CHAPTER FOUR

ART

VIRGINIA WOOLF HAD A COERIDGEAN ABILITY TO SEE HER MIND AS A thinking instrument and frequently pondered on the creative process and the artistic realignments of her lifetime, as well as her relation to her contemporaries and to tradition. She seems to me, however, to have stood apart from the vehemence and passionate concern with the actual, physical world that was frequently the characteristic of the work of her contemporaries in England and, more markedly, Europe. Although she certainly was concerned with politics—sexual politics in particular—there is a notable absence in her work of the sensual, tactile world that is so much a part of, say, Joyce or Lawrence, and the technological world that inspired Marinetti and the Futurists, the Dynamists, and to some extent the Expressionists. Some might construe this as Bloomsbury elitism, but I would prefer to see in it evidence of a political stance that contradicts art such as that, for example, of the Futurists. The actual world, of course, takes a large part in her work, but she seems always to be seeking to express a perception of the numinous. There exists throughout Woolf's fiction a tension between Kantian "transcendental" knowledge, which shapes the world, and the sense of something beneath or beyond the shapes.

In her essays and fiction, Woolf's concern with art per se was primarily with writing, but she had much to say of music and painting also, and drew careful analogies between different artistic modes. As her writing career progressed, her deep and perpetual concern shifted in its focus from art to the artist (To the Lighthouse marking a definite change in perspective).

The ontological importance of writing to Woolf cannot be overestimated: she believed writing to be her life. In "Reading" she wrote, "somewhere, everywhere, now hidden, now apparent in whatever is written down is the form of a human being"
The human being in Woolf’s writing is elusive, but never more apparent than when she writes about creating.

Having had no formal education in her youth and a fairly wide-ranging literary experience, Woolf was acutely aware of tradition. Her novels are laced throughout with quotations and allusions that are never merely decorative, but always apposite and enriching, often applying one more light touch, one more angle of vision, to the picture she is composing. Sometimes such a reference is used as a motif, gathering associations to itself as the novel progresses, recognition of which induces many links and memories. An example is the “fear no more the heat o’ the sun” of Mrs. Dalloway, that gently beats in Clarissa’s mind from the time she actually reads the line in Hatchard’s window, to its absorption by her toward the end of the book; that the same words come to Septimus is a mirroring effect that should not go unnoticed. Apart from forming one bridge between Septimus and Clarissa, the lines from Cymbeline broaden that Shelleyan idea in the novel of death as a gentle release from the awful difficulties of life; the dirge is calming, an image of death not unlike Terence Hewet’s representation in The Voyage Out of death as being just like sleep (170). Such careful choice of allusion has been noted operating very subtly:

At the height of one of Mr. Ramsay’s panics . . . Mrs. Ramsay is disclosed reading a fairy story to her son James. It is the Grimms’ tale of “The Fisherman and his Wife,” and through twenty-odd pages of the novel Virginia Woolf marvellously counterpoints their story with hers: the coastline setting, the clash of temperaments, the lessons of acceptance, and the ominous undertow of insatiable demands.2

Woolf wrote no lengthy manifesto of her artistic principles, nor would she have claimed to be a theoretician, but she lived at a time of great upheaval in art, and was herself influenced by and a major force in the shift in the way we perceive the world that became apparent in Europe from about the 1880s onward. Even had she not been born a writer she could not have avoided thinking about the nature and purpose of art, surrounded as she was by “great men” of the nineteenth and many iconoclasts of the twentieth centuries. Ideas have a way of influencing even those who have no direct contact with them; new thoughts seep into language, spreading far beyond those who experience their first
formulations. An example in Woolf's work is her concern with the relations between different artistic media, and with the possibilities of synaesthesia, which were explored by many of her contemporaries on the Continent.

Although England was perhaps rather isolated from the modernist movements of Europe by its relatively poor tradition of visual art, these movements did have some effect. In the widespread experimentation with color and shape to express sensations and perceptions can be seen a movement toward a synaesthetic art. One (arbitrarily chosen) point of origin for the general shift in vision might be found in Richard Wagner's dream of a Gessamkunstwerke, an idea that found expression in varying forms among artists from the late nineteenth century onward. In the early part of this century, Wassily Kandinsky and other artists of the Blaue Reiter group in Munich were engaged in the search for a common spiritual basis in the arts. Kandinsky, in "The Effect of Color" (1911), wrote of the psychological effect of color:

> Generally speaking, color directly influences the soul. Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another purposively, to cause vibrations in the soul.

> It is evident therefore that color harmony must rest ultimately on purposive playing upon the human soul: this is one of the guiding principles of internal necessity.

Nearly thirty years later, Kandinsky was still thinking of a unity of all the arts:

> All the arts derive from the same and unique root.
> Consequently, all the arts are identical.
> But the mysterious and precious fact is that the "fruits" produced by the same trunk are different.

Even had Woolf never heard the names of, say, Cézanne, Kandinsky, Matisse, Debussy, Scriabin, or Mallarmé, their influence would have touched her deeply. In fact, she was in an excellent position from which to view the sweeping changes wrought by the European modernist movements; there were many routes by which she could receive the traffic of ideas. In 1904 her brother-in-law, Clive Bell, was in touch with the Nabis, and with Gauguin and Cézanne in Paris; in 1919 he met Derain,
Braque, Cocteau, and others. Although hampered by a rather formal, classical training and the general English reaction against German symbolist painting and music (and, indeed, against almost anything new, from Europe), Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell were much in sympathy with their European counterparts. The influence of Fauvism and Cubism is evident in the products of the Omega workshop, begun in 1913 by Roger Fry with Bell and Grant as codirectors. Fauvism might also be discerned in the tropical setting of *The Voyage Out* (though it perhaps owes much to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* also).

The composer Skryabin’s visit to London before the first War was well-publicized. Duncan Grant was partly inspired by the announcement of a concert of Skryabin’s music (to be accompanied by changing colored lights) to paint a roll,

nearly fifteen feet in length, eleven inches high and composed of seventeen sections of pasted paper shapes with paint sometimes overlapping the papers, sometimes simply surrounding them. It was intended to be seen through the aperture of a box as the roll passed through slots at the back at a pace dictated by a slow movement from a work by Bach. There was also to be lighting inside the box.  

Saxon Sydney-Turner, an early influence on Woolf’s musical tastes, praised *Prometheus*, Skryabin’s 1910 “Poem of Fire” in which he used a color organ. Again, the possibilities of synaesthesia were explored in Skryabin’s project:

In 1908 Skryabin began to compose what he believed to be part of the *Mystery* to which he had been making more than passing reference for a number of years, a large work which would unite the senses as Wagner had attempted to unite the arts. He spoke of “tactile symphonies”, and of involving not just sound but sight, smell, feel, dance, décor, orchestra, piano, singers, light, sculpture, and colours. In the event light and colour were the only non-musical elements to be incorporated in this work.  

The current of ideas flowed widely and freely: Gertrude Stein’s *Composition as Explanation*, for example, accepted for publication by the Woolfs’ Hogarth Press in 1926, is comparable to the work of Cézanne, Matisse, or Picasso in terms of its attempt to maintain a “continuous present.” Parallels can be drawn between developments in writing, painting, and music in the early part of this century: what Woolf did, for example, in the sketches of *Monday or Tuesday* (1921) could be compared to Monet’s
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Venice where the all-pervasive light seems to have eaten away the form; a parallel in music might be Debussy's "La Cathedrale Engloutie" where individual notes are indistinct and inseparable from the effect of the whole. To close what could become a very long list, I add a comment of Max Beckmann's On My Painting (1938), which seems pertinent to Woolf's work: "My aim is always to get hold of the magic of reality and to transfer this reality into painting—to make the invisible visible through reality. It may sound paradoxical, but it is, in fact, reality which forms the mystery of our existence."

Music, for the tyro, seems best suited of all the arts to exemplify thoughts on the way art "works." It does not confine, does not dictate, and because it does not directly refer to anything, it is perhaps the least demanding of the arts for the uninformed perceiver. It is tempting to see music as the "substance" of art in its least altered state, bringing to mind Pater's dictum that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music." Because it is nonrepresentational and nonreferential, music comes closest to a "direct contemplation in thought and feeling, which could dispense with all symbolism and mediation." The nature of the the structure of music was described "with remarkable foresight" by Rousseau in his Essai sur l'origine des langues:

The young Virginia Stephen was excited by music; on 23 April 1901, she wrote to Emma Vaughan: "The only thing in this world is music—music and books and one or two pictures. I am going to found a colony where there shall be no marrying—unless you happen to fall in love with a symphony of Beethoven—no human element at all, except what comes through Art—nothing but ideal peace and endless meditation" (L, 35). Happily, she soon moved away from this youthful Byzantium, but music con-
continued to be an important factor in the development of her thoughts on art: "I have been having a debauch of music and hearing certain notes to which I could be wed—pure simple notes—smooth from all passion and frailty, and flawless as gems. That means so much to me and so little to you! Now do you know that sound has shape and colour and texture as well?" (L, 323. To Violet Dickinson, 16 December 1906). As already noted, the idea of synaesthesia was in the air; synaesthetic perception is sometimes displayed by characters in the novels, particularly in *The Waves*. Clive Bell wrote of his appreciation of music as "pure form" and, as Woolf had met him six years prior to writing the letter quoted above, it is reasonable to suppose that such ideas were current in conversations among her friends.

This familiar strain is heard once more in 1909 when (probably under the influence of Sydney-Turner) Woolf attended the great Wagner festival at Bayreuth. In an article written for the *Times*, she attempts some sort of music criticism, admitting that she is only giving the impressions of an amateur. As with all her writing, the article is lively and interesting (despite its strained, almost euphuistic style), and her perceptions are noteworthy. She sees that music can express nonverbal feeling, and that it has a power over people that seems to stem from its lending form to people's emotions: "It may be that these exalted emotions which belong to the essence of our being, and are rarely expressed, are those that are best translated by music; so that a satisfaction, or whatever one may call that sense of answer which the finest art supplies to its own question, is constantly conveyed here" (*BP*, 19). This article anticipates her lifelong concern with the attempt at wording "those exalted emotions, which belong to the essence of our being." The idea of art supplying the answer to its own question is an early example of that form of the circle that is so often apparent in the structures of Woolf's own art. She was aware of the dangers of the literary judgment of music, but she trusted her ear, and with good reason as the following shows:

Apart from the difficulty of changing a musical impression into a literary one, and the tendency to appeal to the literary sense because of the associations of words, there is the further difficulty in the case of music that its scope is much less clearly defined than the scope of the other arts. The more
beautiful a phrase of music is the richer its burden of suggestion, and if we
understand the form but slightly, we are little restrained in our interpreta-
tion. We are led on to connect the beautiful sound with some experience of
our own, or to make it symbolize some conception of a general nature.
Perhaps music owes something of its astonishing power over us to this lack
of definite articulation; its statements have all the majesty of a generaliza-
tion, and yet contain our private emotions. (BP, 21)

In her sensuous, impressionistic article, Woolf comes at
once to a conclusion similar to that reached methodically by the
philosopher Susanne K. Langer in her theory of music: “Music is
a tonal analogue of emotive life.” At the end of the article,
Woolf again makes reference—in vague, romantic expression—
to synaesthesia:

Here at Bayreuth, where the music fades into the open air . . . and sound
melts into colour, and colour calls out for words, where, in short, we are
lifted out of the ordinary world and allowed merely to breathe and see—it is
here that we realise how thin are the walls between one emotion and
another; and how fused our impressions are with the elements which we
may not attempt to separate. (BP, 22)

When she wrote the *Times* article, Woolf had been working
at “Melymbrosia” for about two years; it was another six before
this was published as *The Voyage Out*. In that novel the ques-
tion of the value and nature of art is often raised, and music—a
preoccupation of the book’s protagonist, Rachel Vinrace—is the
medium most frequently used in Woolf’s explorations of this
question. It is interesting to turn again to Langer: “A great many
considerations and puzzles that one meets sooner or later in all
the arts find their clearest expression, and therefore their most
tangible form, in connection with music” (*Feeling*, 133).

The Bloomsbury atmosphere of discussion, of Thursday
“evenings” and Cambridge friends, found its way into *The
Voyage Out*, where Rachel is often seen perplexed by the rela-
tion between her music and the life she experiences. Early in the
novel she frets over the great difficulty of adequate communica-
tion, and comes to the conclusion that “it was far better to play
the piano and forget all the rest” (35). Music is seen here as an
easy escape from the difficulties of relations with others and with
the world, a view that finds repeated expression in the novel.
Susan Warrington—not a character noted for intelligence—says
to Rachel that music "just seems to say all the things one can't say oneself" (TVO, 197); she is perhaps the sort of person the worldly Clarissa Dalloway has earlier criticized for going "into attitudes" over Wagner (although she confesses to having been moved to tears the first time she saw Parsifal [TVO, 49]). This passive, thoughtless attitude is disparaged throughout The Voyage Out, for although a work of fiction, the novel does offer critical concepts. Again, we could turn to Langer for a formal articulation of what is implied in Woolf's writing: "The function of music is not stimulation of feeling, but expression of it" (Feeling, 28).

Another early question that receives attention in The Voyage Out is that of the nature of the structure of music and its power to express nonverbal states of mind. Woolf evidently believed in the possibility of such states early on; in the novels of her maturity the idea comes to be more and more important. The nonverbal imagination must be felt in the reader's mind; the books must be read actively to half-create from intimations their nonverbal origins. Rachel, thinking of the purpose of music, and depressed by her inability to communicate, thinks of music in terms that suggest a description similar to Rousseau's:

It appeared that nobody ever said a thing they meant, or ever talked of a feeling they felt, but that was what music was for. Reality dwelling in what one saw and felt, but did not talk about, one could accept a system in which things went round and round quite satisfactorily to other people, without often troubling to think about it, except as something superficially strange. (35)

An art that expresses meaning and feeling without using referential signs would obviously appeal to a writer wishing to convey her sense of the numinous.17

Having thought about the system, Rachel falls asleep, and as the chapter ends, Woolf lightly reinforces the point when Helen Ambrose quietly withdraws from Rachel's room "lest the sleeper should waken and there should be the awkwardness of speech between them" (TVO, 36, my italics). Musical composition gives the "illusion of an indivisible whole" (Feeling, 126) and it is this wholeness of music that appeals to Rachel: music "goes straight for things. It says all there is to say at once" (TVO, 251). What Rachel does not go on to expound, but what implic-
itly underlies her thought, is that conception of music as a “system in which things went round and round quite satisfactorily,” a system unhampered by external relations. Woolf’s interest in music in *The Voyage Out* is clearly from the point of view of a writer; she has already begun her search for a suitable form through which to communicate her perception of the world that, as we have seen, had at its heart an empty, silent center that eludes communication in language.

Against music as the art of expressing the verbally inexpressible we should perhaps place Terence Hewet’s projected novel “about Silence.” Although many of Woolf’s contemporaries conceived of a fundamental unity in the various modes of art, she was much concerned with ineffable areas of experience, and realized early in her career that words, for instance, could not have an effect always commensurable with that of music.

Toward the end of the novel, Terence reads to Rachel from *Comus,* and seems to wish Milton’s poetry to act like music. He suggests that the words can be listened to for their sound alone, but of course the meaning obtrudes because words must relate to something other. The point is doubly made, as the lines Terence reads (*TVO,* 398-99) have a special significance for Rachel who is just beginning to experience the physical symptoms of the illness that culminates in her death. Music, then, does not have “meaning” but can express feelings that are beyond words. In *The Voyage Out* Woolf, through Rachel, acknowledges the great difficulty of creating music, and criticizes the passive attentiveness of those listeners who “go into attitudes.” Music is seen in terms of its structure, usually by architectural analogy.

By the end of the book music is established as an individual art, dealing with aspects of experience that are not within the reach of words. Langer’s formal articulations are useful in encapsulating the ideas that can be drawn from Woolf’s first novel, and the basic concept of music that emerges from it is very similar to that expressed in Langer’s special theory of music as an “articulate but non-discursive form having import without conventional reference . . . presenting itself . . . as a “significant form,” in which the factor of significance is not logically discriminated, but is felt as a quality rather than recognized as a function” (*Feeling,* 32). It is the logical discrimination of symbols
that prevents language from sharing this quality with music. Woolf recognizes this and I think her idea of the novel “about Silence” probably underwent a change as a result of her understanding. To have continued with the idea of language being able somehow to achieve the nonverbal communication of music would have resulted in actual silence. Her novels are about silence, an empty space at the heart of life, but they can only point to it, imply it, shape round it. The space is ineffable and impossible to construct, for construction or words would mean filling the space; the space must come to be apprehended in the act of reading.

In *Night and Day*, the emphasis of Woolf’s interest in different media shifts from music to the literary canon: architectural metaphors now apply to structures composed of words rather than notes, and criticism of those who attitudinized over Wagner is now directed at those who do the same over Shakespeare. Woolf even feels confident enough for comment on her friends’ aesthetic theories: Mary Datchet, looking at the Elgin Marbles, is “borne upon some wave of exaltation and emotion,” but perhaps her emotions are “not purely aesthetic” (80), for she finds herself thinking of her love for Ralph. Mary is here guilty of that sentimentalism condemned in the previous novel. There is, perhaps, implicit questioning of the “aesthetic emotion” Clive Bell wrote of in *Art*, for this state of pure contemplation is an unrealistic aspiration: the personality of the perceiver cannot be evaded. In *Night and Day*, Woolf sets out a view of the established forms of literature that, in *Jacob’s Room*, she says must be done away with. Literature is shown as the opiate of an intellectual élite who consider it their birthright, to guard and interpret. In *The Voyage Out*, and throughout her essays, Woolf emphasizes that life must be the source of art and art must be life-enhancing; in *Night and Day*, she shows the result of ignoring this dictum.

Katharine Hilbery tries to get her parents interested in modern novels, but even their appearance disturbs them; they prefer their reading to look as it is: portly and solid. Literature is viewed by the older generation as a vessel for private emotions
that has enough generality to raise them to a plane above the individual. The works of literature do their thinking for them; they transfer their joys and sorrows to those of the heroes and heroines. This generation has made a religion of literature: their responses are dogma, the editor of an “esteemed review” is a “minister of literature” (369); they have a certain idea of what literature is and what it should not be. It was this dogmatism that Woolf saw as deadening and restrictive. Even Mrs. Hilbery, who is so passionate about “my William,” seems to have things the wrong way around: the wonder is not that life continues as it does despite Shakespeare, but that Shakespeare continues despite life (an idea found in Jacob’s Room, 108-9). Mr. Hilbery, in using the work of Scott as a pacifying homily to his daughter, typifies the smug attitude against which Woolf rebelled. At the end of the book is a telling description of this attitude: “The power of literature, which had temporarily deserted Mr. Hilbery, now came back to him, pouring over the raw ugliness of human affairs its soothing balm, and providing a form into which such passions as he had felt so painfully the night before could be moulded so that they fell roundly from the tongue in shapely phrases, hurting nobody” (ND, 528-29). This intellectual elite has stifled the spirit of literature and lost the ability to read creatively. The children of this coterie do not escape its influence: Cassandra mocks William with cliquish complacency for not having read Dostoevski (ND, 368), and Katharine assures her mother that clerks do not read poetry “as we read it” (99).

Woolf’s dissatisfaction with the well-made Edwardian novel is expressed in “Modern Fiction,” in which appears her famous image of life as “a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end” (CRI, 189). After the “traditional” Night and Day, Woolf searched for a form appropriate to the embodiment of her vision, one that would show her awareness of the profound change in “human character” she said had occurred “on or about December, 1910” (“Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown”). She wrote a number of “sketches” in which she made the transition from the perceptual world of Night and Day to that of Jacob’s Room and the works for which she is best known.
It is to the world of the painter, specifically the post-impressionist, that Woolf turned in her search for a suitable form: perception, light, form, and color became her materials. Some of her early "sketches," as she called them, were published in *Monday or Tuesday*, a volume enhanced by four woodcuts by Vanessa Bell; most of the sketches were published posthumously in *A Haunted House* (1944). In "Solid Objects" (1920) Woolf gives a clue to the sort of perception she was trying to capture in words: "Looked at again and again half consciously by a mind thinking of something else, any object mixes itself so profoundly with the stuff of thought that it loses its actual form and recomposes itself a little differently in an ideal shape which haunts the brain when we least expect it" (*AHH*, 72). Throughout the sketches Woolf uses color to express mood, character, and communication. Her observation of the changing qualities of light is acute and, in a piece like "Kew Gardens," brings to mind Cézanne or Monet. She uses color in a plastic way, anticipating what Charles Mauron wrote in an article translated by Roger Fry and published by Woolf's Hogarth Press in 1926. In "The Nature of Beauty in Art and Literature," Mauron wrote of painters' use of color to establish "psychological volumes." Woolf's close observation of color and light led her to experiment even with abstract color sketches: "Blue & Green," for example, records gradations of light moving over and through various objects, achieving painterly effects with words. Painters such as Gauguin and Van Gogh wrote letters recording the correspondences between color and sound harmonies; Woolf experimented with color in her writing. It was not, perhaps, until *The Waves* that color and light achieved their most enriching effect in her work, but the groundwork for this aspect of her art was done in the transitional period between the publication of *Night and Day* and *Jacob's Room*.

Of "The Mark on the Wall" Roger Fry wrote to Woolf that she was the only contemporary writer "who uses language as a medium of art, who makes the very texture of the words have a meaning and quality really almost apart from what you are talking about." Such astute criticism from Fry must have meant a great deal to Woolf as she sought to model into the space she felt was at the heart of life:
As we face each other in omnibuses and underground railways we are looking into the mirror; that accounts for the vagueness, the gleam of glassiness in our eyes. And the novelists in future will realize more and more the importance of these reflections, for of course there is not one reflection but an almost infinite number; those are the depths they will explore, those the phantoms they will pursue, leaving the description of reality more and more out of their stories, taking a knowledge of it for granted, as the Greeks did and Shakespeare perhaps—but these generalizations are very worthless. ("The Mark on the Wall," AHH, 38)

Jacob Flanders is caught at a period of transition, at the moment after the breaking of the old molds and before the formation of the new. He is thus full of youthful self-assertiveness, but fundamentally confused; this is a feeling Woolf herself exhibited in a letter to Roger Fry (16 September 1925): “For my own part I wish we could skip a generation—skip Edith and Gertrude and Tom and Joyce and Virginia and come out in the open again, when everything has been restarted, and runs full tilt, instead of trickling and teasing in this irritating way” (L, 1583).

Two months after the publication of Jacob’s Room, Woolf wrote to Gerald Brenan of that sense of breaking and renewing, of being stuck in a period of transition that characterizes the novel, as very much her own feeling about herself as a writer. She felt, on Christmas Day 1922, that the “human soul” was undergoing one of its periodic reorientations. For those artists unfortunate enough to live at such a time, nothing is whole: “Nothing is going to be achieved by us. Fragments—paragraphs—a page perhaps: but no more. Joyce to me seems strewn with disaster” (L, 1337). She and her contemporaries are denied a sight of the whole human soul, but she feels the glimpses they can catch are more valuable than “to sit down with Hugh Walpole, Wells, etc. etc. and make large oil paintings of fabulous fleshy monsters complete from top to toe” (L, 1337). Having just published the first novel that speaks in her distinctive voice, Woolf is engrossed with her own creativity; indeed, she says to Brenan, “I am only scribbling, more to amuse myself than you, who may never read, or understand.” She feels herself a microcosm of the world, suffering “every ten years” a reorientation of her own soul to match the larger one she sees occurring in the human race.

Looking back, she says when she first tried to write, she
found that she could not, for what she had to write about (life) was "too near, too vast." This is certainly borne out by the impression of being overwhelmed and the synaesthetic perception already noted in the young Woolf and in Rachel Vinrace. With *Jacob's Room* she begins to give form to the incoherent experience of being; to do this she must first recede from the object. The letter ends with a postscript in which she returns to the original matter, raised by Brenan, of renunciation. Woolf here fixes on a central paradox of her art when she says that beauty is achieved in the failure to achieve it; in other words, in the effort. In the virtual space of the act of reading, nonverbal thought is communicated. By "grinding all the flints together" (or "gathering fragments"), the whole that cannot be directly communicated is formed in the intersubjective relationship between literary art and the reader: "Are we not always hoping? and though we fail every time, surely we do not fail so completely as we should have failed if we were not in the beginning, prepared to attack the whole. One must renounce, when the book is finished; but not before it is begun" (*L*, 1337).

By the time she came to write *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf was an experienced writer with proven consummate control of the form she had worked out for herself. In this novel is seen a consideration of the artist at work that adheres closely to the problems posed by Lily Briscoe's painting. The novel is not an exploration of whether painting and literature are commensurable, as *The Voyage Out* tentatively explored that question with regard to music and language, but Woolf uses painting to shed a light on literary creation; significantly, to see her specific problems as a novelist in a fresh way. She knows well where the line comes between the two modes, and uses painting to distance herself from literature so that she will not be too close to her own difficulties to see them clearly.

Lily Briscoe finds William Bankes' scrutiny of her canvas an "awful trial," for her work is not representation, but contains the "residue of her thirty-three years, the deposit of each day's living, mixed with something more secret than she had ever spoken or shown in the course of all those days." (*TTL*, 84). Three years after the publication of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf wrote in the introduction to a catalog of an exhibition of Vanessa Bell's paint-
ings, "that they yield their full meaning only to those who can tunnel their way behind the canvas into masses and passages and relations and values of which we know nothing." It seems to me that in these two instances—one fictional, one (f)actual—Woolf is making a definite statement to the effect that an artist's life must be inextricably mingled with his or her created work. She sees a novelist as even less able to conceal actual experience in a work of art: "One defies a novelist to keep his life through twenty-seven volumes of fiction safe from our scrutiny." Here—and on many other occasions—she explicitly says that the writer's life is unavoidably interwoven with his or her fiction.

Lily Briscoe's painting stands for the art Woolf herself wished to achieve. Lily wants to realize on her canvas her perception of Mrs. Ramsay as "an august shape; the shape of a dome" (TTL, 83). She tries to explain to William Bankes that she is painting balance, harmony, and rhythm; at the heart of her perception, the true subject of her art, is Lily's love for Mrs. Ramsay and her urge to somehow bring that love into a shared world of art, out of the private world of memory. In this project, perhaps, the links between the modes of life and the modes of art in Woolf's aesthetic may become clearer.

Lily's struggle for unity, her attempt to realize her vision wholly, is an articulation of the basic problem for any artist. The passage from conception to realization imposes a change, for all visions must be mediated: "She could see it all so clearly, so commandingly, when she looked: it was when she took her brush in hand that the whole thing changed (TTL, 34). At the beginning of To the Lighthouse, Lily understands that her problem has to do mainly with relation: "If there, in that corner, it was bright, here, in this, she felt the need of darkness" (85). She cannot explain what she wishes to make of the scene before her; she only feels it within her, and here we have the problem: how to bring one's personal world into the shared world in such a way that others can understand it. This was Woolf's problem as it is Lily's:

I shall here write the first pages of the greatest book in the world. This is what the book would be that was made entirely solely & with integrity of one's thoughts. Suppose one could catch them before they became "works of art."? Catch them hot & sudden as they rise in the mind—walking up
Asheham hill for instance. Of course one cannot; for the process of language is slow & deluding. One must stop to find a word; then, there is the form of the sentence, soliciting one to fill it. (D, Rodmell, 1926)

Again, Woolf is explicit about the nonverbal origin of her art. The problem remains with Lily; ten years pass, ten years of experience, of perceiving, of having visions; ten years in which Mrs. Ramsay dies; and she returns to the house. "The question was of some relation between those masses. She had borne it in her mind all these years" (TTL, 229). And it would seem that a decade has brought Lily new understanding: "It seemed as if the solution had come to her: she knew now what she wanted to do" (TTL, 229). However, the gap still exists between conception and realization, and although the struggle may be now more equal it is no less fierce, as Lily discovers when she again approaches her easel: "But there was all the difference in the world between this planning airily away from the canvas, and actually taking her brush and making the first mark" (TTL, 243). Section 3 of "The Lighthouse" marks the beginning of a concentration on Lily's picture (concurrent with the voyage out to the lighthouse) which is, at this point, a framed space against the landscape that must be filled: "She saw her canvas as if it had floated up and placed itself white and uncompromising directly before her" (TTL, 242). If we glance back at the last diary entry referred to above, the correlation between the problems of Lily and Woolf is again made clear: "Then, there is the form of the sentence, soliciting one to fill it." Other writings of the period of To the Lighthouse's composition are also concerned with the problems in verbal art that Lily has with painting. Writing in the Times Literary Supplement on De Quincey ("Impassioned Prose"), Woolf expressed those ideas that Lily found she could not put across to William Bankes (TTL, 84-87): "Then it is not the actual sight or sound itself that matters, but the reverberations that it makes as it travels through our minds. These are often to be found far away, strangely transformed; but it is only by gathering up and putting together these echoes and fragments that we arrive at the true nature of our experience" (GR, 40).

Again, as in the letter to Brenan, Woolf says that the only hope for wholeness is to put together the fragments of our expe-
rience, not to go directly for it. In 1925 she wrote in her diary that she had “an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant “novel”. A new—by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?” (27 June 1925). In 1927, in “The Narrow Bridge of Art,” Woolf described a new form of novel; it is a prophecy of *Between the Acts*:

It will be written in prose, but in prose which has many of the characteristics of poetry. It will have something of the exaltation of poetry, but much of the ordinariness of prose. It will be dramatic, and yet not a play. It will be read, not acted. By what name we are to call it is not a matter of very great importance. What is important is that this book which we see on the horizon may serve to express some of those feelings which seem at the moment to be balked by poetry pure and simple and to find the drama equally inhospitable to them. Let us try, then, to come to closer terms with it and to imagine what may be its scope and nature.

In the first place, one may guess that it will differ from the novel as we know it now chiefly in that it will stand further back from life. It will give, as poetry does, the outline rather than the detail.

So, then, this unnamed variety of the novel will be written standing back from life, because in that way a larger view is to be obtained of some important features of it. (*GR*, 18, 22)

In *To the Lighthouse*, this form can be seen applied to relationships: “But this was one way of knowing people, she thought: to know the outline, not the detail, to sit in one’s garden and look at the slopes of a hill running purple down into the distant heather” (*TTL*, 299). The same conditions can be seen to apply to Lily’s picture: before beginning she must draw back from life and subdue the “impertinences and irrelevances that plucked her attention and made her remember how she was such and such a person, had such and such relations to people” (*TTL*, 243). This is why she cannot communicate her vision directly to William Bankes:

She could not show him what she wished to make of it [the scene in front of her], could not see it even herself, without a brush in her hand. She took up once more her old painting position with the dim eyes and the absent-minded manner, subduing all her impressions as a woman to something much more general; becoming once more under the power of that vision which she had seen clearly once and must now grope for among hedges and houses and mothers and children—her picture. (*TTL*, 86)
Overcoming the difficulty of beginning, Lily falls into a rhythm of marking the canvas and pausing ("The most characteristic principle of vital activity is rhythm." [Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 126]). A letter to Vita Sackville-West (16 March 1926) indicates Woolf’s belief in this principle of rhythm, providing a further detail of the analogy between Lily’s painting and the novel: "Style is a very simple matter; it is all rhythm. . . . Now this is very profound, what rhythm is, and goes far deeper than words. A sight, an emotion, creates this wave in the mind, long before it makes words to fit it" (*L*, 1624).

The work of art begins with a *preverbal* rhythm; again and again Woolf comes back to this aspect of creation. Lily’s rhythmic dabbing at the canvas presents a new problem, however, for her marks define a new space; "what could be more formidable than that space?" (*TTL*, 244). In the light of what Woolf has already said about creation, Lily’s experience as she begins her picture can be taken confidently as analogous to the author’s in writing her novel: "Here she was again, she thought, stepping back to look at it, drawn out of gossip, out of living, out of community with people into the presence of this formidable ancient enemy of hers—this other thing, this truth, this reality, which suddenly laid hands on her, emerged stark at the back of appearances and commanded her attention" (*TTL*, 244-45).

The arresting phrase "ancient enemy" emphasizes Woolf’s conception of creation as a struggle. In the holograph manuscript of the novel, the stress of this moment for Lily, and the sense of artistic creation being beyond "human relations," is emphasized in a long monologue in which she speaks of art reaching "some more acute reality where it can rest." This description recalls Woolf’s idea of the soul or self: it was as a "wedge-shaped core of darkness" that Mrs. Ramsay found rest and a communion with a ‘reality’ apart from the actual. In writing of ‘reality’ in her diary, it should be noted, Woolf felt it was that in which she would "rest and continue to exist." There is also a remarkable similarity (the significance of which is fully realized in *Between the Acts*) between the *states* in which Mrs. Ramsay becomes a "wedge of darkness" and in which Lily paints to achieve her "vision"; the most salient feature common to both
states is the loss of identity (see *TTL*, 100, 246). It may also be noteworthy that Mrs. Ramsay’s “wedge” shape is endorsed by the purple triangle as which she is represented in Lily’s painting.

In the published novel, Woolf seems to have realized that Lily’s doctrine is unconvincing because it comes at the problem so directly; the hyperbole obstructs the active reader’s imagination, and it is therefore excised. The draft is significant, nevertheless, because it explicitly connects artistic creation with transcendence of the actual and revelation of the soul. It is only by gathering together fragments and echoes in this way that the connection between experience of the self and artistic creation is brought to light.

Lily, in the draft, is seen as “extended & freed” while painting: “She enjoyed that intensity & freedom of life which, for a few seconds after the death of the body, one imagines the souls of the dead to enjoy: one imagines then that they have gathered themselves together . . . complete & forcible with the force of an organism which is now at last able to unite all its powers” (Dick, 280). The holograph continues by describing Lily’s experience of a transcendence of time and death through art:

> It was attended, too, with an emotion, which could be compared only with the gratification of <hum> bodily human love. So, unhesitatingly, without fear or reserve, at some moment of culminating, when all separation is over, except that final delight of separation—which is that it can be has consciousness of mixing—the two people bodies unite; the human love has its gratification. But that, even, was less complete than this; for who can deny it? Even while the arms are locked, or the sentence married in the air with complete understanding, a cloud moves across the sky & each lover knows, but cannot confess, his knowledge of the transience of love: the mutability of love: how tomorrow comes; <how> they words & other kisses. <but> & they are only tossed together & nothing survives.

> But here, since the lover was the horrible formidable enemy—space—their union, could it be achieved, was immortal. No cloud moved, in that landscape; no death came between them. It was an awful marriage; forever. (Dick, 280)

The space that Lily has created is more awful than the original space of the canvas for it is “truth . . . reality . . .”; it is the space at the heart of life so often felt in the novels; the emptiness
that can only be felt and never directly communicated: nothingness. Another excised passage is a clue to the import of Lily's experience:

There is something better than helping dying women. Something, heaven be praised, beyond human relations altogether, in all this talk of you & me, & me & you, & &<for> one loving another, & one not loving another, all this little trivial baseness of about which we made so incessant a to do of marrying & giving in marriage, pales beside it is irrelevant beside it. Yet so terrible a doctrine could not be confessed. . . . Pictures are more important than people. (Dick, 279)

The "terrible doctrine" of art, perhaps, underlies that sense of the inadequacy of life that has been felt in Woolf's writing.

The overwhelming difficulty that the space Lily has created presents is that it demands to be filled, but can never be filled for then it would no longer be space: "But this form, were it only the shape of a white lamp-shade looming on a wicker table, roused one to perpetual combat, challenged one to a fight in which one was bound to be worsted" (TTL, 245). The space in the painting corresponds to one side of that tension between meaning and nothingness that is felt throughout Woolf's writing. To her thinking, the artist is closest to 'reality' and is constantly torn between the antinomies of emptiness at the center and the possibility of creation. This division in human being is acute for the artist because she perceives it more clearly than others. Art can "make of the moment something permanent" (TTL, 249); perhaps it can even fill the space, but only for an instant and not in the shared world of common reality. In her essays and diaries, Woolf often referred to the unconscious reverie in which artistic creation takes place, and in To the Lighthouse we find a definite statement of the basis in the unconscious of artistic creation that bears a strong resemblance to that state in which Mrs. Ramsay found "rest," seemingly in harmony with her self (TTL, 100). Lily feels part of

some rhythm which was dictated to her (she kept looking at the hedge, at the canvas) by what she saw, so that while her hand quivered with life, this rhythm was strong enough to bear her along with it on its current. 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 . . . her mind kept throwing up from its depths, scenes, and names, and sayings,
and memories and ideas, like a fountain spurting over that glaring, hideously difficult white space, while she modelled it with greens and blues. (TTL, 247)

That "her name and her personality and her appearance" recede from Lily's consciousness is significant for these have been shown as "bases" of identity. Artistic creation and experience of the self/soul are linked by the loss of identity.

As Lily comes to grips with the difficulties of her painting, she solves problems of shape and mass by use of color. A painter's use of color is active, vital, Woolf knew; colors are alive in a painting, elements determined by their environment. Allen McLaurin devotes chapter 7 of his Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved to an excellent analysis and minute observation of Woolf's use of color, which I do not wish to repeat here. The essay "Walter Sickert" (1933), to which McLaurin refers, is extremely interesting with regard to Woolf's view of a basic unity in the arts, and again of the areas of experience that are beyond words: the "silent kingdom" of paint holds many lessons for the writer, but their ways must eventually part.

When we consider the atmosphere of discursive rationalism that Woolf lived in, it is surprising to see the consistency with which her work shapes nondiscursive, intuitive perceptions. Her essay on Sickert is typical in its intimate awareness of tradition; she sees that great writers are "great colorists, just as they are musicians into the bargain." McLaurin's attention to her use of color in The Waves makes clear that Woolf learnt all she could from the painters; the expressiveness of color and line, seized upon as of paramount importance by the Symbolist painters of the early twentieth century, is reflected in words by Woolf. Indeed, it might be noted, she used color in a "psychological" way as early as The Voyage Out: as the intimacy between Rachel and Terence deepens (and Helen's sense of danger grows), Rachel looks out to sea: "It was still very blue . . . but the light on it was yellower, and the clouds were turning flamingo red" (TVO, 261).

The limitations of language in the psychological use of color, enunciated by McLaurin, were completely understood by Woolf by the time she had finished To the Lighthouse. She uses colors in relational sequences, solving Lily's problems of rela-
tion, modeling into the hollows of experience by causing words to suggest shapes beyond themselves, as Roger Fry said she had done in "The Mark on the Wall." Lily, having mastered the skilful employment of color to establish "psychological volumes," comes to have a surer grasp of the form her work must take, and this conception we can take, again with confidence, as analogous to Woolf's literary work, noting especially its paradoxical nature:

Heaven be praised for it, the problem of space remained, she thought, taking up her brush again. It glared at her. The whole mass of the picture was poised upon that weight. Beautiful and bright it should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent, one colour melting into another like the colours on a butterfly's wing; but beneath the fabric must be clamped together with bolts of iron. It was to be a thing you could ruffle with your breath; and a thing you could not dislodge with a team of horses. And she began to lay on a red, a grey, and she began to model her way into the hollow there. (TTL, 264)

Early in the novel it was made clear that the artist's life had an integral influence on her work. As the book and Lily's picture near completion, it is increasingly emphasized that Lily mixes memory and desire with her vision; the past and her wish to regain her experience of Mrs. Ramsay's influence become worked into her painting as a definite shaping element: "And as she dipped into the blue paint, she dipped too into the past there" (TTL, 265). Still something is lacking, for Lily's problem of balance, of relation, persists; and, as she shows in her diary, Woolf shares the difficulty of getting hold of "the thing itself before it has been made anything" (TTL, 297). In view of this, that the novel ends with Lily triumphant ("I have had my vision"; the tense is significant) may at first be confusing. If Lily has realized her vision on her canvas, it is not a static realization, but a moment of creation that must be recreated by each perceiver. Lily's "vision" takes place within her: the moment at which she completes her painting is the closing of the circle of the journey to the lighthouse, and thus the vision is Woolf's as well. Once again, the moment of perceiving a harmonious pattern takes place under the form of the circle: from the center of her creative act, Lily holds the circumference of her vision, her past and her present, in synthesis. It is such a "moment of being" that Woolf
strove to give the opportunity for in her novels; the moment is recreated in the act of reading. *To the Lighthouse* constitutes her most extensive statement on her understanding of art; that she managed to expound and exemplify her insights simultaneously is an adequate mark of her genius.