"WORDS FROM THE MUD": ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH LIFE AND REALITY IN VIRGINIA WOOLF
Life and reality in Virginia Woolf

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THESIS ABSTRACT

A very significant aspect of Virginia Woolf's art is concerned with the problems and dilemmas that the phenomenon of language presents not only to the writer but also to the selfconscious human being. Indeed, an understanding of Virginia Woolf's ideas and feelings about language is essential for the understanding of her vision of the interaction between human nature and the world. This study of Virginia Woolf's work is divided into three chapters. In the first I explore language's relationship with consciousness and reality in her writings. I deal also with her particular use of language in conveying certain "lived experiences." Not all human experience, however, is expressible, and so in the subsequent chapter ensues an investigation of her concepts about ineffability and silence. The universe of silence greatly attracted the novelist for in it she found unified and harmonious existence. In the life grounded in silence people communicate with a new language - "words from the mud" - which is the focal point of the final chapter. But most importantly, in silence she discovered a possible means for the survival of western civilization.
THESIS ABSTRACT

Les problèmes et dilemmes que le phénomène du langage présente non seulement à l'atueur mais aussi à l'être humain conscient de lui-même constituent un aspect significatif de l'art de Virginia Woolf. En effet on ne peut comprendre sa vision de l'interaction entre la nature humaine et le monde que si l'on comprend bien les idées et les sentiments de Virginia Woolf sur le langage. Cette étude des œuvres de Virginia Woolf comprend trois chapitres. Dans le premier j'explore dans ses écrits le rapport entre le langage et la conscience et la réalité. Je traite aussi de l'utilisation particulière du langage pour transmettre certains "expériences vécues". Cependant on ne peut exprimer toute l'expérience humaine, et ainsi, dans le chapitre suivant se trouve une étude de ses concepts de l'inéffabilité et du silence. L'univers du silence attirait fortement la romancière car c'est en lui qu'elle trouvait une existence unifiée et harmonieuse. Dans la vie ancrée dans le silence les gens communiquent avec un nouveau langage, "les mots qui viennent de la boue", ce qui constitue le point principal du dernier chapitre. Mais, ce qui est le plus important, c'est qu'elle a découvert dans le silence une possibilité de survie pour la civilisation occidentale.
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INTRODUCTION

Early in *The Voyage Out*, Rachel Vinrace decides that "Reality [dwell] in what one said and felt, but did not talk about."¹ Later in the novel her lover, Terence Hewet, the young writer, announces: "I want to write a novel about Silence... the things people don't say."² These are just two of the numerous references, in Virginia Woolf's first book, to language and its infinitely complicated relationship with human existence. This questioning of the ability of everyday language, or even literary, artistic language to capture and represent "reality" is one of the earliest signs of the author's lifelong preoccupation with the capacity and potential of her medium. That Virginia Woolf was extremely sensitive to, and keenly interested in language needs no support beyond her short stories and novels. One might mention, nonetheless, that there existed considerable interest in linguistics in the Bloomsbury circle, and that such language conscious literary critics as Logan Pearsall Smith, author of *Four Words*, and George Rylands, who wrote *Words and Poetry*, were friends and publishing clients of the Woolfs.³ Dynamic and, perhaps, influential ideas about language and its literary powers might have come to Virginia Woolf through her reading of Samuel Butler and James Joyce, especially the former. But rather than intellectual and Bloomsburyian, her profound
attachment to the world of words was deeply emotional, going back to her early childhood. In his Biography, Quentin Bell pays special attention to the beginnings and growth of Virginia Woolf's intimate relationship with language. Discussing his aunt's behaviour as an infant, he writes:

In one respect Virginia was an unusual child, it took her a very long time to learn to talk properly; she did not do so until she was three years old... Words, when they came, were to be then, and for the rest of her life, her chosen weapons.

Vanessa quickly perceived her young sister's "command of language," adds Bell, and "from the first it was settled between them that Vanessa was to be a painter and Virginia a writer." Indeed, several years later the younger Stephen girl began writing enthusiastically for the family household newspaper. Furthermore, throughout her Diary, Virginia Woolf affirms her immense love for language and its artistic expression, literature. For example, at one point she asks herself introspectively: "Or do I fabricate with words, loving them as I do?" And at another, she exclaims joyously: "I can write and write now: the happiest feeling in the world." Her unfathomable passion for literature is but barely glimpsed in these remarks: "What a vast fertility of pleasure books hold for me!... I think I could be here [Monk's House] and read forever."

But if Virginia Woolf derived ecstatic feelings from words, language, and literature, she also had to endure, like T.S. Eliot, "the intolerable wrestle with words and meaning," for, as she states in A Writer's Diary,
"the process of language is slow and deluding." Indeed, her monumental struggles with her medium involved many paradoxical, contradictory, and dialectical complexities. Within the confines of this thesis, I can hope to sketch only some of the aspects of the relationship between the phenomenon of language and Virginia Woolf's ideas on life and reality.

My approach to this subject, argumentative and investigative in nature, will be divided into three chapters. I will begin by trying to show how and why Virginia Woolf relates language to external, objective "reality," and to the inner "reality" of consciousness. A fair portion of this initial chapter will be devoted to the author's particular use of language. Chapter II contains two focal points which, though ostensibly diverse, are nevertheless very closely inter-related. The first involves one of the main problems raised by the relationships formed by the interaction of language, life, and reality, namely that of ineffability. What in human experience is inexpressible, and how Virginia Woolf, as a writer, confronts this difficulty are two key questions to be dealt with. That which forever resists verbalization partakes, in the end, of the world of silence. And thus the second part of the chapter consists of a consideration of the nature of silence and its significance in the works of Virginia Woolf, especially in The Waves and Between the Acts. As I hope to demonstrate, silence points essentially to a world before thought and language. The world that Virginia Woolf wanted so desperately to reach lies on the other side of language, and is, in a sense, pre-linguistic. In the
closing chapter I will examine her notions about the nature of pre-linguistic and pre-conscious existence and their significant connections with her art. Moreover, by tracing the presentation and development of these ideas from The Voyage Out to Between the Acts, I hope to show in what manner and for what reasons they become central in Virginia Woolf’s "final" vision of a possible resolution to one of western civilization’s most tragic dilemmas.
INTRODUCTION

1. The Voyage Out, Penguin Modern Classics, p. 33. (All subsequent references will be taken from this edition.)

2. Ibid., p. 218.


5. Ibid., p. 23.

6. A detailed and humourous account of this is given in the first volume of the Biography, pp. 29-40.

7. A Writer's Diary, London, 1969, p. 57. (All subsequent references will be taken from this edition.)

8. Ibid., p. 69.

9. Ibid., p. 211.


11. A Writer's Diary, p. 95.
Virginia Woolf was exceptionally conscious of the many limitations and problems that language presented to a writer. Evidence of this deep concern is found in her essay on E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*, in which she criticizes the author for not saying "more than a sentence or two about the medium in which a novelist works." She was well aware of the unbridgeable gulf between words and what they represent. She understood clearly the linguistic axiom that words are symbolic and interpretive, as expressed in the following definition by Leo Spitzer: "Language is... a system of arbitrary, conventional, ambiguous signs generally not felt as ambiguous by which the outward reality is interpreted for the speaker - and stylized." Even a superficial investigation of Virginia Woolf's concepts about language would reveal that she realized that "the verbal symbol in calling attention to itself must also call attention to the difference between itself and the reality which it resembles and symbolizes."

Throughout her work Virginia Woolf attempts to demonstrate that language and literary art cannot and should not try to copy a given reality. The novels provide innumerable examples supporting this contention. Near the beginning of *The Voyage Out*, Rachel perceives that there exists a definite distinction between "reality... what one said and felt" and language, the verbal
expression of it. Looking out at a lovely scene, Rodney, the supposed poet in Night and Day, asks himself questions that Virginia Woolf poses continually, in one form or another, in all her novels: "Ah... why can't one say how beautiful it all is? Why am I condemned for ever... to feel what I can't express?"5

As if responding to Rodney's questions, Mrs. Swithin in Between the Acts cries out: "We haven't the words! we haven't the words!"6 As for the words we do have, Virginia Woolf implies in her Diary that they may ever distort the "reality" which she strives to express:

... and got then to a consciousness of what I call "reality": a thing I see before me; something abstract; but residing in the downs or sky; beside which nothing matters; in which I shall rest and continue to exist. Reality I call it. And I fancy sometimes this is the most necessary thing to me; that which I seek. But who knows - once one takes a pen and writes? How difficult not to go making "reality" this and that, whereas it is one thing.7

As she explains in "Craftsmanship," her essay on the shaping of language, the reality she seeks is reached and conveyed only by the suggestive power of words, that is, by symbol and metaphor. Whatever can be pinned down to words, to a meaning singled out and emphasized, becomes unreal and thus not the true stuff of fiction.8

This intense interest in language and what it is able to express of life and reality are preoccupations which Virginia Woolf shares with Bernard, her most language conscious character. Indeed, of all her works, The Waves deals most directly, almost obsessively, with the manifold tension between language and inner and outer reality. According to critic Frank D. McConnell, all the
novel’s characters, constantly in quest of a totally articulate existence, reflect in one way or another "the inherent tension between the words of subjective consciousness and the irrecoverable otherness of both things and other people." Least perceptible in Jimmy and Susan, such friction is most evident in Bernard. The flux of life perpetually prevents Bernard from finding "some perfect phrase that fits the ... moment exactly." Language distorts his vision of the outside world by creating illusion upon illusion: "But observe how meretricious the phrase is - made up of what evasions and old lies." Phrases give him the illusion of unity and order in life and reality: "I must open the little trap door and let out these linked phrases in which I run together whatever happens, so that instead of incoherence there is perceived a wandering thread, lightly joining one thing to another." At the novel’s end, Bernard, the old man, rejects language as a means of harmonizing and getting hold of the world, for he realizes, after his visionary experience of leaning over the gate, that language is inextricably interwoven with consciousness and, by implication, the self, those unsurpassable obstacles disallowing total fusion with the cosmos while he lives. "How to describe the world seen without the self?" he asks wistfully. "There are no words;" he concludes in disillusionment. Words and language come into being only with the presence of consciousness. This relationship between language and consciousness will be examined in greater detail shortly.

Besides Bernard, Neville also repudiates language as an instrument
with which to find truth and to establish order and harmony in existence. Characteristically succinct, he declares: "Speech is false." He expresses this adverse feeling in unequivocal, symbolic form by flinging his poem at Bernard: "I took my poem, I flung my poem, I slammed the door behind me." He comes to understand that words transform things and make them "artificial, insincere": "Nothing should be named lest by so doing we change it." This belief closely resembles one found in Samuel Butler's Notebooks, which Virginia Woolf, a great admirer of Butler's work, most likely read: "The moment a thing is written, or even can be written, and reasoned about, it has changed its nature by becoming tangible, and hence finite, and hence it will have an end in disintegration." Commenting on a similar subject, Susanne Langer, in her provocative book Problems of Art, maintains that "a named thing is at once a focus of 'reality' - that is, a fixed identity - and a symbol of its kind." Representative of the Edwardian materialistic world, this kind of "reality" Virginia Woolf denounced, avoided, and found unreal. "When words are pinned down," she claims in "Craftsmanship," they fold their wings and die," for they appertain to a deadness and an artificiality. Only by the imaginative and skilful use of subtle, suggestive word relationships with their myriad possibilities, and with an unflinching faithfulness to his or her vision can an artist achieve a truly commendable and enlightening presentation of life and reality. It is highly improbable that Virginia Woolf would agree with Ernst Cassirer's contention that "the
conscious experience is consumed by the word," and that "whatever has been fixed by a name... is not only real but is Reality."20

Perhaps better than any other character in Virginia Woolf, Neville comprehends that the symbolic nature of language freezes or objectifies - Butler might say "kills" - meaning in experience and, in this way, separates us from life and the world. "This is not necessarily always a negative function. By calling his traumatic encounter with the dead man in the gutter "death among the apple trees," Neville objectifies the experience, distances himself from it, and thus temporarily escapes a direct confrontation with death. Language's inherent, objectifying operation is an important topic in linguistics. For example, Remy Kwant, in Phenomenology of Language, confirms Neville's sentiment by explaining that language "puts us at a distance from the meaning of experience because it makes the meaning an object and therefore removes us from the immediate experience of this meaning." 21 In this regard language always "contains an unfaithfulness to reality."22 Language's process of objectification and the "stricture and rigidity" of death make language itself, for Neville, a reflection of his, and on a broader scale, Man's innate consciousness of death.

For Virginia Woolf words and language are inseparable from human consciousness. Many writers and linguists would agree with this conviction. Samuel Butler, perhaps a source of Virginia Woolf's ideas on the subject, observes: "All the most essential and thinking part of thought is done with-
out words or consciousness. It is not till doubt and consciousness enter that words become possible." 23 Convinced that "an understanding of the structure of thought and language is basic to the understanding of both literary style and content," 24 Jean Love contends, in Worlds in Consciousness, an enlightening and stimulating analysis of Virginia Woolf's art based on developmental cognitive psychology, that "the schematization of a conscious world and the articulation of language to symbolize it are inextricably parts of a single process and the same developmental principles apply to both." 25 In his discussion of the paradoxical nature of language, Kwant points out that consciousness and language, Man's main instruments in getting to know reality, are the very things that render that reality ungraspable. 26 Language, then, like the window pane of consciousness presented in "The Death of the Moth" and throughout Virginia Woolf's work, allows us to see the world but will never permit us to get hold of it.

James Naremore, in his brief consideration of some of the aspects of the relationship between language and consciousness in Virginia Woolf, concludes that the writer distrusts language because it is a product of the ego, or the self, an integral part of consciousness which differentiates and freezes things, and because it is "always at least one step removed from reality." 27 As suggested earlier, for Virginia Woolf the "reality" to which language refers exists not "out there" but in words themselves and in "the world in consciousness." Bernard believes that "a good phrase... seems to have an independent existence." 28
The universe in his "bubbles of words" subtly relates to but is completely disassociated from the universe in his "globs of life." To be sure, the "realm of the word" reflects certain aspects of life and the outer world. For example, Virginia Woolf and some of her characters believe that words have definite physical qualities. The novelist feels that she can "lay hands on words, choose them, and shoot them." Some days words hit her head and bounce and spring. She is convinced that "one gains a certain hold of sausage and haddock by writing them down." Terence Hewet thinks that "one could almost handle" the words of Milton's poetry. The attitude implicit in these assertions confirms the notion of Wilhelm von Humbolt, a distinguished linguist and philosopher who profoundly influenced Cassirer, that "Man lives with his objects chiefly, in fact since his feelings and acting depend on his perceptions one may say exclusively - as language presents them to him." Another affinity between language and life is that words, like consciousness, are imprisoned in the temporal world. Similar to life they have a history of unpredictable change. "Who is to foretell the flight of a word?" asks Bernard. He knows that his phrases will never escape temporality and capture eternity or perfection. They will have only "contributed to the passing moment." And perhaps most significantly, words contain life's flux and instability: "... words that have laid dormant now lift, now toss their crests, and fall and rise, and fall and rise again." Thus like a wave, which can be seen as "the person living," heading towards the shore, that is, towards death, a word is also at
the mercy of the caprices of the sea, or life.

Words, then, have a life, laws, and a tangibility all their own. According to Kwant, language has more or less detached itself from the "world-out-there" and become "the autonomous culture of the word." Virginia Woolf knew very well that language could not hope to reproduce the outside world nor the physical sensations of the human being interacting with it: "But what a little I can get into my pen of what is so vivid to my eyes, and not only to my eyes; also to some nervous fibre, or fanlike membrane in my species." She understood that part of the real value of language lay in its differences from feelings and sensory perceptions. Nevertheless, through her truly ingenious artistry with language, Virginia Woolf establishes a very special relationship between "lived" and "literary" experience. Masterfully employing such devices as synaesthesia, repetition, rhythm, and typographical denotation, she produces idiosyncratic visual, spatial, and sensory effects and, at the same time, emphasizes important aspects of her vision.

The mainstream of my discussion in this chapter deals with theories about language found in Virginia Woolf's works but it would be more than worthwhile here to digress briefly in order to consider her use of language in practice.

"How can I suppose," asks Roger Fry in *A Sampler of Castile*, a work published by the Woolfs, "that I can hand over to you through language the faintest image of a single moment's physical sensation?" A reason for the impossibility of such an action may be found in the complex process from
sensation to conception as explained and simplified by Jean Love:

The immediate world of sensory impressions gives way, in development, and merges into the mediate world of perception. In turn, perception merges into the even more mediate world of conceptualized thought, and sensation is removed from the centre of conscious experience to its periphery. 38

Understandably, then, "not a single one of Flush's myriad sensations ever submitted itself to the deformity of words." 39 Virginia Woolf does not endeavour to convey the countless smells picked up by the Brownings' dog's extremely sensitive nose in any direct fashion because the English language does not have words for them as it does for many colours. Instead she relays them indirectly through colour-smell and smell-sound synaesthesia:

He devoured whole bunches of ripe grapes largely because of their purple smell; he chewed and spat out whatever tough relic of goat or macaroni the Italian housewife had thrown out from her balcony - goat and macaroni were raucous smells, crimson smells. 40

The synaesthetic image is employed for diverse purposes. In the following example from Between the Acts it is used to relate a distinct impression of the nurses' conversation:

... and as they trundled they were talking - not shaping pellets of information or handing ideas from one to another, but rolling words, like sweets on their tongues; which, as they thinned to transparency, gave off sink, green, and sweetness. 41

Things for which we do have the vocabulary, however, also present problems to the writer. "Green in nature is one thing, green in literature another," 42 perceives Orlando. As Allen McLaurin submits, in his excellent
study of Virginia Woolf's ideas about the nature and literacy role of language in relation to Roger Fry's theories about art. *Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved.* "colour as physiological effect cannot be captured in literature." Continuing, McLaurin suggests that only by the creation and development of a relation similar to that established by colours in a painting can there be any real meaning in colour words. Virginia Woolf employs such a method very effectively. She spins meaning around colours by endowing them with multiple associative powers. To take one of many examples, unique relationships form and evolve between Rhoda and red, and the colourless colour white. At first she sees "islands of light... swimming in the grass." The whiteness of the light, after accruing subtle associations, becomes the white petals in the basin, presumably symbols of the purity of selflessness: "All my ships are white," said Rhoda. 'I do not want red petals that float when I tip the basin up!" Rhoda continually associates colour, especially red, a symbol of death, with people and with the self, both of which present a threat to her sense of existence.

Virginia Woolf deepens and broadens the relationship between colour and character primarily through repetition. Many of her critics have noted that her favourite method of building character involves repeating significant phrases and images verbatim and in variation. After carefully analyzing Virginia Woolf's use of repetition, McLaurin suggests a possible underlying reason for its frequent occurrence: "If exact words and phrases to some
extent falsify, then the truth might be contained in the modified repetition, the rhythm of language." In the light of Virginia Woolf's distrust of language discussed earlier, this explanation certainly sounds valid. But I think the main reason for her constant use of rhythmical repetition is much more basic. As she implies in "A Letter to a Young Poet," "the most profound and primitive of instincts, the instinct of rhythm," is fundamental to the creative process. Putting it straightforwardly, Bernard, the novelist, states: "the rhythm is the main thing in writing."

An important question now arises: In what ways does rhythm tie in with some of Virginia Woolf's major themes? One illuminating response is found in E.K. Brown's interesting and useful study *Rhythm in the Novel*:

To express what is both an order and a mystery rhythmic processes, repetitions with intricate variations, are the most appropriate of idioms. Repetition is the strongest assurance an author can give of order; the extraordinary complexity of the variations is the reminder that the order is so involute that it must remain a mystery.

This explanation sheds light on the Woolfian theory that there is some sort of unity which lies far below the surface of a fragmented and chaotic universe. (This idea is important in Virginia Woolf and will be amplified in my examination of her use of grammar and punctuation.) A much more complex and satisfying answer, one which relates very closely to my discussion of language and inner and outer reality, is offered by Raymond Bayer, who believes, like Virginia Woolf, that "rhythm... is the essence of art."
Bayèr writes:

... rhythm has the contradictory privileges of being both perceptible and inward. It undoubtedly participates in duration, as this is incorporated in the movements of consciousness, but it can also be perceived as a scansion of space. Rhythms are images of reality that take their place in space and audible time. The plane of rhythm is therefore at the true intersection of the interior domain and the realm of things. We have here, so to speak, a stage prior to the object and to the Self: you see the rhythms of art falling into visible systems, forms, and structures in the universe; you feel it in the inner world, maintaining cadences and discipline.52

In order to reach and convey the world before consciousness and before the self, what Virginia Woolf called "reality," the artist must use his medium rhythmically, or, in other words, musically. Virginia Woolf wanted her prose to come as near as possible to music, "the art of arts" in its magic suggestiveness, according to Joseph Conrad.53 Expressed in one form or another throughout her work, her immense desire to turn language into music, a language without words and all their negativity, is particularly recognizable in The Voyage Out. A great lover of music, Rachel tries to convince Terence of music's superiority to novels:

"Why do you write novels? You ought to write music. Music, you see... goes straight for things. It says all there is to say at once. With writing it seems to me there's so much... scratching on the match-box..."

The essence of music is rhythm. As noted on page 16, Virginia Woolf regarded rhythm as "the most profound and primitive of instincts." She wished
language, then, to reflect the spontaneity and naturalness of pure, "uncivilized" instinct. The implications here, subtle and significant, link together language, non-verbal and subconscious expression, and the primeval world. These links or relationships, as they emerge from Virginia Woolf's novels and evolve, will form the central subject of the final chapter.

Thus far I have considered Virginia Woolf's use of language in a broad, theoretical sense. Presently I would like to focus on her handling of language on a technical, written level. Many critics of Virginia Woolf have made much commentary on her singular and masterful exploitation of English grammar - especially such areas as sentence structure, apostrophe, exclamation, gerunds, past participles, and the pronoun "one" - to create in her work a deep sense of "lived" experience. That is, she "recreates" grammar in an effort to translate verbally certain phenomena in human existence. For example, in the following sentence from "The Lady in the Looking-Glass," the subject appears to be "her room," in which case the sentence would make no sense: "Under the stress of thinking, her room became shadowy and symbolic; the corners seemed darker, the legs of chairs and tables more spindly and hieroglyphic."55 But for Virginia Woolf grammatical sense is always subordinate to "grammatical effect." Here she relates "grammatically" Isabella's consciousness or state of being to her room. At any rate, an analysis of this type I regard overdone, and, though somewhat relevant to my topic, yet slightly too marginal. Therefore,
I will limit my remarks in the following paragraphs to two typographical items - dots or ellipses and parenthesis.

In an attempt to produce a certain visual effect, Virginia Woolf often uses dots as a literary equivalent to real space. Perhaps the best example of this is provided by her short story "The Searchlight" in which the dots represent the movement of a telescope as it scans the landscape:

"He focussed it so that he could see... each tree... each tree separate... and the birds... rising and falling... and a stem of smoke... there... in the midst of the trees... And then... lower... lower (she lowered her eyes)... there was a house... a house among the trees..."

The "orts, scraps, and fragments" of sentences created by dots throughout Virginia Woolf's work illustrate, perhaps, what Alfred North Whitehead referred to as "the extremely fragmentary nature of all direct individual conscious experience." Or possibly Virginia Woolf is making the same point as Herbert J. Miller, who claims that only "by breaking up factitious alliances and oppositions one may get at the deep uniformities" of an obviously chaotic world. Thinking along similar lines, McLaurin believes that the disjointed language helps to convey Virginia Woolf's idea that "in order to articulate reality must be broken up in this way."

According to Harveya Richter, Virginia Woolf learned a good deal about the potential of parenthesis by studying the styles of Laurence Sterne and Lewis Carroll. However, the entry in the Diary, where the author reflects momentarily on the effectiveness of parenthesis to resolve a certain
problem, does not mention the writers:

Should there be a final page about her and Carmichael looking at the picture and summing up R.'s character? In that case I lose the intensity of the moment. If this intervenes between R. and the lighthouse, there's too much chop and change, I think. Could I do it in a parenthesis? So that one had the sense of reading the two things at the same time?" 62

Generally speaking, Virginia Woolf employs parenthesis for two purposes - one, to achieve a certain three dimensional quality by placing the inner and outer world as close as possible on the page: 63

She was fond of flowers. It was a pity to let them waste. Suppose the house were sold (she stood arms akimbo in front of the looking-glass) it would want seeing to - it would. 64

and, two, to evoke a feeling of simultaneity, for example, of thought and feeling:

"But to go deeper, beneath what people said (and these judgments, how superficial, how fragmentary they are!) in her own mind now, what did it mean to her, this thing she called life;" 65 of speech and action:

Haunted! ever since I was a child. There flies the wild goose. It flies past the window out to sea. Up I jumped (she gripped the steering wheel tighter) and stretched after it. But the goose flies too fast... Always it flies fast out to sea and always I fling after it words like nets (here she flung her hand out) which shrivel as I've seen nets shrivel drawn on deck with only sea-weed in them. 66

or of thought and action:

But he could not taste, he could not feel. In the teashop among the tables and the chattering waiters the appalling fear came over him - he could not feel. He could reason; he could read, Dante for example, quite easily ('Septimus, do put down your book,' said Rezia, gently shutting the Inferno), he could add up his bill; his brain was perfect;
it must be the fault of the world then - that he could not feel. Critic have shown that Virginia Woolf's "moments of being" and even the framework of one of her novels, To the Lighthouse, are based on the parenthetical structure. Furthermore, in the "Time Passes" section of that work, she uses parentheses to separate certain relevant events from the all-consuming, onward march of time.

Virginia Woolf, then, uses language, a generator of discord, to reach out to some sort of order and unity. As I have mentioned, language, like consciousness, owns a paradoxical nature. Its duality is profound. Powerless in one way, words are omnipotent in another. Though they can fabricate a world of mutability and chaos, they can also manufacture one of permanence and harmony. In their intimate and complex relationship with consciousness, they prevent us from uniting with the world and finding out "what's behind things," but at the same time they are our best means of getting to know something about ourselves and the world. Of all things we need language most, maintains Wilhelm von Humboldt, in order "to understand the world in its individuality and totality." Indeed... it is language," insists Cassirer, "that really reveals to Man that world which is closer to him than any world of natural objects and touches his weal and woe more directly than physical nature." And as Kant simply puts it, language creates order and gives meaning to our existence.

The phenomenal ability of language to impose a definite order and meaning on the world and our experience of it has been investigated and
theorized about by many linguists, psychologists, and writers. William James, for one, informs us that language breaks up a chaotic world and reduces it to liveable form. The uniformity of the texture of our experiences, Whitehead surmises, results from our substituting the more logical entities of language for the crude data of sensory and emotional experience. In the opinion of Susanne Langer, "the first thing it does is to break up what William James called 'the blooming, buzzing confusion' of sense perception into units and groups, events and chain of events - things and relations, causes and effects. All these patterns are imposed on our experience by language. Writers also are very aware of this function of language as these lines from Wallace Stevens' "Add This To Rhetoric" testify:

Pfft... In the way you speak
You arrange, the thing is posed
What in nature merely grows.

The idea that language can construct a kind of order is widespread in Virginia Woolf. As already remarked, Bernard's phrases enable him to create an illusory order out of a seemingly confused existence: "The trees scattered... I retrieve them from formlessness with words." Language makes life tolerable for him in its power to build a schematized, imaginary world in consciousness, and thus erect a wall between himself and the apparently empty and meaningless world outside the self: "I must make phrases and phrases and so interpose something hard between myself and the stare of housemaids, the stare of clocks, staring faces, indifferent faces or I shall cry." Bernard's imaginary flights from the world are best
understood, perhaps, by Susan who, in contrast, is the closest of the six to Nature: "I am tied down with single words. But you wander off; you slip away, you rise up higher with words and words in phrases." Indeed, language encompasses Bernard's way of being in the world: "When I cannot see words curling like rings of smoke round me I am in darkness - I am nothing." Jean Love believes that language is a source of unity for Bernard and stabilizes his world in consciousness. "Words are solid forms," she writes, "that he can grasp and use to structure the world, the self, and other persons; they make things real to him, keep them in place." He hopes to utilize his words and phrases to discover unity in the cosmos and to uncover meaning in existence. But unfortunately, and perhaps tragically, he can never accomplish this because the inseparable bonds between language and consciousness make it unrealizable before death.

By no means is Bernard the only character in Virginia Woolf to use language to schematize and harmonize his inner world. Words, at first, are meaningful and endurable for Neville only when they are orderly and exact as in Latin: "Each tense... means differently. There is an order in this world; there are distinctions, there are differences in this world." But eventually, as Jean Love indicates, Neville replaces words as a way of being and of finding order and unity with the silence of nonreflection. "Non-reflection and direct, immediate experiences make bearable the chaos and heterogeneity of his world in consciousness," she argues, "and are a more
complete mystical union of subject and object than one room and one person afforded.82 Neville's determination to remain as much as possible in the natural world of nonreflection of unselfconsciousness, and his violent refusal to enter into Bernard's world of phrases make him a lifelong "clinger to the outside of words."83 As long as he lives, and is conscious, he must at least "cling" to words. A complete divorce from words, from consciousness, would connote a total existence in the outside world - and death. Words, then, offer a certain kind of simulated order for those who have the required strength of character to use them effectively. Appropriately, Rhoda, the most unstable, volatile, and vulnerable of the six in The Waves, "is not composed enough... to make even one sentence."84

One of the most explicit examples of the notion that language can potentially impose an order on human existence is found in To the Lighthouse, where Mr. Ramsay compares elaborately the sequence in "the alphabet... ranged in twenty-six letters all in order" to a person's history with all its happiness and despair, success and failure, and dreams and ambitions. Those extremely few who manage to reach "Z," "one in a generation," are those who have managed to order their lives and thoughts completely. Nonetheless, the reader is reminded time and again throughout Virginia Woolf's work that the order constituted by words always remains a purely illusory one. For instance, immediately "after the great words became inaudible," during a brief episode in Between the Acts, Miss La Trobe regretfully admits that "illusion had failed."85
In contrast to Mr. Ramsay's and Neville's conviction that such things as the exact, rigid structure of the alphabet or Latin grammar can arrange experience into an "ABC" sequence, some characters, Isa in *Between the Acts* for instance, use poetry to retrieve harmony and order from the dissonance and formlessness of the world. Called in Italian "fabbro," "smith" and in Greek "poetes," "maker," the poet is recognized and praised for his gifted ability to build and arrange a world of his imagination. This fantastic power is the subject of much poetry, including Wallace Stevens' "The Idea of Order at Key West":

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She was single artificer of the world
In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
Whatever self it had, became the self
That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,
As we beheld her striding there alone,
Knew that there never was a world for her,
Except the one she sang and, singing, made. 86
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This notion that the ambiguous, plurisignificant, and suggestive words of literature, on account of their specially charged qualities, can give existence meaning, form, and unity, strongly pervades Virginia Woolf's art. 87 For example, Louis's repetition of the four-line poem beginning "'O, western wind, when wilt thou blow" by an anonymous 16th-century poet 88 superimposes a type of ordered structure on his life. Miss La Trobe, symbolic of the artistic spirit, "seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise from its amorphous mass a recreated world." 89 Moments of communion often occur through the medium of poetry, as, for example, Mr. Carmichael's
recital of "Luriana Lurllee" to the party group, and Mrs. Ramsay's silent reading of the same poem in the presence of her husband. As Mr. Carmichael reads aloud, Mrs. Ransay becomes the words: "She did not know what they meant, but, like music, the words seemed to be spoken by her own voice, outside her self; saying quite easily and naturally what had been in her mind the whole evening while she said different things." Mrs. Ramsay uses the lines of the poem, as she sits reading it to herself, to engage in a loving "dialogue" with Mr. Ramsay's thoughts. During this moment the two become very close:

... She was astonishingly beautiful. Her beauty seemed to him, if that were possible, to increase. Yet seem'd it winter still, and, you away,
As with your shadow I with these did play,

she finished.
"Well?" she said echoing his smile dreamily, looking up from her book.

As with your shadow I with these did play
she murmured putting the book on the table.

Language, and especially artistic language, can not only create meaning and harmony but can also discover truth. "Words are the only things that tell the truth and nothing but the truth," declares Virginia Woolf in "Craftsmanship." Another novelist, Joseph Conrad, felt that the writer, "by the power of the written word," should above all make the reader see and also give him "that glimpse of truth" for which he might forget to ask. A similar idea comes to expression in Lily Briscoe's mind in this manner:

... And he shook his [Mr. Ramsay] head at her, and strode on ('Alone' she heard him say, 'Perished' she heard him say)
and like every thing else this strange morning
the words became symbols, wrote themselves
all over the grey-green walls. If only she could
put them together, she felt, write them out in
some sentence, then she would have got at the
truth of things.\(^95\)

Words become magical tools with which to penetrate the illusory world of
matter and appearances, and to reach the profound and elusive "somethingness"
of reality and truth.

By reading "Luriana Lurilee," Mrs. Ramsay momentarily reaches the
summit of the mountain of life and has a clear picture. Her mind is swept clean.
And then, "there it was, suddenly entire shaped in her hands, beautiful and
reasonable, clear and complete, the essence sucked out of life and held round
here - the sonnet."\(^96\) When Katherine in Night and Day, mutters beneath her
breath "Not happiness - not happiness," she captures with verbal symbols the
truth of her moment of vision. Her experience metaphorically resembles
Mrs. 's Ramsay's in that the uttered words

represented the rare flower or splinter of rock brought
down by a climber in proof that he has stood for a moment,
at least, upon the highest peak of the mountain. She had
been up there and seen the world spread to the horizon.\(^97\)

The words that reassure and comfort Mrs. Dalloway, "Fear no more the
heat of the sun," assume visionary value in relation to Septimus's death:
"... the whole house was now with this [the news of Septimus's suicide]
going on, and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun."\(^98\)

Septimus has nothing to interpose between himself and the sun, usually a
symbol of consciousness in Virginia Woolf, to make life tolerable, whereas Mrs. Dalloway possesses something akin to Bernard's phrases - her party.

One of the themes in To the Lighthouse revolves around the idea that artistic language, or art in general, by putting "truth" in a symbolic form and thus objectifying it, renders a "moment of vision" permanent. "Nothing stays; all changes; but not words, not paint," concludes Lily. Bernard's rejection of language might be interpreted as a revocation of this belief. In any case, the thesis that art makes anything eternal is unequivocally dismissed in Between the Acts, as I hope to demonstrate in a portion of the next chapter.

Language, especially artistically heightened language, somehow gains access to "truth and reality," even if it is incapable of describing them in any direct fashion. Restricted by such obstacles as the alphabet, vocabulary, and all the rules and patterns of grammar, language can never grasp and present the subtler and profounder aspects of human existence in all their nakedness. These remain beyond its limits, that is, forever inexpressible verbally. Yet they delineate the very areas of life that Virginia Woolf wanted to reach or, at least, "point to" indirectly with her poetically and musically charged prose. Earnestly, imaginatively, and equipped with a uniquely designed net, she sought them in their sanctuary - somewhere within the vast universe of ineffability and silence.
NOTES

LANGUAGE, REALITY, and CONSCIOUSNESS


4. Asserting this belief in no uncertain terms in such essays as "Modern Fiction" and Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown, and in short stories as "The Mark on the Wall," Virginia Woolf strongly advises future novelists to bypass the fruitless and futile conventions of Edwardian realism in order to explore, with new conventions, the depths of that "luminous halo, [the] semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" ("Modern Fiction," Essays, II, p. 106). Virginia Woolf would probably agree with Susanne Langer's observation that "anything about reality that is to be expressed and conveyed must be abstracted from reality. There is no sense trying to convey reality pure and simple" (Italics hers. Susanne Langer, Problems of Art, New York, 1957, p. 93.

5. Night and Day, Penguin Modern Classics, p. 59. (All subsequent references will be taken from this edition.)

6. Between the Acts, Penguin Modern Classics, p. 43. (All subsequent references will be taken from this edition.) Some of Virginia Woolf's short stories, including "Together and Apart" and "A Summing Up," comment directly on the disparity between language and reality.


10. The Waves, Penguin Modern Classics, p. 59. (All subsequent references will be taken from this edition.)

11. Ibid., p. 114. The pageant in Between the Acts helps to carry across the same idea. After the words of the actors, at one point, became inaudible, Miss La Trobe realized that "illusion had failed" (p. 99).

12. Ibid., p. 41.

13. Ibid., p. 118.


15. Ibid., p. 69.


22. Ibid.


25. Ibid., p.12.

26. Kwant, op. cit., p.48-9. Walker Gibson, in his Introduction to The Limits of Language, points out that Alfred North Whitehead regarded language as indispensable to the learning process, yet, at the same time, as "obsuring, hiding, isolating us from the way we actually do take in what we know" (The Limits of Language, ed. Walker Gibson, New York, 1962, p.x).


28. The Waves, p.58. Similarly Kwant thinks that language has "more of less detached itself from life as a whole and has become a pursuit in its own right" (Kwant, op. cit., p.8).


30. Ibid., p.127.

31. Ibid., p.365.


33. The Waves, p.115.

34. Ibid., p.70. Neville is speaking. Compare this to T.S. Eliot's line in "Little Gidding": "Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning" (Four Quartets, London, 1958, p.43).


40. Ibid., p.124

41. *Between the Acts*, p.11.


44. Ibid.


47. McLaurin points out that sometimes "colour is used to convey something which can be described vaguely as an emotional equivalence, a subtle relation which is not logical" (*McLaurin, op. cit.*, p.193-194).


55. "The Lady in the Looking-Glass," A Haunted House, Penguin Modern Classics, p. 95. (All subsequent references will be taken from this edition.)

56. See also McLaurin, op. cit., pp. 89-90.


60. McLaurin, op. cit., p. 55.


63. Richter, op. cit., p. 46.

64. To the Lighthouse, Penguin Modern Classics, p. 154. (All subsequent references will be taken from this edition.)

65. Mrs. Dalloway, Penguin Modern Classics, p. 135. (All subsequent references will be taken from this edition.)


67. Mrs. Dalloway, p. 98.

68. See Richter, op. cit., p. 46 and McLaurin, op. cit., p. 199.


71. Kwant, op. cit., pp.34-36. Kwant discusses in detail the ways in which language give meaning to experience. He suggests that language, in a certain sense, is "the 'locus' of all meaning" (p.36).


74. Langer, op. cit., pp.70-71


77. Ibid., p.25.

78. Ibid., p.13.

79. Ibid., p.113.


82. Love, op. cit., p.218.


84. Ibid., p.92.


86. Stevens, op. cit., pp.129-130.
87. Cassirer also believes that "artistic words" are imbued with exceptional properties. He states in Language and Myth: "But there is one intellectual realm in which the word not only preserves its original creative power, but is ever renewing it; in which it undergoes a sort of constant palgogenesis, at once a sensuous and a spiritual reincarnation. This regeneration is achieved as language becomes an avenue of artistic expression" (p. 98).


89. Between the Acts, p. 108.

90. To the Lighthouse, p. 127.

91. Ibid., p. 140.

92. Kwant notes: "Through speech meaning begins to exist in a new way for us. By being spoken about, meaning receives a new mode of being" (op. cit., p. 32). It should be mentioned that for Kwant "speech and language are one and the same reality" (p. 54).


95. To the Lighthouse, p. 167.

96. Ibid., p. 139.


98. Mrs. Dalloway, p. 206.

99. A very good case can be made for the sun as a symbol of consciousness in Virginia Woolf, especially in the mountain episode in The Voyage Out, and in the Interlude chapters of The Waves. Yellow, the traditional colour of the sun, iS often connected with consciousness throughout Virginia Woolf's art. I expound on and illustrate this point on pp. 49-51.

100. To the Lighthouse, p. 204.
INEFFABILITY and SILENCE

A central problem for some of Virginia Woolf's characters, as for the moth in "The Death of the Moth," concerns the "fact" that reality exists "out there," on the other side of the "window pane" of consciousness, and words, which exist and function only inside the regions of subjectivity, can never grasp it. In this regard many questions present themselves. What is language able to get hold of in the inner world of human subjectivity? In other words, how does language deal with emotions, spirituality, irrationality, or very intense "lived" human experience? Is Susanne Langer correct in affirming that "the symbolic presentation of subjective reality for contemplation... is impossible in the essential frame of language"? What in life, then, is verbalizable? What is ineffable? Virginia Woolf attempts to capture verbally her strange and meaningful experience with the Hardys. "But the actual event was different," she complains. In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" she exhorts future writers to chase relentlessly after the extremely elusive and complex figure of Mrs. Brown, "life itself." If and how they catch her depends a good deal on what they do with language. There is the admission in Jacob's Room that the literary artist may never corral her:

It is thus that we live, they say, driven by an unseizable force. They say that the novelists never catch it; that it goes hurtling through their nets and leaves them torn to ribbons. This, they say, is what we live by - this unseizable force.
As Professor Bridgman contends, the construction of the world does not, on the whole, frustrate language. But "the construction of ourselves," which renders the world meaningless, makes us confront "something truly ineffable."4

With what verbal wizardry can the writer describe something that defies words? Or is the literary artist condemned, like Rodney, to feel and imagine what he can never express? "Philosophers, writers, painters and ordinary citizens," Walker Gibson submits, "have been living now with the knowledge that a good deal of life is inexpressible."5 Throughout her works Virginia Woolf faces the question of ineffable experience. Perhaps she felt, with Butler, that "the highest thought is ineffable; it must be felt from one person to another but cannot be articulated."6 Basically supporting Butler's idea, Remy Kwant, in his interesting analysis of ineffability, contends that "one must have experienced ineffability to know the limits of speech."7 Not all forms of meaning, he continues, let themselves be expressed in language. For Kwant language is inevitably superficial with respect to the variegated wealth of the "lived" world because language is unable to express all the subtle variations of the world of meaning. "Man's experiences show how poorly his words express what he wants to say,"8 states the linguist-phenomenologist rather simply. Man's intense, profound, and undefinable experiences emphasize life's and reality's ineffability and the great deficiency of words even to outline their meaning. In his consideration of the dilemma of ineffability for the writer, one which Virginia Woolf most likely read, Butler maintains
that we want words to do more than they can. We try to do with them what comes to very much like trying to mend a watch with a pickaxe or to paint a miniature with a mop; we expect them to help us to grip and to dissect that which in ultimate essence is as ungrippable as a shadow.

It has been said, and rightly so, that Virginia Woolf's writing is an attempt to grasp this shadow. The words of literature, Butler adds, like the notes and performance in music, are only evidences of "an external invisible emotion that can be felt but never fully expressed."  

Virginia Woolf deals with the problem of ineffability in various ways. Her approach and method are inevitably metaphoric and symbolic. That is, to use Kwant's terminology, she "points" to the ineffable. For example, the ineffable state that Lily works herself into while thinking intensely about Mr. Ramsay is described thus: "... her thought which had spun quicker and quicker exploded of its own intensity; she felt released; a shot went off close at hand and there came, flying from its fragments, frightened, effusive tumultuous, a flock of starlings." Pointing to the air-borne birds, the author seems to be saying to the reader: "Lily's present condition is designated there, symbolically." Such pervading symbols as Jacob, the lighthouse, the waves, the sea, Percival, and the moths, in all their plurisignificance and multidimensionality, point to a force, a feeling, an idea, or a truth that resists translation into either direct or symbolic language. Its essence and characteristics lie somewhere in the unverbalizable
complexity of many, many relationships. Indeed one might wonder, with Susanne Langer perhaps, whether the nature of such a compelling "reality" dwells within or beyond the boundaries of the comprehensible:

Whatever there is in experience that will not take the impress - directly or indirectly - of discursive form, is not discursively communicable or, in the strictest sense, logically thinkable. It is unspeakable, ineffable; according to practically all serious philosophical theories today, it is unknowable.\(^1\)

In reference to Butler's comment on music, Allen McLaurin demonstrates that Virginia Woolf sometimes comes to grips with ineffability by masterfully using rhythmical repetition and thus turning language into music, having "significance" but no exact verbal meaning,\(^1\) as, for instance, in the episode in *To the Lighthouse* where Mrs. Ramsay puts Cam and James to bed. The mother repeats the fairy story about the animals in the valley several times, each time "more monotonously, and more rhythmically and more nonsensically.\(^1\) The "significance" of this "musical" passage relates to the feeling generated between Mrs. Ramsay and Cam as the words are repeated over and over again. Extremely rich in its suggestive powers, this kind of musical prose hopes to go, in Rachel's words, "straight for things," and to say "all there is at once," including that ineffable feeling.

Virginia Woolf tries to convey the inexpressible feeling between Mrs. Ramsay and Cam in indirect fashion. Her success or failure, to a certain extent, depends on the reader's ability to listen to the music of the language. Feeling and emotion have always presented particular problems
to the writer for, as Kwant explains, they "originate in a zone of existence in which consciousness [and therefore language] does not penetrate." Neville notes that Bernard, the novelist, tells the story of the others "with extraordinary understanding, except of what [they] most feel." Expounding on a similar observation in regard to this impotence of language, Susanne Langer maintains that

the form of feeling and the forms of discursive expression are logically incommensurate, so that any exact concepts of feeling and emotion cannot be projected into the logical form of literal language. Verbal statement, which is our normal and most reliable means of communication, is almost useless for conveying knowledge about the precise character of the affective life.

"The realm of pure feeling" finds utterance and attains "its full and concrete articulation," claims Cassirer, in the world of poetry - the "world of illusion and fantasy." Of Virginia Woolf's works, the poetry of The Waves perhaps best supports this belief. But such feeling, captured and relayed so thoroughly and beautifully, represents a sort of stylistic peak for the novelist. In her earlier novels, she sometimes depicts a significant feeling by a definite symbol. For example, the ineffability of the emotional relationship between Katherine and Denham in Night and Day is denoted by her drawings of various geometric shapes, and his sketch of a "little dot with flames round it." This "idiotic symbol of his most confused and emotional moments" together with Katherine's figures indicate to the reader, perhaps unsatisfactorily, just to what extent the feeling the two have for each other is inexpressible.
Very often ineffably meaningful moments are marked by the repetition of words, or of the name of a deceased person having great symbolic value. This quasi-mystical incantation symbolically sums up the character's transcendent state at the time of its utterance. In *The Voyage Out* there is Terence's "Rachel! Rachel!" in *Night and Day* Katherine's "Reality! Reality!" in *Jacob's Room* Bonamy's "Jacob! Jacob!" and in *To the Lighthouse* Mrs. Ramsay's "It is enough! It is enough!" and Lily's "Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!" just to mention a few. This noticeable emphasis on personal names might somehow be connected to "word magic" in mythology. In mythic thought, according to Cassirer, a person's ego, his very self and personality are indissolubly linked with his or her name. "In fact," adds the German philosopher, "the being and the life of a person is so intimately connected with his name that, as long as the name is preserved and spoken, its bearer is still felt to be present and directly active." In this sense Lily's ecstatic invocation, to use one of the examples, acknowledges Mrs. Ramsay's felt presence, and also signifies Lily's realization that the spirit of the dead woman, by way of people close to her and the lighthouse, continues to affect greatly, and in expressible ways, the lives of those fortunate enough to have had a relationship with her.

Lastly, a detailed study of the structures of Virginia Woolf's novels would support J. Robert Oppenheimer's theory that the writer's problem of doing justice to the ineffable and the imponderable is sometimes resolved through over-all style. The overt framework of her novels, from the
"moments" of Jacob's Room, to the three part structure of To the Lighthouse, to the complex interweaving of Interludes and silent dramatic soliloquies of The Waves, contains within its symbolic form the ineffable aspects of Virginia Woolf's ideas and feelings about life and reality, as well as those verbally accessible. James Naremore has argued in The World Without the Self that her stylistic experimentation grew "out of an attempt to suggest a world she could never directly describe." In any case, the painstaking care with which Virginia Woolf designed and constructed each individual work, as preserved and reflected in her Diary, indicates that she was extremely aware that the shape of a work of art, or even the shape of a sentence or a brush-stroke for that matter, should determine and be determined by the content. She might well have agreed with Susanne Langer's notion that an artistic creation expresses and presents a unique vision of life, and of inward reality, and, in its essence, consists of "a developed metaphor, a non-discursive symbol that articulates what is verbally ineffable - the logic of consciousness itself." 

Ineffability resides ultimately in the "realms of silence," the sanctuary not only of the unspeakable but also of the unthinkable, Virginia Woolf attempts to explore the world of silence and its significations from The Voyage Out to Between the Acts. Regarding this very prominent area of her art, several important questions need answering. What does "silence" encompass in Virginia Woolf's imagination? What invaluable secrets does it hold that she wants to reach and reveal? And how does it relate to her artistic vision?
Silence, as concept and phenomenon, has drawn the concentrated attention of many scholars and distinguished thinkers. Kwant claims that "silence... covers a world [that contains] a wealth of meaning."29 For Charles H. Long it is difficult to get at the meaning of silence, for, though a kind of power is signified through its quality, the power of silence is so unlike the power of words that we have no words to express it. Or, to put it another way, the power of silence can only be expressed through words, words which are able to move beyond and break through their own creative intent to the intentionality of silence.30

According to Long, the British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, author of the famous declaration "what can be shown cannot be said," places "all value outside the world of language."31 "In silence," maintains Gisèle Brelet, "a being is identified with its pure freedom, with that pure possibility of itself which it discovers when it retires within itself... Not only for sonority," she continues, "but for the mind as well, silence is an oscillation between nothingness and being."32 Blaise Pascal's attitude towards silence, as expressed in Pensees, approximates Gisèle Brelet's, but lays heavy stress on the connection between silence and Man's awe and wonderment at his existence:

... for who will not marvel to find our body, which a moment ago was not visible in the universe which was itself imperceptible in the bosom of the whole, is at present a colossus, a world, or rather, a whole when compared with the world which lies beyond our ken... Anyone, who regards himself in this way will be terrified at himself, and seeing himself sustained in the body that nature has given him, between two abysses of the infinite and the void, will tremble
at the sight of these wonders, and I think that, as curiosity changes to wonder, he will be more disposed to contemplate them in silence than to presume to question them. 33

For the French philosopher silence appertains to the most suitable state of mind with which to confront the unanswerably mysteries within the world and ourselves.

Underlining the immense importance of "the language of silence" in literature, Richard Blackmur states that the greatness of literary artists relates not to their words but to their language of silence. In great poetry "speechlessness itself [seems] to burst into speech without breaking the silence," 34 he explains. "The reality that drips from live words," Blackmur adds, "is the reality of this thought: the silence that is in them and the silence to which they reach... Meaning is what silence does when it gets into words." 35

T.S. Eliot expresses an essentially similar sentiment in "Burnt Norton":

Words move; music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness. 36

And for Georg Trakl, the German poet, to enter into silence is to go toward the holy, into the "mirror or truth." 37

As almost all the above comments suggest, silence encompasses the boundless universe of ineffables and unknowables. It relates to meaning before language and thought. By implication it leads to the unconscious, natural
world. Long believes that silence "forces us to realize that our words, the units of our naming and recognition of the world, presuppose a reality which is prior to our naming and doing." Such silence seems to circumscribe the "reality" that Virginia Woolf seeks to capture and express. Art, in a sense, reflects that reality, and thus she claims in her essay on Sickert: "... there is a zone of silence in the middle of every art," and perhaps in every life, one might add. Possibly Virginia Woolf, like Gisèle Brelet, regarded silence as a place where divergent and conflicting forces, especially those inherent in human existence, are unified and harmonized. "An echo of the past," for Gisèle Brèlet, "meets an inkling of the future" in silence. In its subjective aspect, "silence is... a joining together." She uses music to illustrate her point: "They [sounds] can harmonize only by renouncing their sensuous existence - and participating in a single form which makes all of them actual at once in a silent synthesis." There are numerous references to the universe of silence in the writing of Virginia Woolf, of which those most important have been quoted and commented on in this and the following chapter. But the works that deal most extensively with the nature and significance of silence, and those I will focus on presently, are The Waves and Between the Acts.

The Waves has often been called "the novel about Silence" that Terence Hewet aspired to write. Undeniably, it is Virginia Woolf's only novel in which, technically speaking, no one says anything. Its silence has been alluded to by Jean Love as that of nonreflection, "the ontogenetically
early condition of human consciousness and insofar as is known, the ultimate
destiny of consciousness." The pertinence of this idea to Virginia Woolf's
art will be discussed in the final chapter. The characters most associated
with silence in the novel are Rhoda, Bernard, and Neville. Experiences with
other people break into Rhoda's shell of silence and force her to be conscious
of her selfness. This is pure agony for her. The others "have only to speak,
and their first words, with the remembered tone and the perpetual deviation
from what one expects... shake [her] purpose." Listening to the noisly
details of individual life puts "an immense pressure" on her. She finds
protection and peace only in the unselfconsciousness of silence. In contrast,
silence threatens Bernard's sense of self. He confesses: "... silence...
pits my face, wastes my nose, like a snowman stood out in a yard in the rain.
As silence falls I am dissolved utterly and become featureless and scarcely
to be distinguished from another." But after denouncing language's in-
adequacies and faults, Bernard admits: "How much better is silence." He
realizes that silence is connected with the world with which he wants to unite,
on the other side of language. Very probably he would share Susan's feeling
that "when you are silent, you are again beautiful." Neville appreciates the
"silent" aspects of an everyday scene because he believes that "this is poetry
if we do not write it." He tries to remain as much as possible in the domain
of silence, away from "that chaos, that tumult...[the] noise uproar" in his
ears. Instead of the interfering din of objectifying words he will take the
silence of the immediate experience, "the print of life not outwardly, but
inwardly upon the raw, the white, the unprotected fibre. To be clouded
and bruised with the print of minds and faces and things so subtle that they
have smell, colour, texture, substance, but no name." 52

In Between the Acts silence is closely related to the picture of the lady
in yellow looking into an empty room. Drawing considerable attention from
various characters in the novel, this strange painting includes two note-
worthy details which appear over and over again in Virginia Woolf's works,
each time accruing more meaning and associations, and which eventually
attain the status of symbols. One of them is yellow, a colour often associated
in the novelist's writing with consciousness, or with a self-conscious state.
In The Voyage Out, for example, yellow becomes prominent, especially the
yellow represented by the sun, as Rachel becomes more conscious of her
selfness and of the world around her. The candles at the dinner table in
To the Lighthouse glow a deep yellow as the people, inspired by Mrs. Ramsay,
reach a certain group consciousness. The movement of the sun in The Waves
can be compared to the evolution of one's consciousness in a lifetime. First,
"the sun had not yet risen" and "the sea was indistinguishable from the sky." 53
To the newborn everything appears to be an harmonious One. Moments later,
"a dark line lay on the horizon dividing the sea from the sky." 54 This is
childhood when one begins to perceive distinctions and the One is broken up
into parts. Then, "an arc of fire burnt on the rim of the horizon and all round
it the sea blazed gold." 55 The child's selfconsciousness starts to develop.
When the sun is at its height, and the person at his maturest, everything shines a bright yellow. After "the sun had sunk," that is, after death, "sky and sea were indistinguishable," like in childhood, and the cycle is completed - the person loses consciousness and becomes unified with the natural world.

While yellow is connected to consciousness, a room in Virginia Woolf's art usually relates to one's "world in consciousness." Thus in "The Death of the Moth" we witness the moth, our lifeforce, trying desperately to escape from the room but failing because we can never free ourselves from our world in consciousness until we die. All we can do is look out from our "window pane of consciousness" to the world we want so much to be a part of. The room in the opening section of To the Lighthouse called significantly "The Window;" Jacob's room, continually spotlighted and tied closely with Jacob's emotional and psychological development and thus the novel's title; Mary's room, with the candles burning in it, in Night and Day; Isabella's room in "The Lady in the Looking-Glass;" and many other rooms in Virginia Woolf's novels and short stories, all denote the world as it is bound, characterized, and changed by consciousness.

Very significantly, then, if one identifies yellow with consciousness and a room with the world in consciousness, the lady in yellow in the painting is standing outside an empty room. Depicted here symbolically is Virginia Woolf's unrealizable ideal: consciousness escaped from its prison and integrated with nature. The "glades of greenery and shades of
silver"57 in the background lead "down the paths of silence"58 to where, perhaps, "all words will fold their wings and sit huddled like rooks on the tops of the trees in winter."59 The emptiness and silence of the room are stressed through repetition:

Empty, empty, empty; silent, silent, silent. The room was a shell, singing of what was before time was; a vase stood in the heart of the house, alabaster, smooth, cold, holding the still, distilled essence of emptiness, silence.60

The room's emptiness may be interpreted also as symbolic of a primeval, unselfconscious state of being, and hence, would appropriately partake of the universe of silence. Or Virginia Woolf may be suggesting that the road to silence is the one that artists should follow. Or the silence and emptiness may refer to the silence and emptiness, in a negative sense, or art and life. The first two views are more in keeping with the interpretation that the ending implies that Miss La Trobe has created the play using the ultimate "language" of silence.

Both in The Waves and in Between the Acts, as well as in some of the other novels, the land of silence is characterized as a place where consciousness, with its inherent tragic qualities, dissolves and becomes one with the cosmos. At that point, and that point only, is any kind of harmony and meaning introduced into existence. The figure of Percival, more symbol than character, serves as a link between this orderly world of silence and the confused, clamorous world of the other six. Very fittingly, Percival, who never actually "speaks" in the course of the novel, "inspires poetry,"61 and "cannot read."62 He has nothing to do with con-
sciousness or language, those walls that separate us from the world and each other. On the contrary, there is "not a thread, not a sheet of paper that lies between him and the sun, between him and the rain, between him and the moon as he lies naked.""63 Fusing the six together into a whole, Percival injects meaning and harmony into their lives:

'It is Percival,' said Louis, 'sitting silent as he sat among the tickling grasses when the breeze parted the clouds and they formed again, who makes us aware that those attempts to say, "I am this, I am that," which we make, coming together, like separated parts of one body and soul, are false."64

Significantly, news of his death in India comes by telegramme - the tragic words of consciousness.

Whereas Percival seems to reside permanently in silence, other characters occasionally experience momentary excursions into it. In Night and Day, Mary "in the silence... seemed to have lost her isolation."65 Blotting out all sound, Edward's mind, in The Years, "travelled by itself without impediments through a world of pure meaning."66 Later on in his life he concludes: "silence and solitude... that's the only element in which the mind is free now."67 When silence "falls" at the end of the second meeting in The Waves it is, in Jinny's mind, "as if the miracle had happened... and life were stayed here and now."68 Perhaps this is the "other life" that Eleanor feels there must exist somewhere: "Not in dreams; but here and now."69

In its own way silence also performs certain important stylistic functions. Jean Love points out, in her study of Virginia Woolf's art, that
silence acts as a structural component throughout *The Waves*: "... there is silence between the discontinuous monologues, between prologues and chapters. There is silence between the periods of life in reference to the nine chapters and silence at the end."  

Whether the characters' words are "monologues" is quite debatable, and whether there is any distinction between "silence" and "monologues" invites even more doubt. These questions will be dealt with in due time. Harvena Richter also relates silence to an aspect of Virginia Woolf's style, namely, point of view. One of Virginia Woolf's best critics, she explains that the most indirect, and therefore most difficult, ways of presenting point of view is through what people do not say, "through the silence 'between the acts' of spoken thought or symbolic action, or through an attempt to verbalize feelings in artificial soliloquies as Virginia Woolf does in *The Waves*."  

This method of narration depends to a great extent on what has been termed "the irrational element of the mind, the deepest levels of unconsciousness which surface only by chance."  

I might in passing compare such verbalizations to Jungian "phantastic thinking" the better part of which falls in the realm of the unconscious and which "little concerned with the outer course of things, flows from an inner source and constantly changing, creates now plastic, now shadowy shapes."  

The language of silence in *The Waves*, then, involves a human being's deepest impulses and emotions. But unlike the thought-patterns and dream-sequences represented in the other novels, Harvena Richter indicates the verbalizations of apparent "ineffables" in
this novel is in

highly imagistic soliloquies whose movement, colour, and imagery pantomime the inner tensions of the psyche; the voice is silent, the attitudes and emotions speak. By the time Virginia Woolf wrote *Between the Acts*, the concept became refined so that silent appears to mean that which is felt but not explicitly expressed, that which transpires literally between the acts of spoken thoughts. 74

By transcribing these evidently unverbalizable feelings and states into "the very modes the children would use were they to voice them for themselves," she adds, "Virginia Woolf has conveyed with remarkable sensitiveness their evolving worlds." 75

Jean Love calls the non-interlude parts of *The Waves* "monologues" while Harvena Richter names them "artificial soliloquies" thereby concuring with James Hafley's theory in *The Glass Roof* that they are "transcriptions of the feelings, perceptions, and thoughts of six persons by a central intelligence - that of the author." 76 In Irma Rantavaara's view the silent soliloquies in *The Waves* are "a combination of interior stream of consciousness with external action described and with an audience assumed, conducted on a normal lingual level." 77 Virginia Woolf herself refers to them as "a series of dramatic soliloquies." 78 Representations of a sort of "phantastic thinking" which includes much more than usual "feelings, perceptions, and thoughts," they are, strictly speaking, none and all of these. That is, they all occur presumably while the characters are conversing and acting. The reader has only a limited idea of what the six are saying and
doing. Silence, what they do not say as they speak and act, is verbalized and stylized. One is reminded of Merleau-Ponty's "practognosis" which submits that "our activity... wordless as it is" generates intrinsically a kind of knowledge about ourselves and the world. "The thinking-in-action which practognosis is," Kwant contends, "does not require theoretical reflection." It denotes what is happening in the world of our unconscious during our conscious actions.

Traces of the germinal idea for this "practognostic" kind of representation can be found throughout Virginia Woolf's earlier novels. Mrs. Dalloway wants "to go beneath what people said... in her own mind... what did it mean to her this thing she called life?" Another example is found in To the Lighthouse during the scene with Lily and Mr. Carmichael in "The Lighthouse" section. What goes on in Lily's mind as she sits beside her companion is basically what Virginia Woolf presents in The Waves in unchanging, stylized language:

Certainly she was losing consciousness of outer things. And as she lost consciousness of outer things and her name and her personality and her appearance, and whether Mr. Carmichael was there or not, her mind kept throwing up from its depths, scenes, and names, and sayings, and memories, and ideas, like a fountain spurting...

The method that Terence Hewet hints at and which Virginia Woolf develops is described briefly by Neville: "And so (while they talk) let down one's net deeper and deeper and gently draw in and bring to the surface what he said..."
and she said and make poetry.\textsuperscript{82} The language must be poetic, for poetry, as Blackmur explained, comes closest to the world of silence. In principle, the writer cannot verbalize what she catches in the net, what resides in the regions of silence, of the unconscious. She can only translate it into regular language in a specially apt way. The language of \textit{The Waves} does not alter from character to character presumably because the language of silence eternally remains the same language of silence.

The Interludes represent the silence of the natural world. There are no people present. No one talks or thinks. In them one finds the silence associated with the pictures that the old nurse shows Bernard when he is a child. In them one discovers the silence of an unconscious world where thought cannot produce noisy confusion, for here thought does not exist. But more importantly for us, and for Virginia Woolf, the Interludes contain the eternal silence of our unavoidable death. This silence is an essential aspect of the "reality" which beckons the novelist, but one which she can never know while existing in a temporal world. That which makes a moment permanent partakes of such a silence, of a world of unity and harmony. \textit{The Waves} and \textit{Between the Acts} show us that Lily's painting can simulate the silence of nature and of inner subjectivity for a moment but that is all. Expressing it concisely, Bernard says: "All changes. And youth and love."\textsuperscript{83} Death, the silence that fuses us eternally with the cosmos, can never be experienced or reproduced in any facet of life. Life excludes silence inasmuch as it includes consciousness, language, and thought: the unbearable hubbub of
change and discord.

There is the particularly significant implication in Virginia Woolf's attitude towards and presentation of silence, especially in the later novels, that in order to survive, selfconscious Man, or more specifically western civilization, must somehow re-enter the world of silence or perhaps, in biblical terms, the Garden of Eden. If he succeeds the language he will use will not relate to a vocabulary imprisoned in a dictionary, but rather will involve "words" freed from selfconsciousness, egotism, discord, and civilization, words unified with Nature, or as Miss La Trobe sees them, "words from the mud."
NOTES

INEFFABILITY and SILENCE

2. A Writer's Diary, p. 95.
4. Professor Bridgman's words are quoted by James Conant in his essay "The Changing Scientific Scene 1900-1950" found in Gibson, op. cit., p. 22.
5. Gibson, Introduction, op. cit., p. x.
8. Ibid., p. 40.


13. Kwant pays considerable attention to the "pointing" ability to language. He writes: "Pointing raises a meaning out of its relative concealment. It gives that meaning a new and more explicit mode of being" (Kwant op. cit., p. 62).

15. Langer, op. cit., p. 22.


17. To the Lighthouse, p. 132.


23. Both McLaurin and Love, especially the latter, deal fairly thoroughly with the relationship between Virginia Woolf's art and mytho-poetic thought.


25. Ibid., p. 52.


31. Ibid., p. 149.


38. Long, *op. cit.*, p. 140. Long also maintains that "silence is a fundamentally ontological position, a position which though involved in language and speech exposes us to a new kind of reality and existence" (Long, *op. cit.*, p. 150).


41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., p. 109.


45. Ibid., p. 90.

46. "In the very pursuit of his authentic selfhood," comments Charles Long, "western man has come face to face with silence, with the exhaustion of the forms of the world" (Long, *op. cit.*, p. 147). Bernard experiences a more or less similar confrontation.


48. Ibid., p. 254.

49. Ibid., p. 112.
50. Ibid., p.168.
51. Ibid., p.61.
52. Ibid., p.183.
53. Ibid., p.5.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid., p.6.
58. Ibid., p.36.
61. The Waves, p.33.
62. Ibid., p.40.
63. Ibid., Neville is speaking.
64. Ibid., p.17.
66. The Years, Penguin Modern Classic, p.42. (All subsequent references will be taken from this edition.)
69. The Years, p.343.
71. Richter, op. cit., p.42.
72. Ibid., p.59.


74. Richter, op. cit., p.229.

75. Ibid., p.199.


78. A Writer’s Diary, p.159.


80. Mrs. Dalloway, p.135.

81. To the Lighthouse, p.181.

82. The Waves, p.171.

83. Ibid., p.77.
III

"WORDS FROM THE MUD," THE NEW LANGUAGE

When Merleau-Ponty calls silence "the cradle of speech," he alludes, in a sense, to the pre-linguistic era of Man's history. Likewise, Jean Love connects silence with "important aspects of diffuse primordial consciousness." Speaking along a similar line, Edward Sapir speculates that "what is ordinarily called language may have had its ultimate root in disassociated and emotional cries, which originally released emotional tension." The idea that silence, or pre-linguistic and pre-conscious existence, belonged at one time to Man but now lies on the other side of consciousness and language - the side reachable only by death - is central in Virginia Woolf's art and vision.

The important relationship between silence and the primeval, natural world is touched upon in the writer's first novel:

The silence was broken by their voices which joined in tones of strange unfamiliar sound which formed no words... sounds out from the background making a bridge across their silence; they heard the swish of trees and some beast croaking in a remote world.

This allusion pertains not to the silence of soundlessness, but rather, like The Waves, to "the ontogenetically early condition of human consciousness." Void of language and self-reflection such silence resembles greatly the kind
evident in childhood. The children of the caretaker who appear at the end of The Years illustrate this point well. They have no names and "don't mean to speak."6 They "went on eating in silence"7 and "remained silent."8 Finally persuaded to entertain, they sing a song of which "not a word was recognizable"9:

Etho passo tonne hai
Fal donk to tu do,
Mai to, kai to, lai to see
Toh don to tuh do - 10

The rhythm, which Virginia Woolf called in "Craftsmanship" the most primeval instinct, "seemed to rock."11 And the apparently incomprehensible sounds "ran themselves together almost into a shriek,"12 or what Sapir might refer to as a cry of pre-lingual, primitive Man. Suddenly the children stop singing and return to their silent home. The grown-ups, trapped within and limited by their existence in consciousness, cannot understand the language rooted in the world of silence: "'But what the devil were they singing?' said Hugh Gibbs. 'I couldn't understand a word of it, I must confess.'"13 While unable to grasp the song's meaning, the more sensitive Maggie and Eleanor do feel, however, that it was "beautiful" in a strange, unexplainable way.14

Related to the caretaker's children, the old battered woman in the gutter in Mrs. Dalloway, who for a moment fuses together the lives of everyone around her, sings in a language that is pre-lingual, pre-conscious, and, on that level, eternal:

A sound interrupted him [Peter Walsh]; a frail quivering sound, a voice bubbling up without
direction, vigour, beginning or end, running weakly and shrilly and with an absence of all human meaning into

\[
\text{ee um fah um so} \\
\text{foo swee too eem oo -}
\]

the voice of no age or sex, the voice of an ancient spring sprouting from the earth; which lets the wind-beaten tree forever barren of leaves which lets the wind run up and down branches singing

\[
\text{ee um fah so} \\
\text{foo swee too eem oo,}
\]

and rocks and creaks and moans in the eternal breeze.

Through all ages - when the pavement was grass, when it was swamp, through the age of tusk and mammoth, through the age of silent sunrise - the battered woman... stood singing of love - love which has lasted a million years... 

These unintelligible morphemes are the only way to express love, and all ineffables. Like the empty room in the painting of the lady in yellow in "Between the Acts," and like the song of the caretaker's children, this language sings of "what was before time was." It seems to share in eternity for its origins go back to the dinosaur age, which noticeably predominate in Mrs. Swithin's mind, and which may refer to a vision of the earth's rebirth after the apocalypse. It is the language unified with the world. Thus expression is "made permanent" in the language itself. It does not separate us from the world for it has no symbols and so does not freeze and objectify experience. In its diametrical opposition to consciousness it unifies us with rather than differentiates us from the natural world. Virginia Woolf makes
it fairly clear in this strange scene in *Mrs. Dalloway*, one seemingly avoided by many critics, that it is a language that no selfconscious person understands, the language of pure, unmitigated feeling. Totally misunderstanding the meaning of the battered woman's song, Peter Walsh, a representative of civilization and kin to the grown-ups in *The Years*, "couldn't help giving the poor creature a coin as he stepped into his taxi." 17

The language of the old woman or of the caretaker's children is just what Bernard needs to talk about his life to the mysterious listener in the restaurant:

Also, how I distrust neat designs of life that are drawn upon half-sheets of note-paper. I begin to long for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words... 18

Moreover, it is the language he requires to express the feeling of being in and out of love:

... a thunder-clap of complete indifference;... then the return of measureless irresponsible joy;... and the mystic sense of completion and then that rasping, dog-fish-like-roughness - those black arrows of shivering sensations, when she misses the post, when she does not come. Out rush a bristle of horned suspicions, horror, horror, horror - but what is the use of painfully elaborating these consecutive sentences when what one needs is nothing consecutive but a bark, a groan? 19

Such barks and groans represent the kind of language he longs for after he has discarded his phrases and thus rejected conscious, symbolic language:

What is the phrase for the moon? And the phrase for love? By what name are we to call death?... I do
not know. I need a little language such as lovers use, words of one syllable such as children speak ... I need a howl; a cry... I have done with phrases. 20

To emphasize, the language that Bernard seeks, like that of the battered old woman or the caretaker's children, does not objectify emotions nor render reality ungraspable. Above all, it is the language that would be used to describe the world seen without the self.

I might just interject here, parenthetically, that the distinction between conscious language related to the self on the one hand, and the "silent" language related to unconscious Nature on the other is discernible in the rough dichotomy that exists between the characters in Virginia Woolf. Those who have a strong sense of self-identity are usually closely linked to the language of consciousness. In this camp one finds such people as Hirst, Hewet, Denham, Rodney, Mrs. Hilbery, Peter Walsh, Mr. Ramsay, Lily, Bernard, and Isa. Significantly, most of these are writers of some sort of are otherwise indirectly involved with writing. The suffering they experience is perhaps the kind that Virginia Woolf herself had to endure as she tried to come to terms with her extreme self-consciousness. The other group includes such figures as Rachel, Septimus, Mrs. Ramsay, Susan, who "[does] not understand phrases," and who is "hide-bound by the bestial and beautiful passion of maternity," 21 Rhoda, who "is not composed enough ... to make even one sentence," 22 Mrs. Manresa, "the wild child of nature," who "can't put two words together," 23 and Katherine, who had no aptitude for literature. She did not like phrases.
She had even some natural antipathy to that process of self-examination, that perpetual effort to understand one's feelings, and express it beautifully, fitly, or energetically in language; which constituted so great a part of her mother's existence. She was on the contrary, inclined to be silent; she shrank from expressing herself even in talk, let alone writing. 24

In all their naturalness and spontaneity these characters perhaps point to a side of Virginia Woolf, the person, which very rarely emerged. And it is possible that these two opposing forces in her works reflect a personal, inner conflict which she found unendurable, and which, in some way, she resolved in the waters of the River Ouse.

In *Between the Acts* Bernard's notion that human existence and art, its expression, need a pre-conscious language in order to be incorporated into the cosmic scheme of things is made more explicit when several times during the performance the cows take over from the actors:

Illusion had failed... Then suddenly, as the illusion petered out, the cows took up the burden... From cow after cow came the same yearning bellow. 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.

Miss La Trobe waved her hand ecstatically at the cows. 25

The language of the cows, in its obvious connections with the natural world, and thus with order and coherence, enables Miss La Trobe to sustain the illusion of unity projected by her play. The "primeval voice" is the voice of the old battered woman and of the children of the caretaker. In this light one might better understand Miss La Trobe's dream "to write a play without
an audience - the play."

The only way to accomplish this is to use a language which is unselfconscious, and which does not separate us from the world and from each other. One recalls Bernard's realization: "I need an audience. That is my downfall. That always ruffles the edge of the final statement and prevents it from forming." The phrases cannot be completed because they come from a conscious self who is differentiated from everyone and everything else - the audience. Consciousness and its external representation, language produce Bernard's need for an audience. No audience would mean no self and hence unity and harmony with everything. Unfortunately the only time we lose that audience is at our death. For Miss La Trobe, as for Bernard, no audience would signify no need for illusion - order and coherence would occur naturally in "reality".

The concept that this "new language," this new art form free from an audience, must originate in the natural, pre-conscious world is conveyed to the reader in numerous passages including the following:

Words of one syllable sank down into the mud. She [Miss La Trobe] drowsed; she nodded. The mud became fertile. Words rose above the intolerably laden dumb oxen plodding through the mud. Words without meaning - wonderful words.

Miss La Trobe actually "sees" the "words of one syllable" that Bernard so desperately seeks; and in the next paragraph she finally "hears" them:

There was the high ground at midnight; there the rock; and two scarcely perceptible figures. Suddenly the tree was pelted with starlings. She set down her glass. She heard the first words.
The vocabulary for the new language, as for the language of silence, relates to the primeval mud and to the over-laden dumb oxen. Similarly, for Louis in The Waves, such a vocabulary belongs to

the casual quick, exciting voice of action, of hounds running on the scent. They speak now without troubling to finish their sentence. They talk a little language such as lovers use. An imperious brute possesses them. The nerves thrill in their thighs.30

Disassociated completely from human consciousness, the words that Miss La Trobe hears are born in, and fused with, the unconscious, natural world of mud, cows, and hounds.

But what will be the nature of this language of pure emotion and pure communication? Will it somehow be related to the new "language of signs" that Virginia Woolf envisions in "Craftsmanship":

... in time to come writers will have two languages at their service, one for fact one for fiction... When the novelist is forced to inform us that John rang the bell; after a pause the door was opened by a parlourmaid who said, "Mrs. Jones is not at home," he will to our great gain and his own comfort convey that repulsive statement not in words, but in signs—say, a capital H on top of the figure three.31

Or will it be a language comparable to a primitive language such as Dakota, in which, according to Werner Müller, "an extraordinary oneness of the world ("weltganze") is expressed."32 As if describing the kind of language that Virginia Woolf longed for, the linguist continues:

Just as his language stands open to all impressions,
so the Indian sees in the throng between sky and
earth a unity, a cosmic order. Both aspects are
dependent: the language expresses what obser-
vation has perceived.

Because the Dakota grammar contains no past tense, just present and future,
Dakota consciousness knows only "an all-embracing duration," a "mythical
time" which both Muller and Clyde McConne, a specialist in Dakota time con-
cepts, believe is "neither measured or measurable." For such a con-
sciousness "nature is part of that eternal order which is unchanging." Muller demonstrates that the "pathocentricity" of the language, that is, the
passive, adaptable, and absorbing "in regard to me" as opposed to western
consciousness's egocentric, imposing, and desirous "I", allows the Indian,
or primeval soul, "to experience the world in its oneness." Whether the
new language will be the verbal equivalence to a language of signs or Dakota-
like Virginia Woolf does not know. The play that Miss La Trobe begins to
write employing the words from the mud starts after the last line of the
author's last novel: "The curtain rose. They spoke." There is no audience.
And the words are uttered while Mrs. Swithin reads about "Pre-historic
man... half-human, half-ape roused himself from his semi-crouching
position and raised great stones." Isa, obsessed with words and deeply self-reflective, and Giles,
"manacled to a rock" and closely connected to Mrs. Manresa, "the wild
child of nature," may be seen to symbolize the conscious and the natural
respectively. These "two scarcely perceptible figures" do not unite moment-
arily through poetry like Terence and Rachel, and the Ramsays, nor through art like Lily and Mr. Carmichael, nor through any other symbolic form. Instead they merge totally and eternally for the language they use permits them to flow into each other and into the earth. It is the language without the self. But is it the language of the next "civilization" or of another existence after death?

One wonders if Virginia Woolf believed that such a language could be created only at the cost of the absolute destruction of western civilization and a return to a pre-linguist, pre-conscious existence, the England overrun with mammoths and dinosaurs as imagined by Mrs. Swithin. Offering such an interpretation, Josephine O'Brien Schaefer thinks that the holocaust of world war threatening the characters in *Between the Acts*, and the actual world of the author as she was writing the novel, points towards a new, startling future for humankind. The picture of Man painted by Virginia Woolf in her final work, the critic feels, shows that she "is disillusioned with the present version of human beings." A possible explanation for the novel's title, if one is to take into account the frequent allusions to Mrs. Swithin's reading *An Outline of History*, as Josephine O'Brien Schaefer does, involves a vision of the future after the catastrophe: "The whole history of man, then, can be assumed to be between the acts; the curtain might drop upon a return to the primeval mud."  

What lies "between the acts" for Charles Long may well refer to the
"silence" that exists between two vastly different worlds not of the future but of today. In discussing this type of silence in "Silence and Signification," Long provides a link, perhaps rather weak, between Virginia Woolf's profound distrust of language and her overwhelming fear of impending disaster:

The great language of creativity which he used to subdue and exploit his world has been placed in jeopardy; its mighty words are overwhelmed by the silence of the pauses between the words. This language has been prostituted by the very techniques which brought it into being; after having been used and misused for so long by so many, this language has come to be distrusted by western man himself.

Now, this silence which has come about in the modern period may well be a sign of a kind of cultural catastrophe, for when a culture is unable to trust its own language and the names which it has assigned to things it is indeed in trouble.41

The silence which will save western Man, Long maintains, is the silence of nonwestern cultures, or more specifically, "the cultures of primitive and archaic people."42 For centuries the "pawns" of western cultural creativity, but today rightfully asserting their considerable stature, these cultures exist as "the pauses between the words - those pauses which are necessary if speech is to be possible - and in their silence they speak."43 Evidently the time has come for western civilization to listen to this silence, if it hopes to endure.

Virginia Woolf may not have thought that the salvation of the western world depends on what can be learned from "Third World" cultures, but she
would probably have agreed that the "silence" of such "primitive and archaic" societies could furnish what is essentially needed to eliminate western Man's tragic sense of existence, his isolation from his kind and the world, and the cataphonic chaos around him. The silence that ends *Between the Acts* is, above all, an optimistic one. Though she was at the time in the lethal grips of depression, Virginia Woolf envisioned Man's destiny in basically hopeful, if somewhat idealistic, colours. Isa's and Gile's reunion suggests a new, more fruitful and harmonious relationship between human beings. The couple that Miss La Trobe envisions, be it Isa and Gile or not, may well represent the Adam and Eve of another type of human species. But this time there would be no God, no Garden of Eden, and most importantly, no original sin. There would be no unique, enclosed rooms, and no window panes. All would be harmoniously One.

From her first novel Virginia Woolf showed a deep distrust of language. She realized that language, in its inseparability from consciousness, would never allow her to become part of the "reality" she so desperately tried to reach and express. Life's most meaningful aspects and experiences she found painfully ineffable. Feeling and understanding them with profound intuition and insight, she could "point" to them only metaphorically and symbolically, while endeavouring to capture them within the staggering complexities of manifold relationships. Her relentless chase
after Mrs. Brown led her always into the mysterious, enticing, but unknowable realms of silence. Here existed the "reality" she indefatigably sought but apparently never grasped. In silence there is no change, no flux, and no walls to separate people and things. Free from the selfconsciousness of language, disunity, and discord, such a world, Virginia Woolf's utopia, draws praise throughout her novels. From Mrs. Dalloway onwards she attempts to demonstrate that Man was closest to this ideal world during primeval times. Humankind's return to its primitive condition, she seems to be saying in Between the Acts, will be provided by the cataclysm of world war.

But the great disaster will not mark the fall of the final curtain. No, another curtain will rise: "The curtain rose. They spoke." People will speak in "the language of silence." Virginia Woolf, perhaps, is expressing the same sentiment as Friedrick Holderlin in his poem "Celebration of Peace."

This is the law of fate, that each shall know all others
That when the silence returns there shall be a language too.

The world would not be a stage full of actors for there would be no audience. A "death among the apple trees" would be impossible. The gramaphone would play only "Unity. Unity." And thus one might well agree with Louis and Virginia Woolf that "the time approaches when these [our] soliloquies shall be shared."
NOTES

"WORDS FROM THE MUD," THE NEW LANGUAGE


2. Love. op. cit., p.200.


4. The Voyage Out, p.275.


6. The Years, p.344.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., p.345.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., p.346.

14. Ibid.

15. Mrs. Dalloway, p.90.


17. Mrs. Dalloway, p.91.
18. The Waves, p. 204.
20. Ibid., p. 254.
21. Ibid., p. 113.
22. Ibid., p. 92.
26. Ibid., p. 125.
27. The Waves, p. 98.
29. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., p. 234.
36. Ibid., p. 237.
38. Ibid., p. 46.

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