

# Virginia Woolf's Spirituality: "We are the words; we are the music"

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Coming to adulthood as Virginia Woolf did at the beginning of the twentieth century, an age that broke with tradition more radically than any previous era, Woolf naturally experienced conflict between faith and despair. Her fiction and essays reveal a questioning of old values as she vacillates between faith in a meaningful world and a sense of life's absurdities. Yet all of her novels exhibit a profound longing, a tending toward the numinous coupled with recognition of the transcendent embedded in reality. This longing, as manifested in her art, discloses the contours of a religious impulse. Though an avowed atheist, Woolf presented ideas of "reality," the "soul/self," and the "mystery of life" in a surprisingly spiritual manner. A phenomenological reading of Woolf's art yields such an understanding since it demonstrates a search for transcendence through her employment of personal notions of reality and the constitution of characters' selves (souls) in her fiction. Her ideas of self—as she represented them in art—uncover the assumption that the essential nature of human beings is spiritual. Moreover, the search by which her characters gain access to transcendence often occurs in what she called "moments of being." By capturing these moments in her fiction, she provides her reader with a verisimilitude

to life. Finally, the sense of yearning in her art, the reaching after the numinous and mystery, unfolds a pattern of connectedness in all things, a pattern demonstrably spiritual.

Inquiry surrounding Woolf and her work has produced many contexts with particular concerns for examination: feminist, historical, lesbian, psychoanalytical, philosophical, and trauma study. As much as these contexts have enriched understandings of Woolf and her art, perhaps the phenomenological thought of Henri Bergson, Karl Jaspers, and Georges Poulet offers the most successful vehicle for exploring consciousness and being in Woolf's art. Their tradition of viewing human life as being-in-the-world (*Existenz* in Jaspers) sheds light on Woolf's faith in the potential of human *being* to deny nothingness and her despair at the inadequacy of human effort in the face of that nothingness. As her writing shifts between these poles of faith and despair, she praises the power of art to overcome transience or mutability yet recognizes its limitations in doing so.

In her essay "Montaigne," written during the composition of *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Woolf seems to bind up the mystery of life with the mystery of the self as a center of that life: for her the "soul" is "all laced about with nerves and sympathies which affect her every action"; no one knows "how she works or what she is except that of all things she is the most mysterious, and one's self the greatest monster and miracle in the world" (68). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the word *soul* appears frequently, and at one moment Woolf defines it as "the unseen part of us, which spreads wide" (153). Elsewhere, *soul* often signifies the essence of a person, an identification which can be seen as a kind of spiritualization. But in her diary entry for September 30, 1926, the soul still defies complete clarity:

I wished to add some remarks to this, on the mystical side of this solitude; how it is not oneself but something in the universe that one's left with. . . . What image can I reach to convey what I mean? Really there is none I think. The interesting thing is that in all my feeling & thinking I have never come up against this before. Life is soberly and accurately, the oddest

affair; has in it the essence of reality. I used to feel this as a child.  
(*Diary* 113)

*Reality*, like *soul*, has special significance in Woolf's work and seems crucial in understanding her view of the self and its relationship to the world. Her most developed definition of *reality* is presented in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), where her explanation offers a picture of the "restless searcher" she claimed to be and of her faith in a reality that overcomes space and time:

What is meant by "reality"? It would seem very erratic, very undependable—now to be found in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now a daffodil in the sun. It lights up a group in a room and stamps some casual saying. It overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars and makes the silent world more real than the world of speech—and then there it is again in an omnibus in the uproar of Piccadilly. Sometimes, too, it seems to dwell in shapes too far away for us to discern what their nature is. But whatever it touches, it fixes and makes permanent. That is what remains over when the skin of the day has been cast into the hedge; that is what is left of past time and of our love and hates. Now the writer, I think, has the chance to live more than other people in the presence of this reality. It is his business to find it and collect it and communicate it to the rest of us. (165–66)

Woolf feels privileged to possess this consciousness of "reality," and while reality is often a shadow or that "real thing behind appearances," she indicates in *Moments of Being* (1976) that her "shock receiving capacity is what makes her a writer" and that it becomes "the revelation of some order" ("Sketch" 72). However, that order or reality behind or beyond yet present in actual life cannot be turned into an object to define and explicate, but it can be made manifest, briefly illuminated in "moments of being" in her art, which, fortunately, is not time-bound by death. The absent presence of this real thing behind appearance haunts her art with its spiritual mystery and beauty, illusive as it may be.

In her late memoir, "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf tells the most important of all her memories, one that invites her reader into a sensual experience as it rises in that space between sleep and waking; it is brushed with the splash of the waves onto the beach— "one, two," the light beginning and the blind lifted by the wind:

If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that fills and fills and fills—then my bowl without doubt stands upon this memory. It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St. Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and then breaking one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive. (64)

All of the images here commingle in a consciousness, or self, perceiving the world. Yet Woolf herself, in reflecting on this memory, recognizes that to render the experience as she truly felt it, she should begin by knowing the self, the subjectivity, the Virginia who experienced the memory. For Woolf, then, the self, the one who experiences the memory and perceives the world, forms the heart of her thought and art. Gaining access to that subjectivity becomes a crucial aspect of her literary project. Indeed, Woolf notes in "The Narrow Bridge of Art" that for each individual "every moment is the center and meeting place of an extraordinary number of perceptions which have not been expressed. Life is always and inevitably much richer than we who try to express it" (23).

This understanding of consciousness as the center of perceptions, feelings, and thoughts was certainly influenced by her own experience but also by her reading of Bergson. Other critics have noted his influence on Woolf, but few have seen him in the light of phenomenological thinking. In *The Creative Mind* (1946) Bergson states his theory of consciousness or self, a notion which he calls duration: "There is at least

one reality which we all seize from within, by intuition and not by simple analysis. It is our own person in its flowing through time, the self which endures" (191). Bergson offers the modern world the philosophical innovation that reality cannot be reached by an elaborate thought construct but rather is given in immediate experience as a flux, a continuous becoming, and that the self is an inner duration where the phases of time interpenetrate (*Time* 104). Duration is subjective, psychological, and non-spatial, where the dimensions of time—present, past, and future—coexist. Again and again, Woolf's fiction confirms this idea: the experience of being-in-the-world, which is both endless and different for each person, is a process of continuous creation. Like consciousness itself, Woolf's work resists definition and closure, and her art does not convey much about an external world but rather about the world as it is being experienced by a self, i.e., a being-in-the-world.

Bergson's philosophical innovation of self in terms of duration and flux or becoming provides a contrast to a tradition dominant in Western thought in Woolf's time that saw the self, or human nature, as the center of knowledge. A precursor of the phenomenological movement, Bergson laid the foundation for a new understanding of human reality. Viewing Woolf's fiction through a phenomenological lens reveals her faith in the possibility of transcendence, as both she, Bergson, and such philosophers as Poulet and Jaspers understood it. This new or alternate tradition sees human life as being-in-the-world, and in this tradition phenomenology critiques scientific conceptions of the human being that have dominated thought while acknowledging that science is essential to philosophy. According to Jaspers, religion, the other source from which philosophizing springs, preserves man's transcendence, dignity, and freedom, but religion also has its limits. Both religion and philosophy objectify what lies beyond objectivity (xv). Philosophy in the process of coming to an awareness of the human situation and its authentic possibilities tries to grasp the truth of *being* itself. It is a mode of thought that sets out to recover one's basic experience in the world. The divisions within the earlier philosophical tradition—such as body and mind—are resolved in the experience of

the embodied self in relation to others by the being-in-the-world notion of phenomenological thought, as the reader discovers in Woolf's fictional presentations. Though one does not find an explicit philosophical theme stated in her work, an early critic, Harvena Richter, suggests that "one can only conclude that her examination of her own encounter with lived experience was transmuted into the novel's form: modes of life became modes of fiction" (245).

Woolf's writings provide evidence that imagination orders the world of experience through the "modes" of art. A source of self-esteem and approval, her art brought restoration of a vanished world. The passion to regain her childhood with its wholeness, harmony, and relationship to others, for example, is central to her creative endeavor in *To the Lighthouse* (1927). This desire was the well-spring of her creative powers, and in spite of her early attempts at suicide this need to restore her childhood and her self served her well. Leo Bersani defines desire in a way useful to a further understanding of Woolf's search for transcendence in her creative task: "Desire is an activity within a lack; it is an appetite stimulated by an absence. But it is never only a lack. Desire is a hallucinated satisfaction in the absence of the source of satisfaction. In other words, it is an appetite of the imagination" (10). In *To the Lighthouse* Woolf creates a separate existence for her desires in the time and place of literature itself. Her recollection of primary figures and events conveys a meaning of selfhood which immediate experience did not always give her. A phenomenological approach to her work enriches one's understanding of her craftsmanship in creating the lived world within her fiction, especially when examined using Bergson's notions.

Bergson discusses extensively the art of the novelist in depicting a character's inner world. Much of his discussion centers on the difficulty of rendering that interior world. He indicates that the writer, by an act of the imagination that he calls intuition, needs to enter the stream of a character's *durée* in order to create an inner flux for the reader. The true novelist attempts to capture the movement of consciousness so the reader may have intellectual sympathy with a character. Says Bergson,

The novelist may multiply traits of character, make his hero speak and act as much as he likes: all this has not the same value as the simple and indivisible feeling I should experience if I were to coincide for a single moment with the personage itself. The actions, gestures and words would then appear to flow naturally, as though from their source. (*Creative* 188)

In the manner of Bergson's true novelist, Woolf captures "the sympathy by which one is transported into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what is unique" (190), as she creates the movements of consciousness in the mind of her characters. For example, in *To the Lighthouse* she mixes memory with perception and feeling, blending sensations of sounds and smells into a fluid state of consciousness that is continually merging them. The protagonist, Mrs. Ramsay, who is searching through a book for a picture, notices that the men in the next room have stopped talking. Her response is rendered in a lengthy paragraph that is, except for the opening line, one long sentence that suspends readers in the character's mind. The run-on thought pattern, dependent clauses, and modifiers make separating discrete elements to form an opinion impossible until all impressions have been presented:

this sound . . . had taken its place soothingly in the scale of sounds pressing on top of her, such as the tap of balls upon bats, the sharp, sudden bark now and then, "How's that? How's that?" of the children playing cricket, had ceased; so that the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach, which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts and seemed consolingly to repeat over and over again as she sat the children the words of some old cradle song, murmured by nature, "I am guarding you—I am your support," but at other times suddenly and unexpectedly, especially when her mind raised itself slightly from the task actually in hand, had no such kindly meaning, but like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life, made

one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea, and warned her whose day had slipped past in one quick doing after another that it was all ephemeral as a rainbow—this sound which had been obscured under the other sounds suddenly thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror. (27–28)

The conversation comes to Mrs. Ramsay along with the sounds of children and the soothing sea lulling and pacifying her. But the abrupt cessation of the voices with the implication that something has gone wrong sends her mind in another direction. At the same moment she imagines the sea as a cradle song, singing its words of nurture and care, she hears the cries of children at play and thinks about the destruction of the island and her own death. All these elements, even the day as “ephemeral as a rainbow,” coalesce in a larger sensation of peace giving way to terror. Thus, the passage demonstrates Woolf’s ability to break into the barrier of language that, according to Bergson, spatializes consciousness. Her presentation evokes the original emotion Mrs. Ramsay experienced with all its complexity, creating a correspondence between the comings and goings of her mind and the phrasings of her speech that stirs readers sympathetically. *Sympathy* is the key word, for it demonstrates a thread of connectivity that Woolf’s readers feel, tied as they are to the character’s inner life. Her experience is similar to theirs, alone with their thoughts; they are included in the human community.

In a phenomenological understanding of self with all its inner time phases, it is clear that the self is closely related to objects it encounters. In Woolf’s writing, the eternal world or the objects intended in consciousness become the medium through which her characters experience reality rather than the reality itself. This particular thrust of her art where characters are connected to things in the world implies a reverence for all there is, for the variety and unity of being. It suggests “some real thing behind appearances,” the “revelation of some order,” the being always present but never grasped as such (“Sketch” 72). Poulet explains the process of connection in which the object is mimed or interiorized in a character’s consciousness, suggesting that the act is prompted by the desire to connect with the otherness of the

object; the object prompts the character's desire. Poulet points out further that there are two ways for the subject to incorporate or internalize the external object: through imagination and through memory. Freed by either of these acts, the subject or self experiences the object and its image as a free production of the mind: "[f]or the act of imagination or of memory is nothing other than that: to oppose to the exterior perception an image which might be our own creation; to raise up the impression into an expression; to find the metaphor. Such is the *spiritual* effort every tangible object demands of us" (166 emphasis added).

When Woolf speaks of the self as attaching itself by threads to things, she is affirming the same connection between the self and things that Poulet describes:

one could not help attaching oneself to one thing especially of the things one saw; and this thing, the long steady stroke, was her stroke. 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. . . . She looked up over her knitting and met the third stroke and it seemed to her like her own eyes meeting her own eyes, searching as she alone could search into her mind and heart. . . . It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone, one leant to inanimate things . . . felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one. (*Lighthouse* 97)

In her experience Mrs. Ramsay merges with the lighthouse beam, meeting it, as she does, with her eyes and with its ability to gain access to her mind and heart as it sweeps across her gaze. The lighthouse with its third stroke is spiritualized in her regard of it, and the way in which she perceives the lighthouse beam yields a truth to her about herself. There is no longer any difference between Mrs. Ramsay and the lighthouse: she "felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one." The meshing of "became one" with "were one" here carries the emotional weight of an invocation, a religious recognition, a spiritualiza-

tion, if you will. The lighthouse beam is no longer an intended object: it is she herself.

Up to this point in the novel Mrs. Ramsay has moved inwardly where the bustle of everyday life no longer exists. In this place, which she calls the “wedge of darkness” (96), she is free, and everything comes together in peace. The connection to things in the world colors her feeling toward the lighthouse beam. Thus, the object, the lighthouse beam, is suffused with a meaning that reflects a complex state of mind where feelings fuse together. However, the next time she lifts her eyes to the beam, readers initially see the image with its constellations of feeling lying dormant. On this occasion Mrs. Ramsay has been thinking about the fact that there is little justice and reasoning in the world and realizes she must bring herself out of this state “by laying hold of some sight” (99). The sight she seizes upon is the lighthouse with its stroking beam. Its present exterior reality meets her interiorized image of it, and the resulting coincidence transfigures her depression:

She saw the light again. With some irony in her interrogation, for when one woke at all, one's relations changed, she looked at the steady light, the pitiless, the remorseless, which was so much her, yet so little her . . . but for all that she thought, watching (the beam) with fascination, hypnotised, as if it were stroking with its silver fingers some sealed vessel in her brain whose bursting would flood her with delight, she had known happiness, exquisite happiness . . . it silvered the rough waves a little more brightly, as daylight faded, and the blue went out of the sea and it rolled in waves of pure lemon which curved and swelled and broke upon the beach and the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind and she felt, It is enough! It is enough! (99-100)

When the image from the past arises in the presence of the object, Mrs. Ramsay experiences a sense of renewal and ecstasy. The imagery itself concretizes the idea that Woolf wants to portray, namely, that the

present image (the lighthouse beam) presses on the mind for release of the stored image (the lighthouse beam seen for the first time and endowed with wholeness and fusion). The beam, like fingers, strokes her mind with the possibility of release, and the waves breaking on the beach coincide with the burst of ecstasy that Mrs. Ramsay experiences. These separate moments, in the past and the present, conjoin into a unity, a significant pattern, a serial now. Time and self become one, and Mrs. Ramsay fervently responds, "It is enough!"

Clearly, Woolf's well-known "moments of being" provide a meeting place for experience; they are a cross section of consciousness in which perceptions and feelings converge to form for an instant something round and whole (Richter 27). But the Woolfian moment—often compared to Joyce's epiphany—can also be seen as an instant of pure being, a mystical experience beyond the everyday. Memory plays an important role in this moment where a convergence of times and feelings occurs, largely because memory is a means for reconstituting the self and carries with it a quality of timelessness that Woolf sought to portray: an event preserved in its original flavor acquires an independence of passing time. Woolf's moments of being, however, are not exceptional moments beyond time; rather, they are sustaining, expanding elements of time given completely in temporal experience. The expansion of the moment creates such a plenitude, holding, as it does, the past, present, and future in concentration, that the moment itself is experienced as eternity. Though the term *eternity* often leads to misunderstanding because it implies stasis, the intent here is to convey an acute fullness of time, as Jaspers confirms: "Eternity as transcendence appears in time and encompasses all time" (52). In *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay realizes intuitively that moments of transcendence cannot last in immanent form without losing transcendence. Only in rare moments of being when time is intensified can one glimpse transcendence and hold it. Here is one such pivotal moment for Mrs. Ramsay:

there is a coherence in things, a stability; something . . . is immune from change, and shines out . . . in the face of flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again tonight she had the feeling

she had had once today, already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures. (158)

For Woolf, moments of being become in the Jaspersian sense ciphers of transcendence, that is, indices to the transcendent.

Like Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, Lily Briscoe, the artist, struggles with her vision, seeking to grasp the experience of eternity within her painting. Holding a scene suspended in intense attention, a formal relation of light and dark, Lily wants her painting to embody the ordinary things of the life world:

One must keep on looking without for a second relaxing the intensity of emotion. . . . One must hold the scene—so—in a vise and let nothing come and spoil it. One wanted, she thought, dipping her brush deliberately, to be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that's a chair, that's a table, and yet at the same time, it's a miracle, it's an ecstasy. (299–300)

Through memory and imagination Lily makes a transcendent reach to recreate her world and a work of art that will last—even if it is hung in attics. Her attempt manifests a “re-presenting” of the understanding she has achieved in drawing the threads of her own narrative together. Thus, Lily experiences a moment of being when time is so expanded and deepened that it seems to encompass all time and illuminates the being of all things: “she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision” (310).

Woolf captures at the novel's end the coincidence of eternity and transcendence that Jaspers expresses:

Eternity as transcendence appears in time and encompasses all time . . . when as self-being I see being in all things . . . I see eternity as temporal reality, and time as eternity . . . This uplift alone gives the transcending thought a meaning in which time and timelessness become identical as eternity. (52)

For Jaspers, any way of completely understanding and communicating what is all-encompassing—that pattern behind all things that Woolf experiences—fails because at best one is looking at ciphers that indicate the search for transcendence through existential relations to it. The value, then, of philosophical inquiry or artistic creation lies in this search for new transformations or transpositions, or in Jasper’s terminology, ciphers and symbols, to capture the human relation to transcendence. Hence, symbols—that is, words and the paint that Lily Briscoe wishes to use to render her vision—are “cipher scripts of transcendence” (Jaspers 32). Jaspers indicates further that

[t]o understand a symbol does therefore not mean to know its meaning rationally, to be able to translate the symbol; what it means is that an Existenz experiences in the symbolic intention this incomparable reference to something transcendent, and that it has this experience at the boundary where the object disappears. . . . [A] symbol cannot be held fast as an existing reality of transcendence; it can only be heard as its language. (16)

Jaspers’s discussion of symbol is certainly affirmed in Woolf’s use of symbols. She insists that symbols not be translated into abstractions, defending an essentially Coleridgean use as the one she prefers because “directly I’m told what a thing means, it becomes hateful to me” (Nicolson and Trautman 385). In consciousness, Jaspers would argue, the reality of existence is dissolved into “objects of world orientation,” but in existential contemplation, in the search for transcendence, imagination is “committed to active struggle, lighting and fulfilling its way” (133). Ultimately, when Lily completes her painting in a state of exhaustion at the conclusion of *To the Lighthouse*, she bears out Jasper’s philosophical statements on transcendence and imagination: “contemplative imagination . . . makes it possible . . . to have a sense of completion, of temporal fulfillment, for a vanishing moment. Imagination lets an Existenz find peace in being; the cipher transfigures the world” (135).

In Woolf’s last novels, most specifically in *Between the Acts* (1941),

published posthumously, the pattern of connectedness finds even greater thematic expression. Though a contrast exists between the ongoing, recurring natural world and the mutability of the human world, there remains in these works an implication of the eternal process and connection of all things. In *The Waves* (1931), for example, Bernard recognizes that the human race will ride against death again and again, but he also perceives the permanence of the process of which that human act is a part. The pattern of constant change forms a backdrop for the endless pattern of human effort to discover or create order, harmony, and continuity in the middle of flux. Bernard thinks,

I am conscious of flux. . . . It is like a waltz tune, eddying in and out. . . . The waitresses, balancing trays, swing in and out, round and round. . . . Where then is the break in this continuity? What the fissure through which one sees disaster? The circle is unbroken; the harmony complete. Here is the central rhythm. (110)

While Woolf was writing *Between the Acts*, Hitler and Mussolini were marching across Europe, a central concern to humankind in general and Virginia and Leonard Woolf in particular. Thus, in *Between the Acts* the village is threatened from without by encroaching war, and it confronts dissolution from within. Each year, the citizens present a pageant to which all come. The staging of the pageant and the repetition of activities surrounding it assume the status of a ritual: "Every summer, for seven summers now, Isa had heard the same words; about the hammer and the nails; the pageant and the weather. Every year they said, would it be wet or fine; and every year it was. . . . The same chime followed the same chime" (22). The pageant is both a ritual and a dramatic performance, providing the villagers with a recognition scene though not one on the level that a tragic figure experiences. Rather, it involves a recognition of others and of relationships of people through time: "we are members of one another. Each is a part of the whole. . . . We act different parts; but are the same" (192). The pageant serves to regenerate the community and connection to the pageant itself, if only momentarily, and in affirming life

the pageant renews what is vital and spiritual, however shadowy it remains at other moments.

Woolf notes in her diary the method she chooses to utilize in this last work:

“I” rejected: “we” substituted: to whom at the end there shall be an invocation? “We”. . . the composed of many different things . . . we all life, all art, all waifs and strays—the rambling capricious but somehow unified whole—the present state of mind? And English country. (279)

What is striking about Woolf’s last novel is the directness with which her private vision of faith in transcendent “reality”—that background against which being can be seen—becomes apparent against encroaching despair. In *Between the Acts* fragments of characters and actions emerge. Often, bits of dialogue surface, free of their context, exhibiting the apparent aimlessness and fragmented quality of life. Objective events such as the parts of the play and internal thought or monologue have the same texture; that is, everything inside the mind and outside in reality are one “stream.” Random associations, images, and interplay are not just forms of inner life; they are instead the form of life itself. Images, conversations, daydreams, poetic lines, and understanding of another’s story blend into one pattern, one grand design of life across time.

In *Between the Acts* Woolf presents the artist as the figure of Miss La Trobe, director of the pageant, though Lucy Swithin represents the religious impulse, bent on making a great pattern of wholeness, not without gentle chiding by Woolf. Lucy brings a larger visionary dimension to the book, but her faith is a method for structuring reality, not a doctrine of beliefs. Woolf was not very sympathetic to Christianity as a body of doctrine, but here she uses Lucy’s spirituality and “the usual trappings of rather shabby but gallant old age, which included in her case a cross gleaming gold on her breast” to embody an older approach to vision (10). “[G]iven to increasing the bounds of the moment by flights into past or future; or sidelong down corridors and alleys” (9), Lucy needs her cross for a certain solidity: “Above, the air rushed; be-

neath was water. She stood between two fluidities, caressing her cross” (204). Several critics have suggested that Woolf created Lucy as a comparable figure to Mrs. Ramsay in terms of vision. Margaret Church, for example, points out that Lucy’s last name—Swithin (S-within)—indicates that Woolf saw her “as a person whose inner recognition of reality was paramount” (72). Lucy’s consciousness consists in an integration of the dimensions of time, making an organic whole. She spends her days attempting to bring the divided world together, recreating a oneness she perceives is possible. Others—who do not believe in her vision—still appreciate her wish to bring about oneness: “She was off, they guessed, on a circular tour of the imagination—one-making. Sheep, cows, grass, trees, ourselves—all are one. If discordant, producing harmony—if not to us, to a gigantic ear attached to a gigantic head. And thus—she was smiling benignly—” (175).

The private vision of art and order that Lily Briscoe offers in *To the Lighthouse* becomes in *Between the Acts* a communal vision with its concomitant pattern of return—in the seasons, in the drama of individual lives, and in historical process. The individual’s achievement of selfhood apparent in Woolf’s earlier novels is transcended by a vision of the human community and its achievement of human communion through recognition of self and others in intersubjective moments. The telling of a character’s personal story in interior dialogue, in action, and in speaking aloud becomes a communal narrative which sings in verbal fragments, internal thought, and conversation—the story of lively life. At one point in the drama during a silence, even the cows bellow in longing, in communion, connecting the audience to both the natural world and the human communion that watching the play has built up: “The whole world was filled with dumb yearning. It was the primeval voice sounding loud in the ear of the present moment. . . . The cows annihilated the gap; bridged the distance; filled the emptiness and continued the emotion” (140–41).

Woolf’s keen awareness of the flux of life with its uncertainties and its forward historical march and her understanding of moments of being in which flux rests on a platform of “stability” enabled her (*Lighthouse* 63), like T. S. Eliot, to render a “pattern of timeless mo-

ments" in art (58). This pattern offers redemption from time and secures human communion. The open ending of this last novel provides a circle of return and continuance. Woolf's lifetime achievement is the creation of a literature that brings transcendence into the immanent, transmuted into art. Her writings bring eternity into a time-haunted world, offering a revelation of some order at the heart of things. She once said as much:

I feel that I have had a blow; but it is not, as I thought as a child, simply a blow from an enemy hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life: it is or will become the revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole. . . . From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is not Beethoven; certainly and empathically there is God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. ("Sketch" 72)

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