he has found reality. (416) All he cares for is to experience, without intrusion of time's flow, the alloted moments of love, all the more desirable because they enable him to forget his moral dilemma. But the tide of passion to which he dreamily submits brings him to shore a changed man. After Jörgensen has blown up the brig, Lingard's vanished past returns as spectres. The broken fidelity is avenged, and the the world is henceforth dead. As in French classicism, tragedy in this work results from the conflict of two equally valid principles.

No woman in Conrad is divided by such a conflict, probably because a woman,s loyalty and love are usually concentrated on one object. In consequence Conrad invariably presents woman's love as being immune to time; occasionally, he comes dangerously close to creating an abstraction of Woman of the Ages. Marlow believes "only women —manage to put at times into their love an element just palpable enough to give one a fright—an extra terrestrial touch." (LJ, 277) The love of Lena for Heyst has this touch; in her, love is fused with an almost aggressive fidəlity. Though, superficially, her tragic death may suggest the futility of even the most exalted values, these values have a sanction beyond time: dying, Lena has a divine radiance on her face.

The Intended in *Heart of Darkness* is a potential Lena; Marlow discerns in her "a mature capacity fo fidelity, for suffering." (157) He perceives she is "one of those creatures that are not the playthings of Time. For her he (Kurtz) had died only yesterday. And, by Jove! the impression was so powerful that for me, too, he seemed to have died only yesterday—nay, this very minute." (157) Here time, being immobilized, is without effect. That the Intended will age is irrelevant; it is the attitude that constitutes, values, not the contingencies of physical life. Marlow recognizes this truth; indeed, her eter nally fresh mourning impresses him so deeply that he sacrifices literal truth to hers, despite his abhorrence of lies, symbol of mortality. For mortality is precisely what Kurtz's In tended transcends in her recurrent ritual of mourning.

The active transcedence of heroism and love is complemented by the rare moments of recapitulation previously discussed. The broad reaches of time surveyed in these moments suggest that the mind has entered another dimension. If this is so, these moments, like the timeless moment of the mystic, are instances of spiritual transcendence. Though it is not necessary to assume such a breakthrough, Conrad does postulate a moral reality in which man partakes and of which he becomes at times blindingly aware. All of his major figures are initiated into this reality, often at the risk of physical destruction. As noted, the moment of moral epiphany is a fusion of the classical moment of anagnorisis and the Christian moment of grace.

The estheticism of Conrad, coexisting as it does with a sturdy sailor's code and a Christian-classical perspective, is an exacting creed. Though impressionistic in basis, judging from Conrad's statement that the artist's task is "to hold up unquestioningly and without fear, the rescued fragment of life before all eyes in the light of a sincere mood"4)—this need not imply that the purpose of art is a mere enjoyment of exquisite moments. The esthetic moment becomes one in which man achieves insight, whether into nature or himself. The bounds of the moment expand chiefly through symbolism, by which Conrad gives universal meaning to instantaneous impressions. Depending on the narrative technique used, the symbolic intent is realized by a character in the story or only by the reader.

The description of a sunrise in *Chance* provides a good example of Conrad's intuitive moment.

> —the sun had risen in a warm and glorious splendour above the smooth immense gleam of the enlarged estuary. Wisps of mist floated like trails of luminous dust, and in the dazzling reflections of water and vapour, the shores had the murky, semi-transparent darkness of shadows cast mysteriously from below —it was then, in a moment of entranced vision—, that the river was revealed to him for all time, like a fair face often seen before, which is suddenly perceived to be the expression of an inner and unexpected beauty, of that something unique and only its own which arouses a passion of wonder and fidelity and an unappeasable memory of its charm.5)

This may sound Platonic. but is, I believe, far removed from it. The beauty revealed is individual, not universal, as is evident from the simile of the "fair face." The Platonic ascent to the contemplation of the idea of beauty is a laborious one; it demands, besides imagination, great powers of abstract reasoning. Powell's intuition is spontaneous and brings together appearance and reality in a mysterious accord. It is the symbolic relationship between the concrete river and the "inner and unexpected beauty" of which it is the "expression" which confers supernal status on the moment.

But, as always, there is tension in Conrad's world, the realm of order and beauty existing in polar opposition to one of essential disorder and cosmic horror. One might justifiably view this polarity as a secular esthetic emboiment of fundamentally religious conceptions: the primordial moments of chaos and divine order, with the corresponding apocalyptic ideas of *dies irae* and a time of concord. Intuitions of primal disorder are as rare as their contraries. In *Heart of darkness* Marlow explains their infrequent occurrence: "When you have to attend to—the mere incidents on the surface, the reality—the reality, I tell you—fades. The inner truth is hidden—luckily, luckily." (93) In Lord Jim Marlow further develops this theme. as he relates how he listened with horror to the account given by Jim's girl of her mother's death.

> It had the power to drive me out of my conception of existence, out of that shelter each of us makes for himself to creep under in moments of danger, as a tortoise withdraws within its shell. For a moment I had a view of a world that seemed to wear a vast and dismal aspect of disorder, while, thanks to our unwearied efforts, it is as sunny an arrangement of small conveniences as the mind of man can conceive. But still—it was only a moment: I went back into my shell directly, One must—don't you know?—though I seemed to have lost all my words in the chaos of dark thoughts I had contemplated for a second or two beyond the pale. These came back, too, very soon, for words also belong to the sheltering conception of light and order which is our refuge. (313)

Comparable moments of heightened sensibility also occur, according to Conrad, in our relationship with human beings. This may be one of the reasons why, in his character-portrayal, Conrad proceeds by way of sudden flashes of insight than by a careful accumulation of detail, especially in those novels where .Marlow is the narrator. All through the first half of *Lord Jim*, for example, we are, through Marlow's eyes, offered brief, almost instantaneous, glimpses into Jim's mind.6) At this stage, the relationship between Marlow and Jim is almost purely intellectual; in spite of the fact that Marlow is concerned about the young man, his chief function is that of narrator, his chief motive, curiosity. Later on, when they have become friends, moments of deeper emotional resonance befall them. In describing his parting from Jim when the latter leaves for Patusan, Marlow says that "there was a moment of real and profound intimacy, unexpected and short-lived like a glimpse of some everlasting, of some saving truth." (24) Here, again, Conrad emphsizes the eternal validity of the insight received in the moment of intuition, in this case an intuition touched with deep emotion. But, like nature, man can also open ut an abyss of horror, as does, for example, Jim's German-born captain.

> He pronounced a professional remark in a voice harsh and dead, resembling the rasping sound of a wood-file on the edge of a plank; the fold of his double chin hung like a bag triced up close under the hinge of his jaw. Jim started, and his answer was full of deference; but the odious and fleshy figure, as though seen for the first time in a revealing moment, fixed itself in his memory for ever as the incarnation of everything vile and base that lurks in the world we love—(21)

Conrad's moments of vision and significant action are the highest imaginative expression of a Weltanschaung essentially dramatic; the moments find their meaning within the framework of human destiny. It is otherwise with Virginia Woolf's "suspended" moments, which in general have esthetic or ritual content. The paramount value of these moments is that they either touch an order of permanence or create one out of the chaos of contingency which is life.

In most of Virginia Woolf's mature work, these orders are being created in the very texture of the novel. *Jacob's Room,* which is the principal link between her traditional and her fully developed experimental fiction, displays instead a lavish admiration, not entirely unmixed with irony, of the orders of truth and beauty as already manifest in our libraries and museums. The irony, released by juxtaposed life and cutting both ways, is most evident in the evoccation of the British Museum, where "poor highly respectable men—do their best for twenty years to protect Plato and Shakespeare, and then are buried at Highgate—Meanwhile, Plato continues his dialogue; in spite of the rain; —in spite of the woman in the mews behind Great Ormond Street who has come home drunk and cries all night long, 'Let me in! Let me in!" (JR, 103) The Acropolis, a monument and symbol of beauty rather than of thought, elicits a purer response;

> The extreme definiteness with which—(the structures) stand—imposes ideas of durability, of the emergence through the earth of some spiritual energy elsewhere dissipated in elegant trifles—and if you consider how it has stood out all night, for centuries, you begin to connect the blaze (at midday the glare is dazzling and the frieze almost invisible) with the idea that perhaps it is beauty alone that is immortal. (147-48)

Judging from another passge on women's beauty, one is led to assume that the work of art is immortal because it manifests a timeless but fugitive essence, by us intermittently glimpsed rather than fully perceived. "Thus if you talk of a beautiful woman you mean something flying fast which for a second uses the eyes, lips, or cheeks of Fanny Elmer, for example, to glow through." (114)

The fleetingness of the vision of beauty or reality, through which alone man can give to his existence some degree of "durability," is axiomatic with Mrs. Woolf. Only in the kind of dream state frequently experienced by katharine Hilbery can "the realities of the appearances which figure in our world—; the perfect happiness of which here we taste the fragment; the beauty seen here in flying glimpses only" be experienced for any length of time. (ND, 145) This state, however, is too indolently contemplative to be of much value; its condition is evident from the fact that "much of the furniture of this this (dream) world was drawn directly from the past, and even from the England of the Elizabethan age." (145) of a different order altogether are the visionary states that occur in the maturer works, which, characteristically, are fragile. To the Lighthouse, Mrs. Woolf's most positive and triumphant novel, conveys the provisional and precarious state of the vision as poignantly as the mere pessimistic works. Both Mrs. Ramsm and Lily Briscoe are aware that "the vision must be perpetually remade." (270)

The word "vision", with its sensory connotation, may not be sufficiently broad in its reference to comprehend all those momentary states of mind through which Mrs. Woolf's characters achieve contact with a permanent reality. Some of those states, indeed, are characterized by complete submersion in the object contemplated. As living experience, submersion is most profound in the case of Mrs. Ramsay; as a metaphysical idea, it is most explicit in Mrs. Dalloway. Since any efforts to translate the experience into conceptual terms would falsify it, here is, somewhat shortened, the passage from *To the Lighthonse* which renders Mrs. Ramsay's union with the numinous world.

> that was what now she often felt the need of—. To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others—our apparitions, the things you know us by, are simply childish. Beneath it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is unfathomably deep—Her horizon seemed to her limitless—This core of dark-ness could go anywhere, for no one saw it. They could not stop it, she thought, exulting. There was freedom, there was peace, there was, most welcome of all, a summoning together, a resting on a platform of stability. Not as oneself did one find rest ever, in her experience—but as a wedge of darkness. Losing personality, one lost the fret, the hurry, the stir, and there rose to her lips always some exclamation of triumph over life when things came together in this peace. this rest, this eternity; and pausing there she looked out to meet that stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of the three, which was her stroke, for watching them in this mood always at this hour one could not help attaching oneself to one thing especially of the things one saw—Often she found herself sitting and looking, sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at—that light, for example. (95-97)

The mystical qualities of this experience are readily apparent. The conscious or social self, as a mere apparition, has "evaporated"; instead, there is the "wedge of darkness," an image of the soul, merging with the light, a traditional symbol of the divine spirit. The sense of having found refuge from a world of care and reached a state of "stability," "peace", "rest", and "eternity", is further indication of the religious nature of the experience. Finally, the way as well as the end, with its attendant feelings, is reli gious, specifically, mystical. It is through contemplation of an object, the light—which is actual as well as symbolic—that Mrs. Ramsay achieves her state of fusion. The incantatory rhythm of the language—"sitting and looking, sitting and looking"—is a suitable vehicle for the religious striving. That Mrs Ramsay should momentarily be jerked out of her convinced atheism and piously utter, "We are in the hands of the Lord," (97) confirms this view, however "annoyed" she is with herself for letting the remark escape her.

Mrs. Dalloway, who—no dubt from affinity with her creator—is as atheistic as Mrs. Ramsay, also displays a decidedly religious sensibility. But it is less profound than that of Mrs. Ramsay. in whose case the achievement of union brought "to her lips always some exclamation of triumph over life." Here a purely spiritual impulse is evident, whereas it is precisely "life" which Mrs. Dalloway glories in, and wishes to preserve, contact with. "—she—was part, she was positive, of the trees st home;—part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift mist, but it spread ever so far, her life herself." (MD, 12) The "tree of life" symbolism as against the light-darkness symbolism in the passage from *To the Lighthouse* indicates the essential difference between the two experiences. Furthermore, unlike Mrs. Ramsay, Mrs. Dalloway feels the need of formulating the experience conceptually, because in her case it is a weapon against death. In essence, it is a substitute for belief in personal immortality rather than experience of eternity which Clarissa seeks—and this point of contrast, is seems to me, goes far to define the precise divergence of values and spiritual orientation in the two characters: Mrs. Ramsay is fulfilled, Clarissa is not, and would like to extend her life indefinitely. At one point in Mrs. Dalloway, the panpsychistic concept—panpsychism beig a more accurate classification than either pantheism or mysticism—becomes almost over-explicit. Her sense of affinities with places and people.

> ended in a transcendental theory which, with her horror of death, allowed her to believe, or say that she believed (for all her scepticism), that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseeen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places after death —perhaps—perhaps. (MD, 231-32)

More frequent than the moment of mystical union and its rationale is in Mrs. Woolf's fiction a more esthetically tinged moment of revelation.7) This moment occurs in man's interchange both with nature and with other men; it either unveils eternal reality or discloses universal values. Rachel Vinrace has a pre-eminent gift for the non-human variety of this revelatory moment. On one occasion, as she comes to join her friends at the hotel.

> The group appeared with startling intensity, as though the dusty surface had been peeled off everything, leaving only the reality and the instant. It had the look of a vision printed on the dark at night. White and grey and perple figures were scattered on the green; round wicker tables; in the middle the flame of the tea-urn made the air waver like a faulty sheet of glass; a massive green tree stood over them as if it were a moving force held at rest—for a moment nothing seemed to happen; it all stood still……the dust again began to settle. (259)

For a moment, it seems, life is transmuted into the entire repose and more than the transparency of a still-life painting.8) At another time, a single tree becomes the occasion for a similar revelation.

> Dark was the trunk in the middle, and the branches sprang here and there, leaving jagged intervals of light between them as distinctly as if it had but that second risen from the ground. Having seen a sight that would last her for a lifetime, and for a lifetime would preserve that second, the tree once more sank into the ordinary ranks of trees……(174)

One notes even here the presence of the light-dark cnntrast which pervades the mystical moment of Mrs. Ramsay. Noteworthy is also the primordial quality of the experience, indicated by Rachel's feeling that the tree looked as on the morning of creation.

More rapturous, yet equally universal, is the illumination which love elicits. Curiously, the most entrancing love experience is not heterosexual, but a moment of near union with Sally Seton recollected by Mrs. Dalloway. The meaning of the experience, however, is religious-psychical as much as erotic, in that it complements Clarissa's constricted ego with unassimilated contents of her self represented chiefly by Sally.[9] Thus, the experience is the emotional counterpart of her idea that "to know her, or anyone, one must seek out the people who completed them." (231) Sally's kiss brings Clarissa to a state approaching mystical ecstasy:

> Then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life (as she was) passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down!…… she felt that she had been given a present, …… a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling!"[10]

Words like: stone urn," "radiance" and "revelation" are irresistible invitations for symbolic explication. Indubitably, the numinous reaches through here, its light-giving fire polarized between death and life—the stone urn, plausibly enough, acting as a womb-tomb symbol. This interpretation gains strength from both detailed episodes and the thematic structure of the book. Peter Walsh, for example, walking in the city, experiences a similar moment. Even the setting is much the same, life seeming to him at the time "like unknown garden, full of turns and coeners, surprising yes; realy it took one's breath away, these moments; there coming to him by the pillar-box opposite the British Museum one of them, a moment, in which things came together; this ambulance; and life death."[11] Thematically, the life-death complex pervades the book; if comes to climactic statement in the scene of the party, where Clarissa hears of the death of Septimus Smith. "Oh! thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here's death, she thought." (279) As in the symbol of the urn, the two extremes meet, and their meeting revitalizes Clarissa's drooping psychic powers. "He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun." (284) One may note that the language in which Mrs. Dalloway thinks of death is sexual-religious, just like the symbolism in the passage descibing the effect of sally's kiss: "Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death."[12]

Whatever one thinks of the psychological-religious interpretation of these passages, one can safely say that in these moments of illumination man reaches levels of reality unintelligible within the framework of customary concepts of time and space. The reality is numinous, manifests itself usually in a flash—the word should be given its full metaphorical value—and in terms of a *coniunctio oppositorum*. The most fully elaborated of these experiences occurs again in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Clarissa is contemplating her own deficiences, deploring the lack of

> something central (Note the(image of the center!) which permeated; something

> warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together……Yet she could not resist sometimes yielding to the charm of a woman……confessing……some scrape, some folly……she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt……It was a sudden revelation, a tinge which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion. and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its skin and gused and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores. Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. (46-47)

As in the experience with Sally, it is the fact of psychic completion, totality—here described chiefly in terms of sexual imagery—which effects the illumination.

Compare to such experiences, a summary statement that Terence Hewet "had the whole meaning of life revealed to him in a flash" (VO, 312) under the pressure of love or that Sandra Wentworth, writing to Jacob, had in mind "some moment in the dark on the road to the Acropolis which (such was her creed) mattered for ever" (JR, 169) appear as just routine romanticism. Yet, despite their beauty and passion, the moments of revelation are, in my opinion, less important in Mrs. Woolf's novels than others, of similar quality and scope, which are more deliberately sought, often created. One similarity between the two categories of moments is that they both have their roots in love, but in the latter it is love as creativeness rather than as ecstatic union. Secondly, the interpersonal occasion has become social, the moment being one of spiritual communion within a group. Finally, the implicit value orientation is contructive rather than imitative of an *a priori* order. Nevertheless, the inspiration is essentially religious, since the group perforoms acts which in their intention are semi-ritual,

The condition which this creative love seeks to remedy is one of inner disconnectedness and outer chaos. This condition is most pointedly felt, perhaps, by Lily Briscoe at the beginning of the third section of *To the Lighthouse.* She feels completely isolated both from things and people, so that "anything might happen, and whatever did happen, a step outside, a voice calling……, was a question, as if the link that usually bound things together had been cut, and they floated up here, down there, off, anyhow. How aimless it was, how chaotic, how unreal it was, she thought, looking her empty coffee cup." (218-19) This is hardly an unusual condition for a wool fian cheracter to find himself in. It affects most of the figures in *The Waves* and in *The Years*; in *Between the Acts,* Miss La Trobe is acutely conscious of it—even sprightly Orlando is no exception. The transformation of its purely sequential and discontinuous "order", which threatens the individual with a constantly repeated confrontation with theabyss,[13] into an order of wholeness occurs sporadically in most of these novels. In *To the Lighthouse,* it is Mrs. Ramsay's beneficient presence which performs the miracle, either directly or indirectly, through the creative influence she has on others. As Lily is watching James and his mother together, "they became part of that unreal but penet rating and exciting universe which is the world seen through the eyes of love……she felt……how life, from being made up of little separate incidents which one lived one by one, became curled and whole like a wave……" (73) Mrs. Ramsay, the source of this unifying influence, also, naturally, feels its power, particularly in those states of suspension—where "the whole is held together" (160)—of which shich she is so superbly capa ble.

To make out of this personal moment of unity one of groep communion, which Mrs. Ramsay feels it her obligation to do, requires great spiritual exertions on her part. Her success at the dinner is preceded by discouragement, as "nothing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate. And the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her." (126) When the the success comes, it appears as an almost programmatically stated imposition of human order on the flux of the external world, present both actually and symbolically as the encompassing sea. In other terms, it is the transcendence of the ceaseless process of cosmic time by a human equivalent of eternity. This achievement fills Mrs. Ramsay with serene joy, which.

> arose, she thought, looking at them all eating there, from husband and children and friends; all of which rising in this profound stillness……seemed now……to stay there like a smoke, like a fume rising upwards, holding them safe together……It partook, she felt,……of eternity; there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected lights) in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby……Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures. (157-58)

The idea of shaping a refuge against the outer shaos of cosmic time is more directly stated in an earlire passage; the chief vehicle of the idea, however, remains the lighted candles, which

> composed (the faces), as they had not been in the twilight, into a party round a table, for the night was now shut off by pane of glass, which, far from giving any accurate view of the ontside world seemed to be order and dry land, there, outside, a reflection in which things wavered and vanished, waterily.
>
> Some change at once went through them all, as if……they were all conscious of making a party together in a hollow, on an island; had their commom cause against that fluidity out there. (146-47)

Although in *The Waves* the "fluidity out there" is present chiefly in image and symbol, it is more ceaselessly and insidiously destructive. The "moment of eternity" on the Isle of Skye does not, needless to say, last any longer than most such moments; but something remains to be recaptured in the last section of the book. In *The Waves,* the comparable moments, created out of Percival, are barely carried beyond the time of experience, except in the rather fluid, all-encompassing psyche of Bernard. One significant element, however, the two books have in common: The moment of communion contains certain unmistakable elements of ritual. In *To the Lighthouse,* for example, the description of the table abounds in mythological allusions; (146) a reference to "celebrating a festival" appears ; (151) the voices at one point sound "very strangely, as if they were voices at a service in a cathedral;" (165-66) and the common joy which rose from the table and "seemed……to stay there like a smoke, like a fume rising upwards," evokes the idea of an offered sacrifice. But there is no archetypal figure, like Percival, in whose commemoration the meal is given; only a weak adumbration of what such a figure represents appears in the young couple Paul Rayley and Minta Doyle, who have just become engaged. With "her golden haze." (148) Minta has the qualities of an Aphrodite. Furthermore, on one level, Mrs. Ramsay herself is a figure of symbolic myth, though sh is almost too intimately known to be entirely successful in this capacity. Percival in *The Waves*, who, despite a merely reflected existence in the observation and memory of his six friends, is comparable in function to Mrs. Ramsay, is a fully credible mythical figure, a combination of culture hero and sacrificial god. Generally, the two occasions on which he is celebrated correspond to the dinner and recapitulation in *To the Lighthouse*. But important differences spring from two features of the book's method—the absence of the principal character and the continuous juxtaposition of sex inner nonologues of roughly equal impotance. First, these technical peculiarities make each of the six characters participate equally in the creation of the moment of communion; second, they enable the author to make even the linguistic from approximate that of ritual as, on a smaller scale and with a somewhat different intention, T. S. Eliot did in *The Family Reunion*. Because of these differences, *The Waves* conveys a must stronger sense of human unity and solidarity than *To the Lighthouse.*14)

These differences in form, however, do not affect the aspirations of the cheracters, which are identical to those of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. Louis, for example, says, "Yes, as we rise and fidget,……we pray, holding in our hands this common feeling, 'Do not move, do not let the swingdoor cut to pieces the thing that we have made, that globes itself here, among these lights, these peelings……Hold it for ever.' " (145) And, " 'Let us hold it for one moment,' said Jinny;……this globe whose walls are made of Percival; of youth and beauty, and something so deep sunk within us that we shall perhaps never make this moment out of one man again.' ", (145) And Neville asks, "How signal to all time to come that we, who stand in the street, in the lamplight, loved Percival?' " (147)

Neville,s anguished question is in a more subdued tone asked by many of Mrs. Woolf,s characters. Mrs. Ramsay, for example, who is one of the robuster figures, wants time to stand still;15) on the other hand, the passage of time does not, to her, necessarily destroy the value of the significant moment. "Now one thought of it, cleared of chatter, it seemed always to have been, only was shown and so being shown, struck everything into stability." (TL, 170) This moment will endure, as moments from Mrs. Ramsay's earlier life which she likes to contemplate have endured. (132) The mode of existence of such surviving moments is much like that of art, a fact which partly explains the unadulterated pleasure which contemplation of them engenders. (140)

Indeed, there is in Mrs. Woolf's work a complex interplay between the moment of artistic vision and creation, the present moment of communion, and the recollected or recaptured moment. All these moments are timeless, in the sense thet they are exempt from the sense of detrition, tension, and regret which the passage of time brings about. The interplay is most clearly apparent in *To the Lighthouse.* where Miss Briscoe, for example, is constantly thinking of Mrs. Ramsay as, in her own way, an artist, "making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent)……" (241) Furthermore, the close connection between the gifts, love and artistic creativeness, becomes evident from Lily,s and Mrs. Ramsay's temporary excursions into each other's domains. When stimulated by her feeling of intimacy with Mrs. Ramsay, Miss Briscoe is capable of a similar sense of meaningful unity as her antitype; her art, in fact, would have been non-existent but for this ability. On the other hand, Mrs. Ramsay shows an esthetic sensibility akin to Lily's. Reading a sonnet, she feels how "all the odds and ends of the day stuck to this magnet; her mind felt swept, felt clean. And then there it was, suddenly entire; she held it in her hands,……the essence sucked out of life and held rounded here—the sonnet." (181) That this neatly sums up not only Mrs. Ramsay's and Lily Briscoe's esthetic philosophy, but also their creator's becomes evident from a passage in *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Here Virginia Woolf suggests that the end of writing is to present "reality," which is revealed in occasional moments of vivid perception and intuition. "……whatever it touches, it fixes and makes permanent. That is what remains over when skin of the day has been cast into the hedge; that is what is left of past time and of our loves and hates,"[16] This has the unmistakable ring of Mrs. Ramsay's voice—and it accords fully with the artistic practice of Miss Briscoe.

As for the relation between past moments of revelation and communion and the work of art, the last section of *To the Lighthouse* demonstrates their almost Proustian significance.[17] The major difference between Proust and Mrs. Woolf in this respect is that in the latter's work no sudden and overwhelming illuminations occur; instead, as with Mrs. Ramsay's art of living, a deliberate and strenuous exploration—in Lily's case of the course of her friendship and intimacy with Mrs. Ramsay—precedes the attainment of the vision. The only technical Proustian reminiscence appears at the very climax of Lily's search, when, as the breeze changes slightly the visual configuration of the scene before her, she suddenly sees Mrs. Ramsay in her chair precisely as ten years ago. "Mrs. Ramsay—it was part of her perfect goodness—sat there quite simply, in the chair, flicked her needles to and fro, knitted her reddish-brown stocking, cast her shadow on the step." (300) After this reactualization of a passed insted instant of time, completing the picture poses no great difficulty.

Virginia Woolf's last book, *Between the Acts,* presents a captivating variation on the artistic transcendence of time which is such an important motif in *To the Lighthouse.* The way in which it appears is determined by two intervening novels, *The Waves* and *The Years.* *The Waves* has provided the collective or communal moment of the book; but it is a somewhat embittered Lily Briscoe who creates the vision, not the partici pants, as in *The Waves.* Furthermore, the scope of this vision, which projects history, specifically British history, against the background of prehistory and the primordial, is that of *The Years,* only vastly extended. As for the velue of the vision, Miss La Trobe is more pessimistic than Lily Briscoe, who, despite the knowledge that her painting would not last, still feels that because of "what it attempted,……it 'remeaned for ever' ……" (TL, 267) Miss La Trobe, considering her art in relation to the audience rather than to herself, is at the end of the pageant convinced of failure. (BA, 209)

Morever, the contents of her vision, which consist mainly of the pageant, are quite different from anything Miss Briscoe wished to convey. To the latter, art sprang from love, which "had a thousand shapes. There might be lovers whose gift it was to choose out the elements of things and place them together and so, giving them a whoieness not theirs in life, make of some scene, or meeting of people (all now gone and separate), one of those globed compacted things over which thought lingers, and love plays." (TL, 286) This gives a definition of the function of art as well as of the art of living. Miss La Trobe's vision is not inspired by love, and it does not, like Lily Briscoe's painting recapture the immortal essence of goodness.[18] Rather, Miss La Trobe "was one who seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a re-created world." (BA, 153) She, like Virginia Woolf in this novel, is very much the merciless satirist; if she presents essen- ces, they are primitive archetypal ones rather than, as in *To tha Lighthouse,* moral and spiritual.

Accordingly, the moment of vision of as implicit in this novel is not, as one commentetor has suggested, primarily a means of releasing man from "his aloneness, his absorption in the ego and time, and his subjection to change."[19] It is certainty, like the moments of communion in *The Waves,* a means of escape from the disconnectedness of ordinary chronological routine, but through the particular subject-matter, which is history, there is within the vision itself a temporal relation which forces the spectator to assume an attitude toward historical time. True, in the attitude suggested by the novel the timeless asserts itself again, but in the sense of shedding the trappings of history for the purpose of rediscovering the primordial man rather than of escaping, Arabian Nights fashion, from time itself.[19] That there is no basic difference in this respect between the pageant and the work as a wholo proceeds from the practical identity of a primitive scene Kiss La Trobe imagines after the pageant is over and the actual ending of the book.[20] Thus, in *Between the Acts,* the timeless moment of esthetic vision dissolves into a moment of ritual, which invariable reverts to ultimate beginnings.

References

1) Joseph Conrad : Notes on Life and Letters (Garden City, N, Y. Doubleday, Page & Co., 1921), 13.
2) Ibid., 14.
3) These principles call to mind Matthew Arnold' poem "Dover Beach." Although the sea in this poem is used mainly as a symbol and is thus not, as in Conrad, considered under its aspect of eternality, the basic situation in the poem is similar to many in Conrad's novels.
4) "Preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus" (NN)
5) Chance, 276-77.
6) Lord Jim (LM), 76, 114, 119.
7) For a statement of fundamental resemblance between esthetic and "divine" moments, see W. T. Stace; Time and Eternity (Priceton Univ. Press, 1952), 117ff.
8) For a veritable still-life, see *To the Lighthouse* (TL), 163.
9) For religious-sexual symbolism in its relation to the integration of the self, see C. G. JUNG; Psyche and Symbol, ed. Violet S. de Laszlo (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday Books, 1958) 22-60.
10) Mrs. Dalloway (MD), 52-53—Another instance of a similar relationship is that between Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay. See TL, especially 78f.
11) MD; 230.—For a variation on the same motif. MD; 75.
12) MD; 281.

13) For an autobiographical sidelight on the feeling of hovering over an abyss, see Virginia Woolf; A Writer's Diary, ed. Leonard Woolf (New York: Harcourt, Brace £ Co. 1954), 27=28)

14) For an interpretation of *The Waves* from the point of view of unanimism.

15) For an extended comment on this desire of Mrs. Ramsay, see Bernard Blackstone; Virginia Woolf: A Commentary (New York: Hercourt, Brace & Co., 1948) 101.

16) (London: The Hogarth Press, 1954), 166.

17) It is worthy of note that Proust's masterpiece is one of the three literary works cited in A Room of One's Own which perform the function Mrs. Woolf demands of art. (See ibid.)

18) See TL; 300.

19) Marilyn Zorn; "*The Pageant in Between the Acts* (BA), Modern Fiction Studies, 2 (February 1956), 32.

20) See BA; 210, 219.