GOLDSMITH, BONNIE ZUCKER
THE ENORMOUS BURDEN OF THE UNEXPRESSED: LANGUAGE AS THEME IN THE NOVELS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF.
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY, PH.D., 1978
THE ENORMOUS BURDEN OF THE UNEXPRESSED:
LANGUAGE AS THEME IN THE NOVELS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
Bonnie Zucker Goldsmith, B.A., M.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1978

Reading Committee: Approved By
Professor Morris Beja
Professor Suzanne Ferguson
Professor Marlene Longenecker

Adviser
Department of English
VITA

October 13, 1950 .......... Born—Cleveland, Ohio
1972 ..................... B.A., Miami University, Oxford, Ohio
1973-78 ................. Teaching Associate, Department of English, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio
1975 ..................... M.A., The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: English

Nineteenth-Century British Literature. Professor James Kincaid

Nineteenth-Century American Literature. Professor Richard Weatherford

The Novel. Professor Mark Auburn

Twentieth-Century Literature. Professor Morris Beja
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

VITA ................................................... ii

INTRODUCTION ........................................ 1

Chapter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I.</th>
<th>Language and Maturation:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Voyage Out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II.</th>
<th>Language as Barrier:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Dalloway and The Years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>III.</th>
<th>Language, The Woman, The Artist:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To The Lighthouse and Between The Acts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV.</th>
<th>Language and Silence:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Waves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V.</th>
<th>Language and The Narrator:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES .................................................. 197

BIBLIOGRAPHY ........................................ 200
INTRODUCTION

The mind is so saturated with sensibility, language so inadequate to its experience, that, far from ruling off one form of literature or decreeing its inferiority to others, we complain that they are still unable to keep pace with the wealth of material, and wait impatiently the creation of what may yet be devised to liberate us of the enormous burden of the unexpressed.

In Virginia Woolf's last novel, Between The Acts, Isa Oliver longs for a voice "free from the old vibrations."

Her creator's artistic search for that liberated voice fills her diaries and essays, and is developed and refined in her nine novels. It is, perhaps, a tautology to say that writers are fascinated with words. But Viringia Woolf's interest in her artistic medium seems almost an obsession, rising above the usual novelistic concerns with plot and character. Her desire to express herself with maximum precision accompanies her presentation of characters who are importantly revealed and defined by their attitudes towards words and their degree of language facility. From her first novel to her last, Woolf explores with great tenacity the possibilities and limitations of language in the modern world. Topics like conjugal communication, the meanings of silence, the private language of love, the silence and isolation of illness, the inadequacies of language to express
profound emotion, social talk and gossip, the deceptions in the languages of religion, politics, and etiquette, the use of letters, signs, placards, and newspapers as "speech attempted": all are approached and all help to define a world struggling to retain this most human of enterprises, verbal communication, in the face of formidable obstacles. Even in The Years, her most pessimistic novel, the deep ironies and sadness at the heart of her reflections upon language co-exist with a persistent faith in the potential of words to express and communicate the deepest and most enduring truths.

One has only to read Woolf's essays and diaries to sense the pervasiveness of her fascination with words. She speaks of "seeing life . . . an immense opaque block of material to be conveyed by me into its equivalent of language." The world excites her so intensely, partly because the translation of that world into language is so stimulating: "How I should notice everything--the phrase for it coming the moment after and fitting like a glove." "I walk," she writes, "making up phrases" (AWD, 115). And again, "my mind is very bare to words--English words--at the moment; they hit me, hard, I watch them bounce and spring" (AWD, 125). This intense love for words caused her considerable self-doubt. "One must write from deep feeling, said Dostoievsky. And do I? Or do I fabricate with words, loving them as I do?" (AWD, 56). One hears Bernard in his
creator's "What's the phrase for that?" (AWD, 128). She also shares with him an occasional disgust with fluency: "I detest my own volubility. Why be always spouting words?" (AWD, 126-7). But the departure from language is often identified as deathlike and dangerous. She speaks of "[beating] up the waters of talk, as I do so courageously, so that life mayn't be wasted" (AWD, 55). Though she occasionally enjoys "a delicious draught of silence" (AWD, 85), that silence is more often associated with Clarissa Dalloway's "emptiness" and Mrs. Ramsay's "stillness": "there is vacancy and silence somewhere in the machine" (AWD, 144). She describes "a whole nervous breakdown in miniature," and identifies returning health as "the power to make images" (AWD, 94-6). Clearly, language is life and health for her.

In her essays, too, Virginia Woolf studies words, analyzes their properties, expresses an almost sensual delight in them, personifies them. She speaks of the effect of Sidney's lush, rhythmical prose, which gives us "the desire . . . to shut the ear of reason completely and lie back and listen to this unformed babble of sound; this chorus of intoxicated voices singing madly like birds round the house before anyone is up" (I, 22). She engages herself most often in the search for meaning, but can also take a pure delight in words as beautiful sounds. Her essay "Craftsmanship" is entirely about the "craft of
Words." Words are not "useful" for the transmission of ordinary information, she writes, because they never mean just one thing. But they do tell the truth, and they survive the passage of time better than any other medium. Words are close to the living body of their creator, full of echoes, memories, associations. Indeed, they are living things: they inhabit the mind, not the dictionary; they exist like convention-free human beings, intermarrying with impunity; they are "irreclaimable vagabonds" and "it is their nature to change." We need not create an entirely new language. The question is, "How can we combine the old words in new orders so that they survive, so that they create beauty, so that they tell the truth?" (II, 245-51). Woolf's life work is, in large part, her attempt to answer that question, and to honor the claims of the "irreclaimable vagabonds."

She writes in her diary, "It is a general sense of the poetry of existence that overcomes me" (AWD, 55). She had a lifelong desire to infuse prose with the evocative, symbolic, concentrated qualities of poetry, to rescue the novelist from "fact." R. L. Chambers considers that Woolf's "poetic prose" puts her in the tradition of Plato, Donne, Sir Thomas Browne, and the Bible's translators. These writers, "by borrowing from the technique of poetry while retaining the essential prose rhythms . . . exercised a true artistic insight into the possibilities and
limitations of their medium." One of Woolf's signal achievements is her "poetic prose," most radically presented in The Waves. She read poetry and wanted in her own writing "the concentration and the romance, and the words all glued together, fused, glowing" (AWD, 64).

There is an enormous amount of criticism of Virginia Woolf's work, analyses of her literary forms, her techniques, characters, major concerns, world view. Many of Woolf's most important critics have noted that one of her basic themes is the difficulty of communication, and many discuss the importance of language in individual novels. Those who remark upon language, or the urge to communicate, as a primary concern in Woolf include Bernard Blackstone, who notes her interest in the conflict between a desire for solitude and the longing to share experience. Josephine O'Brien Schaefer sees as one of Woolf's basic themes the difficulties of communication, of personal relations, the dual problem of adequately revealing the self to others and of understanding what the other communicates. James Naremore notes that "intuitive communication" is often a subject for Woolf. Her distrust of "facts" leads her to distrust language, he says, since language is a product of the ego "and is always at least one step removed from reality." Manly Johnson describes part of Woolf's achievement as the creation of "an effect that does go beyond words." He notes that "she recognized the formidable task confronting
even disciplined language to make sense of the natural world and human motivation . . . . Only by making incessant demands on language can words be made to assert human control and enlarge the borders of civilization." Harvena Richter notes Woolf's "urge for communication--an anxiety which . . . obsesses every writer but seems to have been unusually strong in Mrs. Woolf." Jean Guiguet finds that "communicating, and eventually entering into communion . . . conquering loneliness," is "the central theme of all Virginia Woolf's work." Part of the "multiple paradox" confronting her was how to express "silence by words." Alice van Buren Kelly sees a dichotomy in Woolf's work between fact and vision, vision being the world of silence and fact the world of language. Allen McLaurin notes Woolf's continuing concern with the disjunction between words and what they represent as important in all her work. He links her questioning of the powers of language with her criticism of other literary conventions, like the traditional portrayal of characters. David Daiches, like Guiguet and others, believes that much of Woolf's work concerns the conflict between the urge to retain one's individuality and the need for communion with others. Charlotte Walker Mendez notes Woolf's "anti-languages," her "substitute languages," the wordless cries, nonsense syllables and silence that fill her novels.
Many of these critics, and others, discuss the importance of language in particular novels. Thus, Susan Gorsky analyzes the "cosmic communication" in *The Waves*, "an alternative means of communication, a non-verbal sharing of experience and thoughts, even of events and ideas which could not be shared in any ordinary manner." Sallie Sears notes the "disintegration of verbal intercourse" in *The Years*. Margaret Comstock points out the prohibitions against speech that surround Woolf's female characters: "The demands of respectability keep talk safely within the bounds of meaninglessness." Schaefer sees the first part of *The Years* as dealing with the failure of communication on the personal level, and the second part with the failure on the public level. The book describes "the particular and universal inability to communicate." Jacob's Room and *Between The Acts*, she says, "are inordinately concerned with language." Naremore finds *The Waves* "saturated with passages revealing an ambivalence toward language which ... is implicit in nearly all of Mrs. Woolf's writings."

A full-scale investigation of language as an important theme in all Virginia Woolf's work has proven to be illuminating. One may note the development of her ideas, the refinements, as she explores the problems of communication from different perspectives. Her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, suggests a belief in language facility as a vital part of maturity. Here, and in her second novel, *Night and Day*, ...
the language of love, and the complications in communication imposed by passionate human relationships. Beginning with *Jacob's Room*, her third novel, she examines more precisely the way language helps to characterize people, the deceptions of words, the necessity for different languages to match varying social situations, the formidable obstacles to free verbal intercourse among people, the torturous road to self-expression. Throughout her work, she looks critically at her own task, at art itself, and accepts finally the artist's responsibility to present the possibility of maximum human expressiveness. World upheavals, societal pressures, and personal inadequacies may erect insurmountable barriers to communication, but the struggle to express oneself, the refusal to yield to meaninglessness, the insistence upon form and a creative order, all constitute a peculiarly human, and heroic, enterprise.

But the essential loneliness of human beings is perceived by virtually all Woolf's major characters. The "emptiness about the heart of life" that Clarissa Dalloway understands, the "stillness" that Mrs. Ramsay perceives, the "darkness and conjecture" that disturbs Bernard, lead many characters to a fundamental distrust of language. A sense of the deceptions possible in words, and of their fragility and transience, battles with a recurring conviction of the imperishability of language. The narrator of *Jacob's Room* worries that words have been used too often,
that their freshness quickly fades; this concern is shared by many other characters. People frequently are lulled by the rhythm of words, thereby forgetting their meaning. Words that cannot quite be heard, nursery rhymes, street sounds, faraway conversations, enter the consciousness of many characters. Septimus watches words become shapes that explode; Mrs. Ramsay is soothed by the sound of her husband's voice, which makes the waves benign, a cradle song. The crooning of the pigeons in *The Years* reminds characters of the "little language" of childhood; Isa Oliver's pleasure in words is largely sensual, divorced from meaning.

The assigning of meaning to words is everywhere seen as a difficult task; Woolf suggests that while these rhythms may comfort because they remind people of natural cycles, they are also dangerous. Death, too, is part of nature's cycle, and human beings must fight for meaning and form. It is too easy to give up the contest, and slide into meaninglessness and incommunicability; as Bernard says at the end of *The Waves*, we must "regain the sense of the complexity and the reality and the struggle."

Woolf's repeated use of the words "phrase," "language," and "word" suggests her special definitions of these aspects of the novelist's medium. The "word" seems to have a mystic significance for her; almost a religious import. Words are the symbolic equivalent of reality, in isolation; they are "hard," yet reverberate with memories and
associations. She often compares them to birds and other living things, to drops of water, to stones on a beach. Singly, they are the most basic unit of meaning, yet for humans to remain on the level of single words is to cling to childhood's simplicity. In her diaries and essays, as well as in her novels, Woolf speaks most often of the "phrase," rarely the "sentence." Words are the raw materials; they must be "glued together" in new and complex ways in order to interpret the world. She suggests that these combinations of words are frequently unfinished, either creatively open-ended or else aborted. The selection, from the common pool, of words to link together in larger formulations of meaning is the most important step in the individual's maturity and in the continuing enterprise of language, the system of communication that is oldest, most basic to human civilization, most difficult to mold into the shape of present realities. Each person, then, rediscovers for himself this ancient system.

Ideally, the creation of phrases is part of the discovery of sequence and continuity. But in her later novels, especially, there seems frequently to be a crisis of language, a radical dislocation between words and meaning. People face unconquerable reticence, inescapable interruptions. The task of the artist, then, becomes more pressing; the single narrator's voice splits off occasionally, in these novels, into larger-than-human voices, voices of time,
history, "human pain unending," to point out enduring connections and to represent a continuing artistic enterprise aimed at healing the "fissures" in life. The artist seems to draw from the pool of words those combinations that most closely approximate maximum expressiveness; the implication is that the inarticulate characters who people Woolf's novels might all dig more deeply into this verbal reservoir, if they could leave behind their inadequacies and the world's interruptions. But since humans can never inhabit an ideally expressive world, the artist must demonstrate the immense possibilities of verbal communication.

James Naremore links Virginia Woolf with other modern authors who struggle with their medium itself:

Perhaps she was aware that the heart of her fiction was silence. In the later half of her career she made tentative efforts to find a new kind of language, represented by the monotonous, declamatory monologues in The Waves and the doggerel passages in Orlando and Between The Acts. In this respect she has something in common with Joyce and Beckett, who for quite different reasons had their own conflicts with words. For Joyce, the solution lay in an avoidance of his own voice, an overmastery of English with mimicry and solecism. For Beckett, the answer was passive resistance and ultimately retreat into elemental French. Virginia Woolf's struggle with language grew out of different sources, and . . . it had far less radical results. Nevertheless, like some other modern authors, she seems to be contending against the very medium of her art. 24

I have found that Woolf's "struggle with language" took more complicated and varied forms than Naremore suggests. Her continual self-criticism and frequently expressed
frustrations over the intransigence of words co-exist with an almost childlike delight in their malleability. She never varied in her desire to communicate with her "common reader"; she never consciously let experimentation obscure her meaning or purpose. In her diary she writes, "I feel indeed rather more relieved of my meaning than usual" (AWD, 66). And again, "I have now at least six stories welling up in me, and feel, at last, that I can coin all my thoughts into words" (AWD, 73). She insists upon resolving the chaos of modern life by re-examining the ancient tool of human communication: words. If she is frequently pessimistic, she never depairs of language and never deserts her reader.

I have attempted to isolate certain major aspects of Woolf's theme, aspects dramatized in many of the novels, presented as philosophical constructs in The Waves. My first chapter traces the stages in Rachel Vinrace's development of language facility. She almost literally learns to speak in The Voyage Out, suggesting the vital role of verbal communication, for Woolf, in the acquisition of experience and maturity. Rachel, and Katharine Hilbery, the heroine of Night and Day, struggle to make language conform to and express the complexities of human relationships. These young women are most at home with other systems, music and mathematics, but they gradually acknowledge the primacy of verbal communication in the expression and
interpretation of the self.

My second chapter deals with the two novels most concerned with London life and with war, Mrs. Dalloway and The Years. In these works, Woolf demonstrates the formidable barrier that language itself can erect against communication and the search for truth. In Mrs. Dalloway, the barriers are largely imposed by human beings; in The Years, powerful world disruptions add further obstacles to self-expression and dialogue. These two novels are remarkable for their presentation of continual interruptions, unceasing noise, the disastrous slide from meaning to incomprehensibility.

My third chapter examines To The Lighthouse and Between The Acts, novels where Woolf considers the battle for self-expression engaged in by the domesticated and the artistic woman; both devise different languages to resolve the conflicting demands placed upon them by family, society, men, and their own perceptions of meaning and significance. For Mrs. Ramsay, Isa Oliver, Lucy Swithin, their private languages are most flexible; only the reader, however, shares their most personal verbal formulations. The artists, Lily Briscoe and Miss La Trobe, expose their "shivering private visions" through the medium of their art, although their success in communicating is only partial. All these women try to make sense of their world through language.
The uses and permutations of language dramatized in most of Woolf's novels are presented in philosophical form in *The Waves*, the subject of my fourth chapter. Here, in the "silent speech" of six characters, she re-examines language as a key to maturation, as a barrier against true communication, as a battle for women and a friendly foe to artists, as the most imperfect and potentially the most expressive means of fostering human relationships, of imposing form and meaning upon the world. Throughout her work, Woolf implies more and more strongly that it is the artist's task to present ideal communication, to demonstrate through narration the hidden similarities between people, the unperceived and unused opportunities for significant verbal intercourse. Narration, then, as I examine in my conclusion, may in some sense be the key to her lifelong examination of the provinces of language.

As Virginia Woolf's diaries and letters are published, one gets an overwhelming sense of words being continually formed into phrases; one hears voices perpetually engaged in manipulating language towards maximum expressiveness. The voices of Bloomsbury become vivid, particularly the unmistakeable tones of Virginia Woolf. Despite the sieges of illness, when she heard incomprehensible voices, Woolf appears to have spent most of her life in the pursuit of more perfect verbal communication on all levels. Her novels reflect her interest in promoting human relationships,
against all odds. Her insistence upon the struggle for self-expression suggests that in a chaotic world it is mankind's responsibility to create and sustain order. Life, then, becomes an unending search for meaning, and language the most important bridge between the world of the mind and external reality, and between individual consciousnesses. But she is not indiscriminate; she promotes meaningful language, freed from self-imposed and societal restraints, able to touch now and then the realms of art. The poetic precision of her narrators, her meticulous detailing of states of mind and of the relationship of the noise-filled outside world to those minds, what R.L. Chambers calls "her power to express the incommunicable thought," suggests her conviction of the artist's responsibility to fashion order from disorder, to present the possibility of maximum expressiveness and complete sympathy.

The novels of Virginia Woolf demonstrate a persistent concern with the complex role of language in human life. People's relationship with words comes before and between their relationships with human beings, and much of the action of these novels revolves around a struggle with language itself. The success or failure of that struggle often reflects the success or failure of the character, and always makes some comment on the society that listens and responds, or refuses to. Human history is increasingly
seen as a battle against the natural and unnatural forces that would silence people and stifle attempts to find and express meaning and significance. A study of this important and unifying element of Woolf's work should further clarify her artistic purpose.

In her diary, she ponders the sort of death she would prefer: "I like to go out of the room talking, with an unfinished casual sentence on my lips" (AWD, 71). Death, then, would be an abrupt end of conversation; language is life.
I. Language and Maturation: The Voyage Out

The role of language in the acquisition of knowledge and experience figures prominently in Virginia Woolf's first novel, The Voyage Out. If Rachel's brief "voyage out" is a sort of initiation into experience, it may also be seen as a gradual progress towards articulation, towards the closest possible relationship between words and truth. Rachel passes from being an awkward, inarticulate young woman, who expresses herself best with music, to a woman increasingly concerned with discovering and sharing truth through language, to a lover who discovers a private and at least partially satisfying language of great expressiveness, and finally to a sufferer condemned by illness to a period of gradual regression and separation from others, until death overcomes her. Her struggle to come into her own as a human being is importantly related to her desire to express herself verbally. All the stages of Rachel's life are in large part described in terms of the development and permutations of her use of language. Virginia Woolf's major interest in the workings of language is strikingly evident in this first novel; an analysis of Rachel's developing relationship with words offers an avenue into the book's total meaning.

Rachel is introduced as an inexperienced, solitary girl whose sheltered life has not only stunted her verbal
abilities, but has convinced her that words are meretricious and better kept to oneself. Her difficulties in speaking to others are epitomized by her "slight stammer," her "hesitation in speaking, or rather a tendency to use the wrong words, [that] made her seem more than normally incompetent for her years." She has adapted to her uncommunicative father and convention-bound aunts by expressing her feelings in music. She has had no opportunity to converse; she is used to interpreting the world in the privacy of her mind, and then working out her frustrations on the piano. Once she had tried, "with her slight stammer," to explore with her aunt Lucy her frequent sensations of the strange unreality of even the most ordinary life, but she managed only to hurt the woman's feelings. She concluded then that feeling strongly separates one from people, "that nobody ever said a thing they meant, or ever talked of a feeling they felt" (37). "Reality dwelling in what one saw and felt, but did not talk about," she will stick to music. Her personality has remained unformed, and the usual questions a child asks about the world have, for Rachel, gone unasked and unanswered.

Another of Rachel's aunts, Helen Ambrose, is discouraged by her initial attempts to talk with the girl as they set out on their sea voyage; Rachel, she decides, needs "to think, feel, laugh, or express herself." Since Rachel remains alone in her cabin, lost in thought or in her music, Helen is not at first interested in pursuing their relationship. But the
arrival on board the *Euphrosyne* of the Dalloways provokes Rachel's intense desire to understand and to be understood. She is enchanted by the couple's sophistication, although "she had taken no part in the talk; no one had spoken to her" (46). She longs to learn from them, to ask her "enormous question, which she did not in the least know how to put into words" (56). But the exigencies of polite social talk prohibit her from intruding her feelings; she is continually constrained. "The talk . . . raced past her." Frustrated, she escapes to her music, which provides "the invisible line . . . a shape, a building" that words cannot. Mrs. Dalloway interrupts her playing, but Rachel finds her easy to talk to, "able to understand without words" (61). Rachel must attempt expression:

She was overcome by an intense desire to tell Mrs. Dalloway things she had never told any one—things she had not realised herself until this moment. "I am lonely," she began. "I want--" She did not know what she wanted, so that she could not finish her sentence; but her lip quivered (60).

Later, Rachel attempts to talk to Richard Dalloway; she is frightened but "he seemed to mean what he said" (65), and so she tries "to recollect and then to expose her shivering private visions." But Richard misunderstands her attempt to explain the essential loneliness of human beings; he prefers to think of the world as a whole. "The attempt at communication had been a failure," but Rachel tries again, out of "a thrusting desire to be understood." She is stymied by ideas she cannot express; he is struck by "how little,
after all, one can tell anybody about one's life" (68). Rachel asserts that "it's the way of saying things . . . not the things," but their conversation is interrupted by the sighting of two English warships, which as they pass awaken so many private feelings about country and Empire that "it was not until they were again invisible that people spoke to each other naturally." The urgency of Rachel's need to communicate is striking as she strives to overcome her shyness, her uneasiness with words, the frequent interruptions.

Her attempts to talk are continually frustrated; nature, then, banishes language. The fury of a storm is followed by the whirlwind of physical passion. After bemoaning "this reticence--this isolation," Richard Dalloway kisses her passionately. Later, Rachel has a nightmare about "a little deformed man who squatted on the floor gibbering." The sexual fear combines with a vision of inarticulate lust, "gibbering." The attempt to give words to her "shivering private visions" is cancelled by the intrusion of wordless passion, just as the storm had temporarily halted the normal social life of the travelers. In the face of natural furies, language is overwhelmed. The later exploration of Rachel's and Terence's love, and of Rachel's silent descent into death, will confirm this early impression.

The bewildering experience with physical passion leads Rachel to Helen, who tries to explain to the sheltered girl that men desire women. "Helen's words hewed down great blocks which had stood there always" (81); Rachel realizes
why she has not been permitted to walk alone. Her life then seems "a creeping hedged-in thing . . . the short season between silences." Helen goes on talking, deflating the Dalloways, and Rachel marvels at the fascination of people "when they talked to one [and] ceased to be symbols" (83). Rachel perceives language here as both the ineffectual mark of her own life, and as the delineator of character, the sign of human individuality. She is moving gradually from a stuttering innocence to a communicating maturity. From this point, words will assume an increasing importance for her. The dawning of her identity as an individual functioning in society compels her to assert that individuality in language.

The first section of the novel, then, introduces an inarticulate girl with private visions who longs, despite protestations to the contrary, to make contact, to be understood. Her attempts to communicate with the Dalloways are at first exhilarating, then frustrating when they are aborted by the intrusion of wordless passion. Such an intrusion cannot be reconciled either with polite talk or with the delicate, awkward, private conversations between people with some desire to reach each other. Like the storm at sea, passion drowns out language. Still, Rachel has had her eyes opened to aspects of experience hitherto denied her; she has also managed to ingratiate herself with Helen Ambrose, a person at ease with language, who will now attempt to educate her further.
Living with the Ambroses effects certain subtle changes in Rachel's use of language. They are a communicating and happily-married couple, and Rachel has been able to observe their relationship. More importantly, she has been encouraged to take part in conversation, to state her opinions, to argue. Now she attends "to what was said as though she might be going to contradict it." For the first time, Rachel begins to take her place in a household as an independent personality; now, she can even share "a comfortable silence" (97). Helen has been trying to compensate for her niece's sheltered life, and "talk was the medicine she trusted to, talk about everything, talk that was free, unguarded, and as candid as a habit of talking with men made natural in her own case" (124). The barriers against open communication are dropped, and Rachel begins to blossom.

But the feelings of unreality that have plagued her before continue to undermine any tendency to trust the expressiveness of language. Helen gives her books, but Rachel reads "with the curious literalness of one to whom written sentences are unfamiliar and [handles] words as though they were made of wood, separately of great importance, possessed of shapes like tables and chairs" (124). Although she is becoming more comfortable with speech, the fluidity of words in phrases and sentences eludes her. Language seems too solid and unmalleable to represent a world which appears frequently transient and dissolving. As she had on the
Euphrosyne and earlier in her life, she is capable of losing her sense of herself as a discrete personality. Then she is conscious only of "the clock still ticking in the midst of the universal silence" (125), a continuation of her earlier sense of her life as "the short season between two silences." Later she will learn to struggle against this radical dislocation between words and experienced reality; she will demand the truth from language. But at this stage of her development, she drifts passively in and out of this self-annihilation, and is brought back only by the human voice, and even then slowly. When Helen hands her Terence Hewet's invitation to climb Monte Rosa, she "read the words aloud to make herself believe in them" (126). The invitation leads Rachel gradually into the most important phase of her maturation, her love affair. Clearly, she needs other people to assist in her acquisition of language; each stage in her progress is marked by the enlarging of her world of acquaintances.

Through her developing relationship with Terence Hewet, Rachel discovers the significant speech and silences of love's private language. The stages in the creation of that language are previewed by the lovers Susan and Arthur, whose dawning intimacy isolates them and imposes constraint upon those around them. The initial contacts between Rachel and Terence are, understandably, awkward and difficult, but from the first they exhibit a powerful urge to communicate. Rachel is "slow to accept the fact that only a very few things can
be said even by people who know each other well" (145). She will never really reach an accommodation with this fact; she will not live long enough. But her brief experience of love will drive her to struggle towards maximum expressiveness, and to reject angrily all verbal falseness and social expediency. The link between maturation and the development of a language adequate to express the self and to communicate with others is explored most thoroughly in this third phase of Rachel's growth.

The first significant indication of Rachel's growing feelings for Terence occurs on the morning after the dance; she experiences a revelation, an epiphany. The all-night affair has not only drawn her closer to Terence but to his difficult, intellectual friend, St. John Hirst. As she walks outside her uncle's house, the faces of the party come before her: "she heard their voices; she stopped singing, and began saying things over again or saying things differently, or inventing things that might have been said" (173). Consumed by these visual and verbal impressions, she is abruptly stopped by a tree that suddenly "appeared so strange that it might have been the only tree in the world" (174). From the tree, she turns to the Gibbon she borrowed from St. John and thinks, "never had any words been so vivid and so beautiful" (175). Admitting finally that the source of her exultation is Hirst and Hewet--"from them all life seemed to radiate; the very words of books were steeped in radiance"--that they
promise limitless possibilities of knowledge, that they promise love, she puts her central question into words: "What is it to be in love?" she demanded, after a long silence; each word as it came into being seemed to shove itself out into an unknown sea" (176). Rachel is changing from a non-verbal stammerer into a woman for whom words suggest infinite vistas of knowledge and experience. She is turning eagerly to people intimately connected with, and dependent upon, language, a writer and a scholar, and is stimulated by them to verbalize her important questions and to search for answers within language. This mystical episode has been importantly connected with, even triggered by, words remembered, read, and spoken.

Rachel's development closely parallels the growing feelings of Terence Hewet, a young man who, if he is considerably more articulate than Rachel, is still new to the experience of love. His thoughts and encounters at this point extend and deepen the implications of Rachel's revelation. Brooding over his feeling "as if he had been in the middle of a talk which interested him profoundly when some one came up and interrupted him" (184), he asks, "Did love begin in that way, with the wish to go on talking?" He hears Rachel's voice in his mind as she had heard his, and his eavesdropping on a conversation between Rachel and Helen at the Ambrose villa leads him to a similar exhilaration about language. Like Rachel reading Gibbon after her vision of the strange tree,
Terence "shouted out a line of poetry, but the words escaped him, and he stumbled among lines and fragments of lines which had no meaning at all except for the beauty of the words" (187-8). "Roaring innumerable words, lovely words about innumerable things," he goes back to the hotel. His excitement, like Rachel's, expresses itself in a delight in the beauties and infinite suggestibility of words.

Their relationship does not develop smoothly, but with painful slowness; their deepening communication is matched by a stubborn reticence. During one important encounter, Terence longs to shortcut the torturous process of knowing another person by taking Rachel in his arms and eschewing the "indirectness" of conversation, but he is afraid to; Rachel begins to speak about herself but despite Terence's obvious interest is afraid "she had been talking too much" (214). She is reluctant "to define sensations which had no such importance as words were bound to give them." They each fear that the other is indifferent; Terence's desire to write a novel "about Silence . . . the things people don't say," receives its ironic comment by his failure to perceive accurately Rachel's thoughts. Fortunately, as though she read his mind, Rachel admits that she likes him. He returns the sentiment, "speaking with the relief of a person who is unexpectedly given an opportunity of saying what he wants to say" (218). At that moment, the lateness of the hour strikes them, they hurry back, and Rachel leaves him without a word:
"She could not ask him to come in. She could not say that she hoped they would meet again; there was nothing to be said ..." (219). When she is gone, Terence's discomfort returns. "Their talk had been interrupted in the middle, just as he was beginning to say the things he wanted to say."

He reviews their desultory conversation and despairs: "What was the use of talking, talking, merely talking?" Once again, they struggle painfully to communicate, stymied by self-consciousness and a growing attraction they both welcome and fear. These frustrating meetings continue: "Over all their partings hung the sense of interruption, leaving them both unsatisfied, though ignorant that the other shared the feeling" (224). One recalls Hewet's earlier question: "Did love begin in that way, with the wish to go on talking?"

Evidently, that wish co-exists with an equally strong conviction that talk is fruitless and unsatisfying.

But Rachel is clearly trying to use language meaningfully. The growing importance of words for her is further demonstrated in this section by her significant reaction to the church service she attends at the hotel. She suddenly perceives the disparity between the words and the ideas of Christianity, and the discovery causes her to lose her formerly unexamined faith. She becomes conscious of "the childlike babble of voices" (226). Most people lazily "accepted the ideas that the words gave as representing goodness," but Rachel, for the first time, "listened critically to what was
being said." The psalm of the day is particularly apt: "They daily mistake my words." Rachel is distressed "by the voice of Mr. Bax saying things which misrepresented the idea, and by the patter of baaing inexpressive human voices falling round her like damp leaves." Once again, a significant episode in her life, her first serious questioning of organized religion, is stimulated by language and resolves itself into a demand for words that are meaningful and precise. Rachel is becoming obsessed with meaning, with fitting language to truth. Ironically, Terence, thinking of Rachel after the same church service, identifies the reasons for his loving her in her ability to facilitate conversation and to speak honestly. He credits her with the verbal sincerity she increasingly demands from others (243-4).

Just prior to the climactic journey up the river, during which Rachel and Terence discover the effects upon language of expressed love and physical passion, Rachel spends a frustrating day trying to find answers to the puzzles of life that her growing experience makes her increasingly conscious of. Unfortunately, she discovers that, although lovers may devote themselves to enhancing communication, other people, however well-intentioned, cannot help her through the central human dilemmas. As the subsequent river expedition will suggest, some parts of life are resistant, even impervious to language. She visits the flighty, confused Evelyn first, but each of them is hopelessly bound up
in her own private emotional difficulties. Rachel finds no explanation of love's mystery from Evelyn, and Evelyn finds no intimacy with Rachel: "I wish you'd sit down and talk . . . You make me feel as if you were always thinging of something you don't say . . . . Do say it!" (251). But Rachel does not respond; she leaves and communication is aborted.

Next, Rachel accepts the invitation to visit Miss Allan; "for it seemed possible that each new person might remove the mystery which burdened her" (252). Miss Allan is kind and interesting and seems capable of imparting wisdom:

She seemed to have known and experienced so much . . . that surely there must be balm for all anguish in her words, could one induce her to have recourse to them. But Miss Allan . . . showed no signs of breaking the reticence which had snowed her under for years. An uncomfortable sensation kept Rachel silent; on the one hand, she wished to whirl high and strike a spark out of the cool pink flesh; on the other she perceived there was nothing to be done but to drift past each other in silence (255).

"I find it very difficult to say what I mean," Rachel admits finally. Miss Allan believes this to be "a matter of temperament"; clamly she observes, "for myself I find there are a great many things I simply cannot say." She senses that Rachel is in difficulties but "her life had schooled her to restrain her tongue," although her goodwill towards the young "often made her regret that speech was so difficult" (257). In despair, painfully conscious of the isolation of people from one another, Rachel accepts the Flushings' proposal for an expedition up the river. Her futile attempts to find
answers to life's most complex problems in the self-bound, convention-bound words of others suggests the inaccessibility of language to certain mysteries of existence. The expedition takes her deeper into this wordless realm.

This ambiguous, often-frightening journey is in large part a metaphor for Rachel's movement, with Terence, into the mysterious world of love. The journey is in stages, and each stage is described in terms of a changing, and sometimes disappearing, language. Throughout Woolf's work, the experience of physical passion is identified with the enduringly primitive, non-verbal side of life. One surrenders one's self, at least temporarily, and when the self departs it takes language with it. The first stage of the journey, accordingly, leads them into a dark silence. Those on the boat can neither read nor speak; the non-verbal world intrudes on all attempts to communicate. Terence tries to read but "a bird gave a wild laugh, a monkey chuckled a malicious question, and, as fire fades in the hot sunshine, his words flickered and went out" (267). The noises of the forest come and go, "and then long spaces of silence." The atmosphere is sinister and strange, and they are drawn into it helplessly. As it will be in later novels, darkness is the element of silence and non-being, light the signal of language and personal identity.

The boat provides some shelter from the wilds, but it is necessary for Rachel and Terence to penetrate the darkness
more deeply: to touch, that is, the central mysteries of love and the self. They walk into the woods together, where "the noises of the ordinary world were replaced by . . . creaking and sighing sounds" (270). Their confession of love is described in terms of a language that seems part of the overwhelming silence; the frequent use of the word "silence" is especially striking here. "The silence was again profound"; "Silence seemed to have fallen upon the world"; "The silence was then broken by their voices which joined in tones of strange unfamiliar sound which formed no words"; "sounds stood out from the background making a bridge across their silence" (271). The absence of all familiar reference points contributes to this silence and makes what words are spoken sound strange. The primitive environment and the ageless emotions Rachel and Terence share mingle and lead them into a world without words, a world in which the self is surrendered. The heart of the mystery that Rachel had earlier sought to penetrate in words is reached in silence.

But humans cannot remain for long in what Bernard of The Waves will call "the sunless territory of non-identity." Despite a lingering sense of unreality, Terence and Rachel grope their way back to familiar things, to language. The journey back is difficult; they feel as if they "had dropped to the bottom of the world together" (274), and were separated from the others on a different plane of existence. The sense that Terence has of other people speaking
incomprehensible words above him, while he and Rachel remain together below, is paralleled by Rachel's sinking for a moment into an ego-less, speechless state; she literally falls down and hears only "broken fragments of speech" from those around her. Nothing is familiar to her, nothing seems real. Unlike Terence's earlier feeling of separation when with Rachel, Rachel is alone here, isolated from the meaning of everyone's words. In this preview of the separation her illness will bring, language seems a perilous medium for Rachel; she is obsessed with using it and yet its powers escape her frequently. Her self seems fragile, easily lost and hard to reassume; she does not move easily from the extraordinary and rarefied back to the mundane. The isolation of lovers and their gradual creation of a private language is a battle for her. Her identity seems especially precarious and her use of words a continual struggle against meaninglessness and silence.

The river expedition is not yet over, and the primitive world around the travelers has a silencing and disquieting effect. Their visit to a native village where the people live "far, far beyond the plunge of speech" (284) makes them feel melancholy and insignificant, gives them "presentiments of disaster." Painfully, Rachel and Terence attempt to speak to one another, and "with every word the mist which had enveloped them, making them seem unreal to each other, since the previous afternoon melted a little further, and their
contact became more and more natural" (281). The experience of physical passion has been described in terms of dissolving, reforming, changing language; the annihilation of self that love entails is seen to be perilously close to the separation Rachel will endure in sickness. When the individual ego is released from its community with others, words lose their referential value and all their usefulness as tools of human contact.

The short period before the onset of Rachel's fatal illness is a time of maximum verbal expressiveness between her and Terence. They learn to "express those beautiful but too vast desires which were so oddly uncomfortable to the ears of other men and women." They are comfortable in their own language now, "no longer embarrassed, or half-choked with meaning which could not express itself" (290). The world is different for Terence: "the book called Silence would not now be the same book that it would have been" (291). Rachel resumes her challenge to language, her naive insistence that words correspond to reality as closely as her music seems to. She condemns the notes of congratulation she has received for the sameness of their sentences, but then produces phrases just like them when she answers them. Amazed at the gulf between reality "and her sheet of paper," she asks "Why don't people write about the things they do feel?" (297). Still, the conversation between Terence and Rachel assumes the virtues Helen sensed "in free
talk between men and women"; their talk has "no boundaries" and helps Rachel to deepen and enlarge her views, Terence to marvel at her curiosity and perception. They continue to experience doubts and separation, but they heal all breaks with words and then cling together in silence (303). Their relationship has from the first been described by its fluctuations from frustrating, interrupted talk, to silence, to satisfying, liberating conversation, and back to silence. That silence is at times despairing and lonely, at times healing and unifying, depending usually upon the quality of the speech that has preceded it.

Just before Rachel's illness comes on, she is shown at a tea-party, enjoying the comfortable social talk that she always dreaded before. People's words "flowed on so lightly, so kindly, and with such silvery smoothness" (318). Rachel sees a pattern and a direction in life now, and feels calm and certain. She has a sense of a love greater than man for woman, a love synonymous with purpose and peace. The liberating influence of her conversations with Terence seems here to lead her into a secure, articulate position within her society. One recalls the way talk "raced past her" on board the Euphrosyne. Maturing love, it would appear, removes some of the burdens of self-consciousness and fear that so inhibit language. For Rachel, however, this calm interval is brief; she soon begins her descent into silence and separation.
The final phase of Rachel's life is as importantly linked to her language as the earlier stages have been. Her illness begins with a feeling of pain in listening to the poetry of Milton. The words "seemed to be laden with meaning, and perhaps it was for this reason that it was painful to listen to them; they sounded strange; they meant different things from what they usually meant." She goes off "upon curious trains of thought suggested by words . . . " (326-7). In her delirium, she tries to remember Milton's words but "the effect worried her because the adjectives persisted in getting into the wrong places" (329). Meaning begins to separate itself from language; common reference points are lost. As her condition worsens, she grows more and more isolated: "she was completely cut off, and unable to communicate with the rest of the world, isolated alone with her body" (330). Nothing makes sense; she hears "whispering" around her, "whispering incessantly." The illness is shown to affect language in the people around Rachel also; the strain inhibits them, but they try to talk of ordinary things. Terence learns to assign deep meaning to words "which had before seemed to him empty: the struggle of life; the hardness of life" (345). Rachel dies surrounded by silence and darkness, the elements already identified with non-being.Interestingly, the resumption of life among the others is described in terms of the gradual return of ordinary conversation. St. John Hirst is comforted by "the soft
communicative voices." Meaning is re-established; the nightmare is over.

The Voyage Out makes significant thematic use of the issues of human communication and of the self-imposed and external pressures that hinder it. Rachel is the child of an inarticulate, unperceptive man, who rarely expresses his feelings; she lives with aunts who exist totally in the world of polite, conventional conversation and behavior. She is sheltered from unpleasant realities but has inwardly to deal with an acute sensitivity to the underlying strangeness of life, the mysteries lying just below the surface. Her extraordinarily limited experience makes her more than usually eager to learn and to know, once she is initiated into the adult world by the Dalloways, Helen Ambrose, St. John Hirst, and Terence Hewet, and more than usually impatient with the gap between perceived truths and the methods available to express and share them. Words become the most immediately accessible tools of communication for her, more precise and shareable than music. She almost literally learns to speak, and learns also both the enormous potential and the limitations of the discriminations made possible by language. She has only a brief period of comfortable, relaxed social talk; her early death prevents her, in a sense, from relaxing her exacting standards for discourse, from being corrupted by long familiarity into the easy, inconsequential, everyday speech of, for example, married people. Maximum
expressiveness, the private language of love, is followed for Rachel by maximum separation, illness and death. She learns a great deal in the few months that the novel describes, and through her education, the reader perceives the importance of verbal communication in Woolf's conception of experience and knowledge.

This novel also introduces some of Woolf's other concerns with language, concerns which later novels will explore further: the connections of language with the daylight world of the secure, functioning ego; the link between physical passion and self-annihilation, and the resulting surrender of language; the barriers to verbal communication imposed by social convention, personal constraints and feelings of inadequacy, and natural forces; the liberation of language by love; the different meanings of silence. The contrast shown between free and meaningful conversation and constrained or aborted speech constitutes an implied argument for the way people can and should relate to one another. One must decide, finally, whether communication in this novel succeeds or fails, whether the possibilities of language triumph or are conquered by the limitations. Rachel does undeniably come into her own as a human being, a process largely described in terms of language facility. She and Terence are revelations to each other and each benefits greatly from their unrestricted conversations. Rachel's dying young may be her preservation, as suggested before, from the
corruptions that age and social obligations seem to impose upon language in its relationship to true feelings and genuine perceptions. Her untimely death may also demonstrate the fruitlessness of the attempt to communicate and express oneself in the face of absurdly destructive natural forces. The inhibitors of language often seem to have the advantage, helped as they are by people themselves, their insecurities and conventionality. Still, language in The Voyage Out is seen most convincingly as a humanizing force, its corruption or submersion as life-destroying. Self-expression is courageous, full of risks and plagued by interruptions. Maturity involves language facility, an ability to relate to and make contact with others verbally.

Woolf's second novel, Night and Day, is also in part a study of a young woman's struggle to express herself. But Katharine Hilbery is no awkward stammerer; she is a self-assured, capable woman whose inner conflicts are hidden from her family and friends. Her struggle, in a sense, glances ahead to Louis' dilemma in The Waves, to Mrs. Ramsay's, and to Isa's in Between The Acts: she must somehow bring into harmony the poetic and prosaic sides of life, the imaginative and the realistic, the night and the day. Like The Voyage Out, this novel consists in part of a series of scenes among the main characters where they try, with varying degrees of success, to speak to one another. The constraints
of love returned and unreturned, the inhibitions imposed by
convention, and the intractability of language itself, impede
their communication. Katharine, especially, is plagued by
the contradictions in her need to be silent and to explain
herself, her longing for the clarity of mathematics, and her
immersion in a literary household.

The granddaughter of a great poet and the daughter of a
woman who serves as the caretaker of his memory, Katharine
is surrounded by illustrious ghosts and the echoes of their
words. Voices surround her, voices of Victorian propriety,
voices of tradition, "the voices of the invisible question-
ers."27 Her mother is a sprite-like lover of language,
flitting back and forth between memories of her father,
dreams of long-dead authors, and the confusing demands of
her present life. As for Katharine,

... she 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 own feeling;
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 in writing (43).

This silence is interpreted by others as a quiet self-posses-
sion, and it gives her the responsibility for practical action
"in a family much given to the manufacture of phrases" (44).

But Katharine, however capable she is of running her
father's household, of pouring tea, is a woman with a complex,
hidden, private self. When she is released from the "pretense" of language, she turns to mathematics. She hides this interest: "she would not have cared to confess how infinitely she preferred the exactitude, the star-like impersonality, of figures to the confusion, agitation, and vagueness of the finest prose" (46). Like Rachel's preference for music, Katharine's passion for mathematics is part of a longing for ideal form and order, an escape from the untidiness of human relationships.

Existing along with her love of figures and mathematical signs is a rich dream world, an imaginative life that defies all attempts to express it in words: "It was a desire, an echo, a sound; she could drape it in color, see it in form, hear it in music, but not in words; no, never in words. She sighed, teased by desires so incoherent, so incommunicable" (287). Even at the story's conclusion, when emotions have been sorted out and she is engaged to Ralph Denham, she tells him that she is "a person who can't tell things" (504). The complications of human relationships force her, along with Ralph, Rodney, and Mary Dachet, to coax feelings and perceptions into understandable language, but the task is never easy, especially for Katharine, who is convinced of "the infinite loneliness of human beings" (284).

Ralph Denham, obsessed with Katharine, must learn to reconcile his dream of her with the troubled, often-silent woman she really is. He considers "how terrible sometimes
the pause between the voice of one's dreams and the voice
that comes from the object of one's dreams" (303). Similarly,
Mary Dachet believes that she and Ralph, whom she loves,
communicate with wonderful openness; but he never speaks to
her "without considering whether what he was about to say
was the sort of thing that he could say to her" (162).
Bravely, Mary reveals her love and absorbs the fact that her
feelings are unreturned. The admission of unequal affection
imposes an intensely painful constraint upon them: "they
went on to talk calmly of things that had no reference to
their feelings--a talk which, in its constraint, was infi-
nitely sad to both of them" (252). In the sensitive render-
ing of Mary Dachet's loneliness, and of the torments of
Katharine and Rodney as they too discover unequal affection,
Woolf explores the reticence that love imposes upon language.
In The Voyage Out, she was most concerned with the rich
private language of lovers; here, she details the effects of
strong, opposing emotions upon the equally strong desire to
communicate. As Ralph tries unsuccessfully to put into words
for Katharine, "although human beings are woefully ill-
adapted for communication, still, such communion is the best
we know" (487).

All the characters in Night and Day try to break through
the sheltering "envelope of personality" (271) that keeps
people locked away from each other. They try to articulate
their pain and joy, but share an anguish that William Rodney
expresses: "Why can't one say how beautiful it all is? Why am I condemned forever, Katharine, to feel what I can't express?" (66). Katharine and Ralph, Rodney and Cassandra, do manage to pair themselves off correctly, and Mary Dachet learns to adjust to a solitary life of public service: all find that "much depended, as usual, upon the interpretation of the word love" (313).

In Woolf's first and second novels, then, she explores the private language struggles of young people as a way of characterizing these developing men and women, and of revealing the society they must live in, or escape from. In later novels, her interest in private languages continues, but she also examines the barriers to true communication imposed by society upon older, more convention-bound people. She considers self-imposed reticence, and the further silencing power of world cataclysms. From ships, dream jungles, and drawing rooms, she moves to the hectic streets of London. Two novels, Mrs. Dalloway and The Years, are primarily and pessimistically concerned with language as an obstacle to human relationships.
II. Language as Barrier: Mrs. Dalloway and The Years

In her two novels most concerned with London life, Mrs. Dalloway and The Years, Virginia Woolf presents war-haunted worlds where language is most often perceived as a barrier, a hindrance, working against meaningful human contact, against genuine emotion, against self-expression, against civilization itself. In Mrs. Dalloway, the complex inner lives of Clarissa and Septimus remain mysteries to those closest to them, due in part to the paralyzing demands of polite society that distrusts any excess of emotion. The time when emotion was expressed and communication established is placed firmly in the past: at Bourton for Clarissa and Peter, before the war for Septimus. The all-pervasive inability to communicate feeling is linked with rigidity of personality, with stasis. Septimus' radical refusal to accept an inability to feel is part of the "defiance" of his suicide. Society is in part defined and judged by its unwillingness to listen and respond to the individual's plight. In The Years, the inability to communicate is given implications not only for the individual and society but for the civilized world. There is much interruption, both of speech and of reverie, in Mrs. Dalloway; interruption is an essential thematic and stylistic technique in The Years. The process of discovery is continually intruded upon by the demands of
social existence, by ugliness and decadence, by fear of ridicule or censure. The Years is filled with unfinished sentences, unanswered questions, untranslated foreign phrases, ungiven speeches, incomprehensible songs. People find themselves talking about the same things on the eve of the second war as they did in the midst of the first.

Both novels contain an extraordinary amount of noise, sounds without precise significance, sounds that interrupt or supplant language: clocks, bells, backfiring cars, planes, fragments of passing conversations, jingles, the rhythms of birds, vendors and street singers. In Mrs. Dalloway, the "normal" people try more or less successfully to assimilate these sounds, and use them to organize their lives and to stimulate memories. But people also look vaguely, vainly, for significance, for a sign, in the uproar that surrounds them; Septimus manifests his illness by taking these "signs" personally, as messages he is meant to decipher. In The Years, language seems increasingly overpowered, the human voice drowned, by outside influences that are alien and non-human. Silence, which is frequently creative and healing in Woolf's other novels, here is full of menace; the account of the air raid emphasizes the enforced silence that war brings, the silence of human beings encircled by the incomprehensible noises of battle.

But if language is frequently seen to work against human communication, appearing to consist mainly of slogans,
platitudes, socially acceptable expressions, if even corrupt, unsatisfying speech is often overcome by non-human forces, language is also shown to be the most effective potential weapon against despair, insanity, war, time, death. The spasmodic attempts of people to use the civilizing power of language are sometimes successful at establishing contact and suggesting communion, however fleeting. More important is the attempt itself, in the face of all the obstacles. Although these novels are certainly not optimistic about the chances of language as a civilizing and humanizing force, they nevertheless do suggest the possibilities, and the bravery of indefatigable human attempts.

In Mrs. Dalloway, the barriers against communication are seen as being largely imposed by people themselves. Self-consciousness, an easy adherence to habitual behavior, a self-absorption that locks individuals away from others: all conspire to stifle any meaningful talk. The noise of London, the frenetic activity, the illusory signs, also interrupt thought and the translation of that thought into language. Most importantly, characters are constantly ruminating over voices from the past, from Bourton, from India, from the war, from their youth; these voices are compounded for Septimus by the voices of his madness, the messages of birds and trees. This language of the past, beautiful in memory but of questionable value as an aid to contemporary problems, permeates the present and often blocks out the problems of current
relationships. The accumulated experience of years does not seem helpful in solving the communication dilemmas of the present. Characters are extraordinarily isolated, receiving their occasional revelations and absorbing their fears and bitterness in solitude and silence. Only one is driven to communicate, Septimus, but madness drives him, and the radical gap between his language and the language of the "normal" world helps destroy him. It is the omniscient narrator who demonstrates the spiritual similarities among people: the connections, for example, between Clarissa and Septimus. They seem, on the surface, to have only their London home in common, but the narrator demonstrates that both remember a past of eager communication, both have difficulty expressing themselves to their spouses, both hate tyrants who attempt to impose their system of meaning on others, both have an urge to communicate and both express that urge in symbolic form, Clarissa with her party, Septimus with his suicide. The suggestion that humans are potentially able to communicate profoundly, even with their social opposites, makes their continued isolation more poignant.

The narrative technique of moving nimbly from character to character also emphasizes misunderstandings and false impressions. Thus, Rezia wonders what a stranger will think of her incomprehensible husband; the stranger, Peter Walsh, believes he is watching a lovers' quarrel. Peter unknowingly shares with Septimus and others the longing for a sign whose
meaning hovers around everyday language and unthinking associations: he sees "duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England" in a regiment of soldiers, and follows an unknown woman in a fantasy of romance. But he will hear the sound of the ambulance coming for Septimus and, utterly unconscious of the other's tragedy at the hands of society, will call the sound "one of the triumphs of civilization." At her party, Clarissa has her private moment of vision and understanding, but the social event largely consists of the false intimacy encouraged by such orchestrated gatherings. What is emphasized in Mrs. Dalloway are the hidden connections among people, the potential for communication and sympathy, the underlying, rarely acknowledged similarities. People close together in space are miles apart in understanding, locked inside their own predicaments.

The contrast between the remembered fluency of the past and the awkward reticence of the present is continually demonstrated. Clarissa Dalloway's consideration of her important relationships involves memories of things said, not said, and impossible to say. Part of the beauty and sadness of her memories of Bourton comes from her sense that only there, when she was young, did people really express themselves. She recalls Sally Seton, who had "a sort of abandonment, as if she could say anything, do anything," with whom she had "sat up till all hours of the night talking."28 She remembers her own words of excitement and
infatuation, although "the words meant absolutely nothing to her now." That revelatory attraction to another woman led Clarissa to "an inner meaning almost expressed" (47). But it was not expressed; it passed, yielding to the ordinary and trivial.

As for her old friend and admirer, Peter Walsh, she remembers best his "sayings," and recalls their arguments, the words that hurt her. She wonders, "If he were with me now what would he say?" She is grateful to him for enhancing her language: "She owed him words: 'sentimental,' 'civilized': they started up every day of her life as if he guarded her" (53-54). Still, although they had talked constantly, "he had never done a thing that they talked of" (11). This hint of the essential futility of past conversations surfaces again at Peter's unexpected arrival. The actual words they speak merely skim the surface of the torrent of memories and private impressions that only the reader participates in fully. It is almost as though present encounters are merely one more annoying interruption in the continual, private examinations of the past.

For Peter, Clarissa's words, her "My Elizabeth" and "Remember my party," stimulate a chorus of past voices. Lulled by his memories and the beauty of Regent's Park, he sleeps, waking up suddenly with words from the past on his lips, "the death of the soul," which "attached themselves to some scene, to some room, to some past he had been
dreaming of" (88). He recalls the conversation at Bourton, Clarissa's prudery, her ability to intimidate. He remembers that "they had always this queer power of communicating without words" (90). At the same time, he remembers frustration: he "couldn't explain to her; couldn't have it out." He recalls the "very emphatic" voice of Sally Seton, thinks of Clarissa's life in society, the parties and dinners at which she talks nonsense, "saying things she didn't mean" (118). His mind is filled with voices from the past, memories of things said and left unsaid.

Clarissa and Peter, then, spend much of their mental time considering and re-interpreting the past, but they are sufficiently immured in the present to function unobtrusively in society, to "fit in." For Septimus Warren Smith, however, the mind's voices drown out the signals of conventional, acceptable social life. The voices of Rezia and the nursemaid send not meaning but "waves of sound," as Septimus discovers "that the human voice in certain atmospheric conditions . . . can quicken trees into life" (32). He hears the voice of "the unseen," "the voice which now communicated with him who was the greatest of mankind" (37). Unlike Peter and Clarissa, he cannot separate the voices in his mind from the sounds of the world around him. Thus, he hears the sparrows chirp his name, and sing in Greek; he hears people talking behind the bedroom walls. Voices rustle above his head, directing him to deliver "the supreme secret" to the
world, although it takes "an immense effort to speak out."
Rezia speaks to him, tells him "it is time," and "the word 'time' slit its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time . . ." (105). Words become living things; as Sir William Bradshaw notes, Septimus "was attaching meanings to words of a symbolical kind. A serious symptom, to be noted on the card" (145). Voices overpower Septimus, conflicting voices.

Sir William, of course, attaches symbolic meaning to the word Proportion, much as Richard Dalloway equates Buckingham Palace with continuity and tradition, much as Peter Walsh sees patriotism epitomized by the regiment of boys in uniform, much as the people of London see Majesty symbolized by the curtained car. Unfortunately for Septimus, he does not recognize these conventional word-symbols; he does not acknowledge the significance of the appropriate terms. The theme of language in Mrs. Dalloway is intricately woven; both the sane and the insane hear voices and attach symbolic meaning to words. Just as Septimus endows language with too much meaning, so do Lady Bruton and Hugh Whitbread in their reverence for nobly-phrased letters to the Times. But while the language problems of Septimus lead him to destruction, and are part of his tragedy, the "art of writing
letters to the Times" allows Lady Bruton and "the admirable Hugh" to live comfortably complacent lives, and is one of the chief sources of narrative satire on the two characters. In all these cases, language is a barrier, insulating people from their current lives, their true feelings, and from the understanding of others.

The barriers extend even to people on supposedly intimate terms with each other. The inability to express emotion is all-pervasive. Clarissa, for example, accepts the necessary reticence between husband and wife that permits individuality and privacy, but her relationship with Richard occasionally suffers from language inhibitions. The mention of Peter Walsh, during the luncheon with Lady Bruton, recalls for Richard his wife's past love affair, and induces him to decide "that he would tell [Clarissa], in so many words, that he loved her" (162). Although "the time comes when it can't be said; one's too shy to say it," although he has become "rather speechless, rather stiff," still he will say it "because it is a thousand pities never to say what one feels" (175). But he cannot do it. He soothes himself by noting that "she understood; she understood without his speaking; his Clarissa," but "he could not tell her he loved her" (180). After he presents her with roses and goes to his meeting, it becomes clear that Clarissa has not really perceived his message; after he leaves she suddenly feels "desperately unhappy." Words unsaid hang in the air, along
with words remembered. The "language of love," so meaningful in *The Voyage Out*, suffers in this novel from the universal reticence of a convention-bound society.

Clarissa and Richard cannot express their feelings; this problem is compounded, as are all the language frustrations of the "normal" world, for Rezia and Septimus. Rezia tries desperately to keep Septimus from anti-social behavior, from talking to himself and making suicide threats, because she has learned that English society will not suffer such deviations. She is frightened, but can "tell nobody." The languages of Rezia and Septimus have no connection; their points of reference are radically divergent. She remembers fondly her Italian home and speaks aloud her memories, "but to whom?" For Septimus, Rezia's voice, trying to call him back to reality, is felt as an interruption of the message he is trying to hear. He applies her words to his own private visions. She is the suffering multitude to whom he will tell his revelation. He hears Evans singing; "but she heard nothing" (213). They are hopelessly locked away from each other. Septimus' voices keep them apart.

Interestingly, just before his suicide, Septimus has a few moments of lucidity, when he can look at real things and see them as they are. He sees that the real world of Rezia, Mrs. Peters, hats, is not frightening, and he signifies his temporary return by "speaking as he used to do" (216). He and Rezia share the private laughter and conversation of
marriage. Rezia marvels that "she could say anything to him now. She could say whatever came into her head" (221). This was what she had first admired about Septimus; she could tell him anything and "he understood at once." But this suggestion of a relationship more communicative than the Dalloways' is short-lived. Septimus' conviction that he could no longer feel is part of what has driven him mad; his refusal to accept that deprivation is communicated by his suicide. Septimus is ill, not merely unconventional. He is driven by powerful, irrational forces. But his difference from those around him, his inappropriate speech and gestures, are at the heart of the doctors' desire to remove him from society. He is a social embarrassment, because he cannot disguise his feelings. The people around him may feel, but they are too self-conscious to express their feelings. It is far easier to follow conventional behavior; the risk of deviating from the conventional is dramatically shown by Septimus' fate.

Even fairly unconventional people cannot express themselves. Miss Kilman's loneliness and frustration are seen as resulting partly from her inability to express emotion. She leaves Clarissa's house feeling insulted, as usual, but tries to subdue "the flesh" out loud, "it being her habit to talk aloud" (195). But to Elizabeth, the young girl she loves, she can say nothing to relieve her agony and make the girl stay with her. She is "unable to think of anything to say" and Elizabeth, "like some dumb creature who has been brought up
to a gate for an unknown purpose, and stands there longing
to gallop away . . . sat silent" (200-1). Confirmed in her
loneliness, Miss Kilman has no idea that Mr. Fletcher,
Mrs. Dalloway, the Reverend Whittaker, Elizabeth, have all
been impressed by "her largeness, robustness, and power" (203).
Only the reader knows.

But if people seem determined to erect barriers around
themselves and others, they must also contend with a barrage
of sounds, noises, often-verbal signs and symbols. Their
responses to these stimuli provide further links among them,
although the connections go largely unrecognized. Clarissa's
response to London is connected with sounds: the striking of
Big Ben, life as heard "in the bellow and the uproar; the
carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans . . . brass bands;
barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange
high singing of some aeroplane overhead . . ." (5). Early
as the hour is, she hears "a beating, a stirring of galloping
ponies, tapping of cricket bats." She is extraordinarily
receptive to these stimuli: the quotation from Shakespeare,
read in a shop window, will run through her day as a cryptic,
tantalizing refrain: "Fear no more the heat o' the sun/Nor
the furious winter's rages." Next to the plays of Shakespeare
lie the more common reading material of the day, the books
one might take to Evelyn Whitbread and present before the
"usual interminable talk of women's ailments": Jorrocks'
Jaunts and Jollities, Soapy Sponge, Mrs. Asquith's Memoirs,
Big Game Shooting in Nigeria (13). Clarissa and the other characters must constantly make distinctions among the bombardment of trivial and significant language that comes their way.

Peter Walsh, ruminating about his past, is interrupted by the inarticulate song of an old woman: "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 . . ." (122). The song has something to do with love and it is ancient, as are love's emotions, shrouded in incoherence. The interruption of this song subtly mocks Peter's complacent memories and self-appraisal; it suggests a primitive underside to the emotions people try so hard to articulate, an underside not susceptible to the civilizing powers of language. This is a song that is sung repeatedly in Woolf's novels, connected with Rachel's voyage into the jungle, the old woman singing on the streets of London in Jacob's Room the song of Mrs. McNab in To The Lighthouse, the song of the caretaker's children in The Years, the frequent references to the primitive in The Waves and Between The Acts. The song is a reminder of the uncivilized, enduring, inarticulate, other side of life.

Noises, which carry with them a multitude of vague meanings depending upon the person who hears them, figure prominently in the novel. The backfiring of a motor car interrupts the mood of peace that the fresh flowers had been
conveying to Clarissa. This curtained car, with someone "of the very greatest importance" inside, starts rumors that pass "invisibly, inaudibly"; the citizens of London have heard "the voice of authority" (20). They are silent at the thought of being "within speaking distance of the majesty of England" (23). All think for a moment "of the dead; of the flag; of Empire" (25). The vague, automatic, ritual-enshrouded words that the nation teaches its citizens are linked with the ritualistic words of religion: the accoutrements of "civilization," the statues and tables, seem "to return the frail hum of the motor wheels as the walls of a whispering gallery return a single voice expanded and made sonorous by the might of a whole cathedral" (26). (Later, a man stands outside St. Paul's, longing to enter into the community that the church seems to symbolize, to go "beyond seeking and questing and knocking of words together" [42].) The sentimental attention evoked by the car, consistently mocked by the narrative voice, is diverted by the introduction of another cryptic language, the words of the skywriting plane. Breathlessly, the citizens of London gaze straight up, attempting to decipher this new message:

As they looked the whole world became perfectly silent . . . and in this extraordinary silence and peace, in this pallor, in this purity, bells struck eleven times . . . Then suddenly, as a train comes out of a tunnel, the aeroplane rushed out of the clouds again, the sound boring into the ears of all people . . . (30).
Sounds without meaning, or sounds that should awaken thought but do not, like the bells' announcement of the passing time; noises that distract or interrupt; comically trivial or fraudulent signs and symbols that are assumed to have profound meaning, like the sky-written toffee advertisement: the London that Clarissa loves is also a frightening, lunatic place, and the response of Septimus Warren Smith to all these signs illustrates this other side of city life.

Besides the uncontrollable voices he hears, Septimus misreads the signs. He sees the motor-car but does not identify what it signifies as the others do; the people must be looking at him. "It is I who am blocking the way" (21). He looks up at the "smoke words" and believes he is being given a signal of great beauty, "not indeed in actual words; that is, he could not read the language yet; but it was plain enough, this beauty . . ." (31). Where Clarissa feels herself part of everything she had ever known, "being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist" (12), Septimus, in his bewildering hallucinations, feels connected to the living trees, sharing their "statement." He knows the pattern of sensory impressions means "the birth of a new religion": "sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds" (33). The two have similar perceptions and sensitivities, but Clarissa's are fleeting impressions of the mind,
kept private, while Septimus is bombarded by his distorted senses, until his socially acceptable personality is overpowered. And Rezia "could tell nobody." Thus, people are shown to be locked into their own terrors, isolated, convinced of their separateness, lonely. The barrage of signs and symbols must be sorted out, dealt with in the conventional fashion, or ignored; otherwise, one goes mad. The illness of Septimus is made manifest by his inability to share in a common language. He has his own system of meaning and the impossibility of communicating it terrifies him. The only words society hears from him are those of his suicide threat; this flagrantly anti-social behavior brings down upon him the accepted psychiatric punishments.

Septimus is consumed by the idea of his being called "to hear the truth, to learn the meaning . . . the supreme secret" (102-2). He tries to write the message down, so he will remember it, but is bewilderingly conscious of both worlds at once, the ordinary world of motor horns and penny whistles, and his visionary world of visible music, anthems. He hears "a queer harmony," and finds ultimate truth and beauty in what he knows are "ordinary things" (105). Before the war, Septimus had loved literature and philosophy; now, opening Shakespeare, he discovers that "that boy's business of the intoxication of language . . . had shrivelled utterly" (133). He now knows "the message hidden in the beauty of words. The secret signal which one generation passes, under
disguise, to the next is loathing, hatred, despair" (134). This "secret signal" of despair alternates with an equally strong conviction of universal beauty and love. The world sees a madman talking to himself and prescribes, through Sir William, "rest in solitude, silence and rest; rest without friends, without books, without messages . . ." (150). This advice makes bitterly ironic Septimus' conviction that "Communication is health; communication is happiness, communication . . ." (141). Just before his suicide, he believes that Nature has shown him her meaning, "standing close up to breathe through her hollowed hands Shakespeare's words" (212). Those words provide the most poignant link between the doomed, shell-shocked veteran and Clarissa Dalloway, the society hostess: "Fear no more, says the heart in the body; fear no more." This line, which, besides suggesting the language people unknowingly share may also allude to the potential unifying power of artistic expression, comes to Clarissa for the last time as she contemplates Septimus' suicide.

It remains for Clarissa to explore and take into herself some meaning in Septimus' death. She senses that this nameless man has somehow preserved something by his dying, something "wreathed about with chatter," something important. Death is partly an embrace, she decides, communicating in a wordless way, viscerally, its importance as an experience all must share. Language having failed him, the suicide
resorts to a troubling, undeniable act that itself speaks compellingly. But if, as she senses, death is an attempt to communicate, it also signifies the ultimate failure of language as a tool in the service of life. Septimus' inability to participate in the ordinary, socially acceptable relationships between words and the things they represent radically isolates him. His intrusion of his private visions and fears upon society leaves him a helpless victim of those who feel called upon to protect and defend convention. His language is an unconquerable barrier, keeping him separate but also, ironically, destroying the privacy of his imagination: he must tell the world his discoveries. His is importantly a disorder of language, an inability to use and understand words as others do, and his death may be seen as a judgment upon a society which will not or cannot listen sympathetically to him. The problems of "normal" people in communicating are shown at the extreme limit of severity in his tragedy. At the same time, the force that originally caused his disorder by exposing him to mankind's brutality, war, is shown to challenge meaning most critically in the realm of language—the realm of community and sharing. The Years, published twelve years later, expands this vision of the repressive, silencing power of war.

The Years is Virginia Woolf's most relentless and pessimistic analysis of the forces, both human and non-human,
working against significant speech and meaningful communication. The novel is concerned in part with the verbal relationships within several generations of a single family; their tireless but futile attempts to speak to each other are reflected in the large mirror of world events. Political turmoil, war, the rise of dictators—all these well-known examples of the failure of dialogue find their ironic "explanation" in the small events of the Pargiters' lives. That is, Woolf presents people with considerable perception and sensitivity who nonetheless cannot, will not, communicate. The persistent use of interruption, both of speech and of dream or thought, epitomizes the formidable obstacles to self-expression. The world of noise, even more pronounced and sinister than in *Mrs. Dalloway*, seems to mock the characters' attempts to make contact: the non-human world seems to parody the human. One is confronted with a universe that seems utterly indifferent to human endeavor; people flounder in endless, meaningless repetition of words and behavior while the world is assailed by forces inimical to civilized life. The pattern and purpose that is momentarily perceived by several characters is belied by the accumulated evidence of meaningfulness. Even Eleanor's determined optimism is consistently, if gently, mocked, and she is forever unable to express herself.

The presentation of communication tried, circumvented, or avoided fills virtually every section of the novel. All
the important characters are shown struggling to speak and to understand; all confront interruption, noises, and their own insecurity and fear. Sounds and noises mock them, their reveries are interrupted, their stories go untold. Language seems frequently to work against emotion and insight, to be a maddeningly awkward barrier to understanding. This constant aborting of expression is illustrated in part by the large number of people who talk to themselves. Again and again, Woolf shows the failure of the individual to make contact as reflected by the inability or unwillingness of the community to share meanings and respond to its members' need to communicate. In the "Present Day" section, North, back from Africa, finds "phrases ready-made," although "it was difficult to remember accurately what had been said even one hour ago." His sister Peggy muses about the failure and "farce" of the "sharing" that is attempted through conversation (352-3). Eleanor, as usual, tries to share her perceptions: "But no, she thought, I can't find words; I can't tell anybody" (367). "Somebody has to say something," thinks North, "or human society would cease" (378). But all one gets at their final party of 1937 is "odd little gusts of inconsecutive conversations" (385), while outside "on every placard at every street corner was Death" (388). The little kindnesses of people, "the human voice at its natural speaking level" (411), are drowned out by incomprehensible noises, as exemplified by the mystifying song of the
caretaker's children. "'The younger generation,' said Peggy, 'don't mean to speak'" (429). The older generation has tried for years without success, finding itself talking about the same things on the eve of the second war as it did in the midst of the first. Everyone waits for the "peroration" that never comes.

The ironic refrain of this novel is no thought-provoking Shakespearian lament; it is the meaningless but soothing sound of the pigeons. Their croon, "Take two coos, Taffy, Take two coos," recalls the rhythms of childhood, before people are frustrated by the intransigence of language. If this refrain is benign, other sounds seem maliciously to work against language, as though the natural world were united against human beings. The themes of parody and of interruption are introduced immediately, in the description of the "uncertain spring" of 1880. The music of street musicians is "echoed, or parodied" by the birds. Pigeons croon "over and over again the lullaby that was always interrupted" (3). Colonel Pargiter hates the shabby neighborhood where Mira, his mistress, lives, "where the muffin man seemed always to be ringing his bell, where children screamed . . ." (6). He hears the aimless sounds inside the apartment also, the barrel-organ, the whispering on the landing. As he begins to make love to Mira, the reader's attention is drawn to "the elderly street singer" who chants, "Count your blessings, Count your blessings" (9). The sordidness of the human
behavior is emphasized by the mockery of the sounds, sounds of poverty reflecting changeless class distinctions.

In "1910", Maggie and Sara live on a noisy street filled with shouts, cries, street hawkers impossible to understand: "the rhythm persisted; but the words were almost rubbed out" (162). "The swarm of sound, the rush of traffic, the shouts of the hawkers, the single cries and the general cries" fill the house, infiltrating it with a primitive, incoherent chaos. Later, Maggie marries and moves away, but Sara continues to live surrounded by noise and unconnected voices. Her cousin North comes to visit her in "Present Day" and, as they talk, a trombone player in the street joins a woman practising scales. "They sounded like two people trying to express completely different views of the world in general at one and the same time." Then a van rattles past and "all sounds were for the moment obliterated." North, just returned from Africa, is bothered by the noise of London: "against the dull background of traffic noises, of wheels turning and brakes squeaking, there rose near at hand the cry of a woman suddenly alarmed for her child; the monotonous cry of a man selling vegetables; and far away a barrel-organ was playing" (317). Noise conspires against conversation.

Language itself frequently becomes noise, irritating sounds without meaning. At Mrs. Pargiter's funeral, Delia is at first moved by the service: "The first words struck out with a rush of extraordinary beauty";"... the
outspoken words filled her with glory" (85). But the minister seems to move back and forth from what he believes to what he does not believe; Delia cannot follow the argument and can only respond to the flashes of verbal beauty. "But what did he mean by what he was saying? She gave it up. Either one understood or one did not understand, she thought. Her mind wandered" (86). Somewhat like Rachel Vinrace, Delia is bothered by the disparity between the words and the ideas of religion. As she looks into her mother's grave, she has a sense of "something everlasting; of life mixing with death, of death becoming life," but her moment of vision is interrupted by the pat words of the clergyman; "he had robbed her of the one feeling that was genuine; he had spoilt her one moment of understanding" (87). Language works against genuine emotion and interrupts the occasional insight.

Language periodically takes on a frightening unintelligibility. In "1914," Martin and Sara walk through Hyde Park and notice the large number of people who talk to themselves: a middle-aged woman (237); once, in winter, a Negro laughing in the snow (237); a young man (238); a lady (239); Sara herself (228, 241). They pass Speaker's Corner, where fragments of absurd speeches reach them. They seem to walk through a lunatic world filled with incomprehensible words and disconnected sentences. Years later, at the Pargiter reunion in "Present Day," the mysterious song of the caretaker's children sums up, in its absurdity, the perverse
ability of language to erect impenetrable barriers against understanding. The children say nothing when addressed, but when asked to sing a song, they suddenly burst into weird syllables: "Etho passo tanno hai." "That was what it sounded like. Not a word was recognisable. The distorted sounds rose and sank as if they followed a tune." They sing the second verse "more fiercely than the first. The rhythm seemed to rock and the unintelligible words ran themselves together almost into a shriek. The grown-up poeple did not know whether to laugh or to cry. Their voices were so harsh; the accent was so hideous." When they finish, "they stood there grinning, silent, looking at the floor. Nobody knew what to say. There was something horrible in the noise they made. It was so shrill, so discordant, and so meaningless" (430).

Eleanor tries to express the effect of "the contrast between their faces and their voices ... it was impossible to find one word for the whole." She tries "beautiful" and Maggie agrees: "But Eleanor was not sure that they were thinking of the same thing." The "younger generation," as represented by the children of another class, puts the final seal on the sad picture of human beings incomprehensible to each other and to themselves.

If people very often provide their own obstacles to communication, their struggles to make contact are complicated by the inhuman, non-human force of warfare. "1917," the section most directly concerned with the War's effect
upon human life, begins in an ominous, cold silence, "so silent that the air seemed frozen" (279). Eleanor walks to Renny's and Maggie's house through a London darkened because of the threat of air raids: "... the darkness seemed to muffle sound as well as sight. Silence weighed on her . . ." (279-80). She arrives during a discussion about Napoleon with the foreigner Nicholas: "... the argument came to an end without her understanding a word of it . . ." (280). Eleanor feels awkward: "I've interrupted them, she felt, and I've nothing whatever to say." Nicholas tries to explain their discussion of "the psychology of great men" to Eleanor but finds it difficult to sum up their argument: "... he used his hands as people do who find language obdurate" (281). Eleanor supplies him with a word, although "she had no idea what they were talking about." Suddenly, "words floated together in her mind and made one intelligible sentence":

'How odd that you should say that!' she said, smiling at him, 'because I've so often thought it myself!'
'Why is that odd?' he said. 'We all think the same things; only we do not say them.' (282).

The novel preceding The Years, The Waves, has this idea as the basis for its radical form and technique; in The Years, Nicholas' comment is made deeply ironic by its relevance to disastrous world events, and to the unremitting exposure of failed communication.
Conversation proceeds haltingly, frequently interrupted and stymied by the reticence of these self-conscious people. Eleanor is embarrassed, conscious of repressed bitterness and tension in those around her, plagued by "words [which] were not the ones she had meant to use" (286). Still, when the air raid siren sounds, she feels "as if some dull bore had interrupted an interesting conversation." The "dull bore" has his way and, except for the sound of the guns, "the silence was profound." Even after it is over, "none of them could remember what they had been saying." (292). Conversation seems even more sporadic and unsatisfying. Eleanor is convinced that "nobody would know what she meant" if she expressed her feelings. She wants Renny to speak because "it seemed to her that he hoarded immense supplies of emotion that he could not express. He did not answer." She exchanges quiet conversation with Nicholas, about the improvability of human beings, and "they seemed to be talking, privately, together." Haltingly, he expresses his belief in the need of the soul to expand, to leave behind its absorption in self. Then Maggie interrupts them: "... talk in private was impossible." Eleanor has been stirred by Nicholas' words and longs to ask him questions, but Sara deflates the importance of the talk by guessing what they had said, although she had been sleeping: "Because people always say the same thing" (297). Outside; in the dark street, a searchlight "seemed to take what she was feeling and to express it
broadly and simply, as if another voice were speaking in another language" (299-300). Then she remembers that the searchlight is connected with the air raid, and the War. Years later, in 1937, Eleanor's niece Peggy will hear the sounds of London that suggest "other worlds, indifferent to this world, of people toiling, grinding, in the heart of darkness, in the depths of night . . ." (388). She will wonder how one can be happy when "on every placard at every street corner was Death; or worse—tyranny, brutality; torture; the fall of civilization; the end of freedom. We here . . . are only sheltering under a leaf, which will be destroyed." That fragile leaf shows a certain power of endurance, but the people sheltered by it must contend with enforced silence, unexpressed tensions, and powerless words of hope repeated over and over, even though the outside world seems deaf to them.

People frequently use language to cope with the repressive powers of circumstance and human nature. Sara Pargiter is one of the oddest of Virginia Woolf's characters, a person with some of the language and perceptual singularities of the suicides, Rhoda and Septimus, but without their fear. Her disassociation from the ordinary world, epitomized as much by her language as by her slight physical deformity, begins early. "1907" finds her lying in bed, listening to the dance music and the talk from the party next door. The waltz music takes the words of Sara's reverie "and flung
them out; but as it repeated the same rhythm again and again, it coarsened them, it destroyed them" (134). She sees a couple sitting in the garden and wonders what they are saying; her imagination supplies the dialogue. She looks at the Antigone that her cousin Edward has translated. "At first she read a line or two at random, then, from the litter of broken words, scenes rose, quickly, inaccurately, as she skipped" (135). The sounds from the garden mingle with her reading: "she could not hear a word that they were saying." Out of the half-read play and the half-heard voices, Sara fashions her own story and falls asleep. Her singularity, which will grow more pronounced as she ages, is in part expressed as a private language; Sara takes ordinary language and uses it as a springboard for her own fantasies. Even as a small child, she had imitated the words of others, rendering them ridiculous: "Emptied of all meaning, she had got the rhythm of [Digby's] words exactly" (127).

Sara's verbal flights bother her more conventional relatives, and keep her isolated from any potentially meaningful conversation. In "1914," Martin sees his cousin standing against one of the pillars in St. Paul's, talking to herself. Martin takes her to a restaurant and wants her to talk, but when she opens her prayerbook and begins to read aloud, he stops her in fear of someone listening. Sara's antic manner is a social embarrassment; without self-consciousness
herself, she quiets down in deference to him. He wants her to talk of her mother or of some other safe topic from the past, but Sara bursts out again in random associations. Once they are on a bus, Martin begs her to say something "very profound," as though she had a sort of wisdom beneath her non-conformity. But Sara will not perform on command, and Martin is too self-conscious to speak of his emotions. When they reach Maggie in Hyde Park, Sara drops off to sleep in the grass, like the precocious child she resembles all her life.

"Present Day" reveals the aging Sara to be as much the mimic and fantasy-creator as ever. When North tells her something of the discussion at Eleanor's house, Sara imitates Nicholas' voice and repeats what he always says, and what Eleanor always asks, perfectly. Replying to questions about what Nicholas does, she says that he "talks . . . about the soul." Her unique ability to deflate people's words is part of the oddness that lends force to her sometimes fantastic, often true, remarks.

The interruption of North's reading of his poem to Sara by the disgusting reality of the man next door having his bath brings to light those details of Sara's life that prove inhospitable to poetry, and provokes from her a kind of parody of The Waste Land or of Baudelaire: "Polluted city, unbelieving city, city of dead fish and worn-out frying pans" (340). All her bitterness over her sordid life seems
epitomized by the "Jew in my bath"; she expresses her feelings by weaving one of her verbal fantasies for North. She becomes "excited by the sound of her own voice which had run into a jog-trot rhythm." The fantasy concerns a job-seeking trip to a newspaper office, where Sara cannot seem to explain the "insoluble" problem of "the Jew . . . the Jew . . ." (342).

North considers this exhibition, which dwindles away as Sara finishes her wine:

Yes, he thought, there's the voice; there's the attitude; and the reflection in other people's faces; but then there's something true—in the silence perhaps. But it was not silent. They could hear the Jew . . . .

'How much of that was true?' he asked her. But she had lapsed into silence. The actual words he supposed—the actual words floated together and formed a sentence in his mind—meant that she was poor; that she must earn her own living, but the excitement with which she had spoken, due to wine perhaps, had created yet another person; another semblance, which one must solidify into one whole (342).

This odd verbal fantasy, which ends so abruptly in complete silence, is perhaps impossible to interpret precisely. "Present Day" is presumably 1937, and Sara's insoluble dilemma is somehow personified by the Jew who dirties up the bath they share. Somehow the newspaper presses will not stop, nor will her letter of introduction keep her safe from the sordidness of her life. The relation of all this to the political events of 1937 is vague; perhaps she is parodying or adopting the racist cant of the time. What is important is the representation of poetry interrupted and
then parodied in order to make it fit the inescapable reality of poverty. Non-human and anti-human forces, especially war and want, are formidable enemies to language. Sara talks extravagantly but her verbal flights always dwindle away into silence, her meaning unresolved. Unique as she is, her colorful use of language provides only the thinnest gloss over the barren loneliness of her life. She is one of the many people who talk to themselves.

The numerous examples of language frustration, of interruption, of unexpressed emotion and untold stories, suggest an unchanging dilemma that resists the passing of time. The novel opens with the frustration and strain of children longing for their mother to die, but unable to express their feelings. Eleanor tries to comfort the restless Delia: "She meant but she could not say it, 'until Mama dies'" (19). The family lives in an "atmosphere of suppressed emotion," of "unreal emotion" (44). Nothing is talked out; tensions and fears go unexpressed. The first of many examples of reverie interrupted occurs as Delia dreams of her hero, Parnell, "wearing his white flower. . . . But a stick grated in the hall" (12). Later, disturbed by the atmosphere of illness and by her longing for her mother's death, she begins once again to fantasize about Parnell. But she is interrupted just as Parnell turns to whisper to her; her mother wakes up (25).
Frequently, the interruption comes just as the character seems to be reaching a conclusion or approaching an insight. In "Present Day," North, stung by his sister's attack upon his ordinary, mediocre life, leafs through a Latin book, breaking off one sentence. "There the words lay, beautiful, yet meaningless, yet composed in a pattern. . . . There the words floated; but just as they were about to give out their meaning, there was a movement at the door" (394).

Later, he moves impulsively to speak to an unfamiliar young man, although "it was difficult to speak to a man whom he did not know, and say: 'What's this knot in the middle of my forehead? Untie it!" (414). But, predictably, the contact is not made; Nicholas wants to make a speech. Events and people themselves seem to conspire against any breakthrough in understanding or communication.

Eleanor, especially, is shown to be stymied again and again through her long life. In "1910," she sits at a political meeting, hearing with irritation the increasing arguments. "If we could only get at something, something deeper. . . . Suddenly she saw the only point that was of any importance. She had the words on the tip of her tongue. She opened her mouth to speak" (177-8). But just then someone leaves, and the momentary distraction leaves Eleanor's perception forever unexpressed.

Kitty drives Eleanor home; both want to speak to each other but both are shy. "There were many things that [Kitty]
wanted to ask; but the engine was so powerful; the car swept in and out of the traffic so smoothly; before she had time to say any of the things she wanted to say Eleanor had put her hand out because they had reached the Tube station" (180). People seem swept along, powerless to resist the indeterminate forces that keep them apart.

The long "Present Day" section shows all generations of the Pargiter family experiencing the frustration of failed communication. The section has a cumulative power, as character after character struggles and fails to create meaningful dialogue. As "Present Day" begins, Eleanor tries to have a word alone with her nephew North but so many people had dropped in to see her that evening, including "that very talkative man" Nicholas Pomjalovsky, that "she had scarcely had a word with North alone" (307). When they do start talking, they are drowned out by the ubiquitous street seller. North has already begun leaving when Eleanor remembers "something she wanted to say to him. But he had turned on the engine; he did not hear her voice." Repeatedly, almost comically, the optimistic, sensitive Eleanor is stymied in her efforts to communicate.

At the party, Sara tells Eleanor that she and North had been discussing Eleanor's life, leading the old woman to consider "what people called a life." She remembers that Sara is listening: "Then she must put her thoughts in order; then she must find words. But no, she thought, I can't find
words; I can't tell anybody" (367). She thinks of Nicholas and he comes to sit beside her. "If I can't describe my own life, Eleanor thought, how can I describe him?" She recalls a familiar phrase of Nicholas' and then he says it, causing her to consider these repetitions in life:

Does everything then come over again a little differently? she thought. If so, is there a pattern; a theme, recurring, like music, half remembered, half foreseen? ... a gigantic pattern, momentarily perceptible? The thought gave her extreme pleasure: that there was a pattern. But who makes it? Who thinks it? Her mind slipped. She could not finish her thought (369).

Once again, Eleanor feels herself on the verge of "something profound"; inevitably, her thought recedes into vagueness and words desert her.

Peggy, the repressed doctor whose attempt to cling to an objective, scientific outlook on life masks her unexpressed loneliness, tries repeatedly to find and communicate some important insight. At one point, she has a vision of a state of being "in which there was real laughter, real happiness, and this fractured world was whole; whole, vast, and free. But how could she say it?" (390). She tries to speak; "she wanted to express something that she felt to be very important. . . ." But when the others stop talking to allow her to speak, she finds suddenly that she has nothing to say, "and yet she had to speak." Her vision comes out as a personal attack on North, whose life, she predicts, will follow
the ordinary, mediocre pattern:

She stopped. There was the vision still, but she had not grasped it. She had broken off only a little fragment of what she meant to say, and she had made her brother angry. Yet there it hung before her, the thing she had seen, the thing she had not said. But . . . she felt relieved of some oppression. . . . She had not said it, but she had tried to say it. Now she could rest . . . (391).

But Peggy cannot rest; it is time for supper. Eleanor, whose knee Peggy has been leaning against, begins to go. Peggy wants her to wait: "There was something she wanted to ask her; something she wanted to add to her outburst, since nobody had attacked her, and nobody had laughed at her. But it was useless . . ." (392). The "fractured" world is mirrored by the spasmodic, doomed attempts of people trying desperately to make the world whole again by communicating.

Her brother North also tries to break through the obstacles. He it is who expresses most concisely the crisis in language that constitutes much of the world of this novel. "Something's wrong, he thought; there's a gap, a dislocation, between the word and the reality . . ." (405). He wants to talk to his uncle Edward about "the past and poetry." "But Edward was too formed and idiosyncratic; too black and white and linear, with his head tilted up on the back of his chair, to ask him questions easily." Edward talks politely about Africa and North rages inwardly at his conventionality.
"Why's it all locked up, refrigerated? Because he's a priest, a mystery monger, he thought, feeling his coldness; this guardian of beautiful words" (409). He vows to have a different kind of life from Edward's and Eleanor's generation: "Not halls and reverberating megaphones; not marching in step after leaders, in herds, groups, societies caparisoned." But doubt assails him:

But what do I mean, he wondered--I, to whom ceremonies are suspect, and religion's dead; who don't fit . . . don't fit in anywhere? He paused. There was the glass in his hand; in his mind a sentence. And he wanted to make other sentences. But how can I . . . unless I know what's solid, what's true; in my life, in other people's lives? (410).

He continues to listen to and observe Edward. When he promises to help "Runcorn's boy" get into college, North observes, "that's the human voice at its natural speaking level." North forgets what it was he had been thinking a moment ago. "He felt that he had been in the middle of a jungle; in the heart of darkness; cutting his way towards the light; but provided only with broken sentences, single words, with which to break through the briar-bush of human bodies, human wills and voices, that bent over him, binding him, blinding him. . . . He listened." Only language can bring him into the "light" of understanding. He longs for words that will clarify the world for him.
Edward quotes a line in Greek from the *Antigone* but refuses to translate it because "it's the language."

Then he shut up. It's no go, North thought. He can't say what he wants to say; he's afraid. They're all afraid; afraid of being laughed at; afraid of giving themselves away. . . . We're all afraid of each other, he thought; afraid of what? Of criticism; of laughter; of people who think differently. . . . That's what separates us; fear, he thought (414).

In this poignant meditation, North explains further that "gap," that "dislocation." The details of the novel confirm his analysis.

Stymied by forces beyond his control, North retreats into a dream of "silence and solitude"; he begins to drift off, although people talked; people talked. . . . And babbling—babbling. He made no sense of what they were saying. . . . And he was floating, and drifting, in a shallop, in a petal, down a river into silence, into solitude . . . which is the worst torture, the words came back to him as if a voice had spoken them, that human beings can inflict . . . (424).

Even Eleanor grows exasperated; she feels there must be "another life" where people understand each other. "We know nothing, even about ourselves" (428). She longs "to enclose the present moment"; she calls to Edward. But he is not listening. "It's useless, she thought, opening her hands. It must drop. It must fall." At the end, even Eleanor gives up the task of sharing in language the fleeting
visions of her mind.

The dawn has risen and Renny notes the need for a "peroration." But Nicholas reminds him that "there is going to be no peroration . . . because there was no speech" (431). Sara wakes up to an ephemeral picture of "the old brothers and sisters," gathered together at the window, like statues. "Then they moved; they changed their attitudes; they began to talk." They hear the old crooning of the pigeons. The morning sky "wore an air of extraordinary beauty, simplicity and peace." But this is a sky that has rained down bombs and soon will rain them down again. In the light of what has gone before, this pristine dawn is deeply ambiguous as a sign of hope or promise.

There are many ambiguities in The Years; the picture of human life is not unrelievedly grim, but the details of frustration and repression, set against troubling world events, seem to overpower the flashes of beauty and self-expression. The "gap," the "dislocation," between language and reality is demonstrated from the first section, where Delia is disturbed by the minister's insincerity at her mother's funeral. Woolf repeatedly presents failures of contact, the destruction of dreams and visions, the intransigence of language when wielded by people plagued with their own fears and the relentless force of outside political and social changes. Against all this, Woolf seems to say, language is finally overcome. Still, although humans may have little
control over world upheavals, it would appear that the obstacles of self-consciousness, social stricture, and conventionality can be confronted. The Years presents people trying all their lives to express themselves; with all its pessimism, the novel does suggest that this attempt is essential. Talk is "the only way we have of knowing each other" (171). As North realises, despite all his frustration, "somebody has to say something, or human society would cease."

In a sense, the final parties of Mrs. Dalloway and The Years bring together the voices of the past, present and future, and show them repelling each other instead of enriching present communication. Sally and Peter recall for Clarissa the voices of the articulate past; the death of Septimus supplies her with a communication from the future. But the present, the party, is plagued by the exigencies of social talk and the artificially heightened atmosphere. No one shares Clarissa's revelation except the reader. Similarly, in The Years, the old Pargiters recall frustrating conversations from their youth, their children despair of self-expression, and the caretaker's youngsters suggest by their song that the gap between words and reality will only widen as time goes on. The worlds of both novels are characterized by a crisis in language; in both, people remain isolated from each other by self-consciousness and fear. Although the pessimism about language is mitigated in both by the
persistent sense of the potential of words, these novels demonstrate that language can be the most formidable of obstacles to human understanding.
The struggle of women to balance the demands of social and domestic existence with the necessity for a private, inner life is a recurring topic in Woolf's novels. From Rachel Vinrace to Isa Oliver, women are shown devising and utilizing two languages: one that is appropriate for husband, lover, children, friends, guests; another that buffers the private self against the demands of others, and against an often frightening world. Their inward lives are frequently invaded by their outward; reality continually intrudes into the dream. Even the balanced, generous soul of Mrs. Ramsay is often bruised by the onslaught of other egos: her husband's, her children's, her guests'. Isa Oliver balances her poetry and her taste for romance, Lucy Swithin her religious faith and her imagination, against the commonsense realities of a tarnished between-wars existence. None of these women is able to share her imaginative perceptions: Isa hides her poetry, Lucy fingers her crucifix, Mrs. Ramsay defers to her husband's needs. All chafe under the division in their lives.

For the woman artist, the ordinary difficulties of communication are compounded by the need for a totally responsive audience. Lily Briscoe longs to draw Mrs. Ramsay's
secrets from her, longs to express her love; later, she struggles for the words to comfort the widowed Mr. Ramsay. She finally succeeds in expressing her sense of the profound significance of the Ramsays' life in a painting, but is frustrated by her inability to share her feelings in conversation with others. She has her "vision" and recognizes its importance, despite the probable fate of her work, to hang in a closet somewhere; but she suffers from the eyes over her shoulder, the uncomprehending audience she both requires and despises. Lily Briscoe is a more developed character than the mysterious Miss La Trobe, who growls behind her tree during the pageant of Between The Acts. But enough is known of this village playwright—she is poor, odd, unattractive, solitary, probably homosexual—to recognize her frustration as the wind blows the words of her pageant away, and her audience disperses in various stages of misunderstanding. She requires that audience and ponders her next play even as her current one is being performed; but her moments of exhilaration over communication achieved are more than matched by her persistent sense of failure. Like Lily, she is her own severest critic, and her thirst to explain herself and the world is only infrequently slaked. Neither woman has a domestic life to demand her attention; both have special gifts, and special frustrations, dogging them as they attempt to give "voice" to their private perceptions.
The voice of the individual artist is enhanced in both novels by the introduction of anonymous, all-knowing "voices" that suggest a larger artistic enterprise. "Time Passes" in *To The Lighthouse* details the state of the world in the absence of the human, of language. The Ramsays' old house is "saved" from the idiot voices of the wind and the darkness by the return of people, whose attempts to communicate reinstitute a search for meaning and form. The voices of nature and of art in *Between The Acts* link Miss La Trobe's village pageant, which presents human history as reflected in period literature and the changing meanings of words, with the history of art from earliest times. These voices, in both novels, join with the individual voices of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily, of the Oliver women and Miss La Trobe, to suggest the problems and possibilities of women's personal and artistic communication.

Mrs. Ramsay's domestic existence as wife, mother and hostess demands from her a language of conciliation, nurturing, and unification. She reassures her husband, soothes her children, and eases any awkwardness her guests may encounter. But when she is alone, she luxuriates in silence and in the periodic dropping of her role-bound ego; the amount of her life that is lived for others is reflected in the enormous relief she feels during her infrequent moments alone. Still, her sense of self is intricately connected to her relationships with husband and children. She depends
upon familiar patterns of language, sounds and verbal behavior to protect her against the terror of loneliness. Unlike Mrs. Dalloway, who perceives "an emptiness" at the heart of life, Mrs. Ramsay treasures the "still space," that which endures beyond the specific conversation at a particular dinner, that which is only made meaningful by the comforting language that surrounds it. It is probably not coincidental that Clarissa is often referred to by her first name, but Mrs. Ramsay never is. Mrs. Ramsay is much more a "connected" woman, bound in complex emotional ways to her family, and to the functions they expect from her. Her reactions to and use of language are important indicators of her character and of the nature of her important relationships.

The language of marriage, of central importance in *To The Lighthouse*, is examined in many of Woolf's novels: the Ambroses, the Hilberys, the Dalloways and the Smiths, and the Olivers are all shown to communicate with varying degrees of success. Mrs. Dalloway, for example, requires the privacy that a certain reticence with her husband permits, but the language inhibitions in her marriage sometimes frustrate and upset her. For Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, conjugal communication takes several overlapping forms: they communicate without words, they avoid certain issues for fear of causing emotional distress, and thereby feel frustrated and unsatisfied, and they fulfill certain roles
for each other as exemplified by the words they do use, the things they do say. Since the first part of the novel is seen primarily from Mrs. Ramsay's viewpoint, one is most conscious of the care she takes to say what must be said, and to keep silent when speech is superfluous or insurmountably difficult.

The non-verbal aspect of the Ramsays' communication is demonstrated several times, and implied frequently as part of what seem to be unsatisfying conversations. At the dinner party, for example, Mr. Ramsay flashes to his wife his anger over Mr. Carmichael's second plate of soup. He is furious with this drawn-out dinner but restrains himself and does not speak. The two have an angry, unspoken conversation: "they looked at each other down the long table sending these questions and answers across, each knowing exactly what the other felt." Later, when Mrs. Ramsay comes into the room where her husband sits reading and sees "that he did not want to be interrupted," she refrains from speaking, although she longs to. Earlier, Mr. Ramsay had refrained from intruding into "that solitude, that aloofness, that remoteness of hers" (104). Here, she becomes aware "that she wanted him to say something," that "every word they said now would be true." "Do say something, she thought, wishing only to hear his voice." He remains silent but they draw together, he somewhat reproving, wanting the thing she finds difficult to give, her verbal assurance that she loves him. She can
serve him, do anything for him; "it was only that she never could say what she felt" (185). Still, she knows that he hears her unspoken assurance; they smile together, "though she had not said a word." This is her "triumph"; "she had not said it: yet he knew." They can and cannot communicate; much remains unexpressed and much is intuitively shared.

Mr. Ramsay's voice frequently rouses his wife from her private meditations, forcing her to give meaning "to words which she had held meaningless in her mind for a long stretch of time" (48). He retrieves her from formlessness, in a sense; he demands that she pay some attention to the "facts" of daily existence. His peace of mind is vital to her; when he recovers it, "domesticity triumphed; custom crooned its soothing rhythm" (49). But she irritates him by what he considers her irrationality, her insistence, for example, that the weather may permit them to go to the lighthouse; she is, in turn, "dazed and blinded" by his cruel negation of his child's hope. Their quarrel and reconciliation on this subject exemplify the problem of reticence that troubles this marriage. They stand together in a frustrating silence, both feeling remorse. Despite her anger over the unfeeling verbal "truths" of men, Mrs. Ramsay "reverences" her husband's definiteness, and her expression of this trust is significantly expressed: "She was quite ready to take his word for
it." She yields to him, in part because of her dependence upon his tranquility.

That tranquility often requires a sympathy that Mrs. Ramsay unstintingly provides. She is willing to exhaust herself in order that he may feel renewed; she "filled with her words" his periodic emptiness, his insecurity. This constant giving and nurturing sometimes irritates her, although she will not "let herself put into words her dissatisfaction." His "phrase-making" annoys her; it seems a game, unrelated to real feelings. She "could not bear not being entirely sure when she spoke to him, of the truth of what she said" (61), and regrets "not being able to tell him the truth" about household disturbances, about her suspicion that his last book was not quite his best. "The inadequacy of human relationships" pains her, forcing her to lie and exaggerate. Mr. Ramsay suffers also from what he cannot say; they both regret their inability to communicate certain emotions. "No, they could not share that; they could not say that" (104). But Mrs. Ramsay tends to blame herself for most of their communication problems; her husband, after all, has "a great mind" that "must be different in every way from ours." Also, "he found talking so much easier than she did. He could say things--she never could. So naturally it was always he that said the things . . . (184-5). He admires and respects his wife, and tries not to intrude upon her solitude, but considers
her reassuring words to be part of her duty to him. She "reverences" her husband, understands his needs and fills them, sometimes at the expense of her private meditations. But she shields her children from his occasional cruelty, and will not share with him the perceptions behind her silence. Theirs is a complex relationship, and the language they use and refrain from using together suggests the choices and sacrifices confronting this "domesticated" woman.

But despite the demands of her large family, Mrs. Ramsay has her own relationship with life, her own private language, "which she shared neither with her children nor with her husband" (91-2). She has a quality of silence that impresses people, making them suspect her of some long-ago personal tragedy, a dead lover. She is a presence to her children; "only in silence" can her daughters contemplate a life different from hers. Her beauty is a powerful catalyst for others' thoughts and prompts their attempts to understand her. Her voice, even when it speaks of trifles, moves people. Her identity is "formidable."

And yet, when she is alone, Mrs. Ramsay confirms the truth of Lily's picture by feeling herself "a wedge-shaped core of darkness," relishing her solitude. With her family, "it was so important what one said"; alone, she can be silent, the "vocal" evaporates. Having shed its attachments, her self is free to roam anywhere; she can even become the thing she looks at. She relishes, more than any other of Woolf's
contemplative characters, these moments when the self-bound, role-restricted ego drops off. Even Bernard, in The Waves, is more prone to fear this "sunless territory of non-identity." It would seem that Mrs. Ramsay's sense of herself is extraordinarily strong; she is not afraid of these visionary moments when the self is unmoored from its familiar surroundings. Like Bernard, she is recalled back to the ordinary world by a gradual return of language. She begins to repeat "some little phrase or other" and adds to it, annoyed when an automatic phrase like "we are in the hands of the Lord" injects an "insincerity . . . among the truths" (98). She is often reluctant to pull herself out of her solitude and re-enter the world of language and personal identity, because that world demands from her so much giving, so much compromise.

The occasion of her dinner party affords important examples of the interweaving of Mrs. Ramsay's languages. She is a hostess, and that role demands another special language. But it is one that comes so automatically to her that she can simultaneously indulge in her private language, her reactions to the words around her, the thoughts behind her silence. Ladling the soup, she feels weary, drained of emotion, passive; "but this is not a thing . . . that one says" (126). She is burdened by her responsibility to merge these separate people into a whole, a harmonious group having dinner together; she must give herself a mental shake in order to begin that process again. But once she assumes
So, when there is a strife of tongues, at some meeting the chairman, to obtain unity, suggests that every one shall speak in French. Perhaps it is bad French; French may not contain the words that express the speaker's thoughts; nevertheless speaking French imposes some order, some uniformity (135).

She succeeds, finally, in bringing her guests together; they become one communicating unit and she can relax and indulge in her private thoughts.

One sees her sitting at the head of her table, smiling and speaking occasionally so that her silence will not be obtrusive. By means of the omniscient narrator, the reader knows that all the talk among her communicating family and friends induces in her a feeling of "security." She is conscious that these moments of communion are what endure, immune from time and change, and that really "nothing need be said; nothing could be said" (158). Language surrounds her, but this feeling of "eternity" comes and goes in silence, in the "still space that lies about the heart of things." Into this space crashes the ego, Charles Tansley's, but Mrs. Ramsay merely observes him, "rather than listening to what he said." She need not listen to anyone's words now, with this mood upon her: "... she saw them; she heard them; but whatever they said had also this quality, as if what they said was like the movement of a trout when, at the
same time, one can see the ripple and the gravel, something to the right, something to the left" (160). The words exist simultaneously in the fleeting present, and in a mystical world of pure thought where they have reverberations that endure always.

She is aware of the people around her, conscious of the words that will disturb or annoy her husband, knowing when his comfort has returned. She contemplates her children with their secret smiles; she speaks to the almost-grown Prue in her mind. At the same time, she looks at the reflections of the candles in the window and "the voices came to her very strangely, as if they were voices at a service in a cathedral, for she did not listen to the words" (165-6). She catches the rhythm of her husband's voice: "the words . . . sounded as if they were floating like flowers on water out there, cut off from them all, as if no one had said them, but they had come into existence of themselves." The words are "like music" which "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" (166). She feels that everyone hears the voice, the poetry, "with the same sort of relief and pleasure that she had said, as if this were, at last, the natural thing to say, this were their own voice speaking" (167). Then the moment ends, the dinner is over, "a sort of disintegration
set in." But Mrs. Ramsay walks upstairs alone, needing solitude "after all that chatter" to contemplate the moment that has passed, that which, "cleared of chatter and emotion," "struck everything into stability." Her sense of communion, her happiness in the space she has cleared in the lives of all these people, has been expressed in terms of a universal, all-embracing language system.

The ideal voice that Mrs. Ramsay discerns is for her rhythmic, inevitable as a nursery rhyme, "like music." Earlier, the sound of her husband's voice made the waves appear to repeat "the words of some old cradle song." When his voice stopped, the waves reminded her of the remorseless passing of time. Terrified, she listened for the "habitual sound," "half said, half chanted," of her husband reciting poetry on the terrace; when she heard it, "she was soothed once more" (28). The language that comforts Mrs. Ramsay, and the language she uses to comfort others, is intimately connected with her central mothering function. When she goes up to put her children to sleep, for example, she comforts Cam by crooning a fairy story. "She could see the words echoing as she spoke them rhythmically in Cam's mind . . . and Mrs. Ramsay went on speaking still more monotonously, and more rhythmically and more nonsensically" (172) until the child falls asleep. Words are most important to her for their sound, their color, their form, not their meaning. When she recalls the poetry that had been quoted at her dinner
table, the language "began washing from side to side of her mind rhythmically, and as they washed, words, like little shaded lights, one red, one blue, one yellow, lit up in the dark of her mind, and seemed leaving their perches up there to fly across and across, or to cry out and to be echoed" (178). Her complex sensuality attracts her to what is beautiful, soothing, nurturing; many of her actions have a sacramental quality, involving feeding, uniting, inducing rest and sleep. She rebels against "ugly academic jargon," " parched stiff words," "phrase-making." It may be said that words, as human sounds, are more important to her than the system of meaning that is language: words are symbols to her of an enduring human music, an eternal rhythm that surrounds and complements the "still space" at life's heart.

When Lily Briscoe comes back to the Ramsay's house after ten years, her readiness to understand the meaning of Mrs. Ramsay's personality is signalled by her sense that "like everything else this strange morning the words became symbols, wrote themselves all over the grey-green walls" (219).

Lily Briscoe is an artist, and a woman unburdened by a domestic existence. Unlike Mrs. Ramsay, she is not content with intuitive understanding; she fights for and demands meaning, both from paint and from language. The studies of the domesticated woman and of the woman artist are not separated in To The Lighthouse; Mrs. Ramsay is an artist of personality, able to infuse the moment with meaning and so
make it eternally significant, and Lily struggles with many of the same demands placed upon all women, who are expected to fulfill certain supportive roles in their relationships with men. Similarly, the arts of painting and writing are repeatedly yoked. For Mrs. Ramsay, words have a visual as well as an auditory significance; Lily, the visual artist, must also communicate with her fellow humans in words and she depends upon their verbal appreciation of her work; both artists attempt to wrest from the chaos of sensation and feeling some meaningful form. Lily Briscoe's use of and reactions to language are crucial to the novel's total meaning. She, too, employs public and private languages: she must deal with the social world of critical and demanding men, and must also try to express privately and in her art her understanding of Mrs. Ramsay.

Lily spends much of the first section of the novel contemplating and trying to express the significance of the Ramsays' family life. Her meditations are in part stimulated, in part interrupted, by her relationships with the male guests, especially William Bankes and Charles Tansley. Bankes' "rapture" at the sight of Mrs. Ramsay reading to her son allows Lily to stop making conversation for a while. She considers William Bankes: his unacquisitive love is meant to be shared, she feels, and "the world by all means should have shared it, could Mr. Bankes have said why that woman pleased him so" (74). He cannot. Lily is grateful
for his "silent stare" that removes from her the burden of "small talk," but is still frustrated by the difficulties of communicating what is really significant. Her own painting is "infinitely bad," and Mrs. Ramsay is not quite the ideal figure that Mr. Bankes gazes at. That gaze leads Lily to ponder Mrs. Ramsay herself: what is the source of her undeniable wisdom and power? If people like Mrs. Ramsay held some secret of life, "could they tell one what they knew?" These secrets, "which if one could spell them out, would teach one everything . . . would never be offered openly, never made public" (79). Lily longs for unity, for the intimacy which is knowledge: "not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men." Mrs. Ramsay's aura is felt "more vividly than anything she said" (80). Similarly, Lily's painting contains "something more secret than she had ever spoken or shown." Lily struggles to bridge the gap between the reality of Mrs. Ramsay, and the communicative strategies available to express that reality.

Lily thinks a great deal about the relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, and she is critical of, for example, Mr. Ramsay's inability "to own his own feelings." But the Ramsays' communication may be compared with the spoken and submerged contacts between Lily and William Bankes. She has difficulties with the male-female code of behavior; she tries to behave with the old bachelor the way she feels she is
expected to. She wants to compliment Bankes, because she believes that most men like compliments; realizing that he does not, she refrains, merely "tossing off her little insecurity" (110). Lily's troubles with the language of sexual role-playing persist; when she returns to the Ramsays' house after ten years, she has great difficulty supplying Mr. Ramsay with the sympathy that his wife is no longer there to give. Her lack of intimacy with any man prevents her from realizing the complexities of spoken and unspoken communication possible in marriage.

Lily's struggle with social talk continues in this first section, at the dinner party. She wonders why she minds what the "uncharming" Charles Tansley says about her painting; she does not want to be angry but finds herself speaking insincerely to him, with false warmth. Lily perceives Charles' need, "that thin mist which convention had laid over his burning desire to break into the conversation" (137). But she is reluctant to obey the unwritten code that calls on women to help awkward young men. She is much attuned to Mrs. Ramsay's feelings during this dinner, and obeys her unspoken plea for help with Mr. Tansley by being "nice" to him. But her insincerity disturbs her. "She would never know him. He would never know her." The subterfuges of social life frustrate her need to discover what is true. The pervasive sociability of the Ramsays' existence makes demands on Lily, too. She is too shy to express her love to
Mrs. Ramsay, or to anyone else, and the constant surveillance of her painting leaves her stymied in the artistic expression of her emotions. Her public and private languages conflict, and her attempts to interpret the Ramsays' significance are spasmodic and frustrating.

Ten years later, while still plagued by the codes of social behavior, Lily is more successful in her attempt to express her perceptions about Mrs. Ramsay in artistic form. Her increased maturity, and perhaps the absence, except in memory, of Bankes, Tansley, and Mrs. Ramsay herself, allows Lily to concentrate more fully on her painting. The "formidable" identity of Mrs. Ramsay had a subduing effect upon Lily; now, it would seem, she can wrest out of her bereavement some coherent expression of what the dead woman had meant or represented.

But Lily's "vision" comes slowly, still complicated and interrupted by her ongoing struggle with words as well as paint. She finds the atmosphere at the old house strange and disturbing; voices call erratically, ordinary questions seem extraordinary, words become "symbols." "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" (219). As it had ten years earlier, Lily's "truth" must wait until she contends with her social and sexual roles: Mr. Ramsay wants the expansive female sympathy that Lily finds difficult to give. She stands mute, "hoping for an
interruption," while Mr. Ramsay tries very hard to excite her pity. "Still she could say nothing; the whole horizon seemed swept bare of objects to talk about" (227). She feels terribly inadequate: "It was immensely to her discredit, sexually, to stand there dumb. One said--what did one say?" Only when they escape to "the blessed island of good boots" is Lily suddenly overwhelmed with sympathy for him. "But now just as she wished to say something, could have said something," they are interrupted. This final, almost-comic frustration of Lily's trying to fill a verbal and emotional role that does not suit her leaves her distressed but, except for the barely-conscious Mr. Carmichael, alone to confront her memories and her painting.

The journey towards her vision is accelerated by voices from the past that race through her mind. She must concentrate reality upon canvas, "drawn out of gossip, out of living, out of community with people" (236), but these voices disturb and also stimulate her gradual discovery of the "still space" that Mrs. Ramsay had treasured. Besides the voices, she sees mental pictures: Mrs. Ramsay, "sitting there writing under the rock," resolving "everything into simplicity" (239). Even in this image itself, the activities of painting and writing are yoked, just as the language struggles of the domesticated woman and the woman artist are interwoven. Lily calls to Mrs. Ramsay, but "all was silence" (241), and the silence, like the earlier
voices, seems portentous. The persistent image of Mrs. Ramsay does not help Lily with the verbal expression she seems to require as much as the visual. Although when she wants to remember Charles Tansley, she has to recall "Mrs. Ramsay's sayings," she remembers most clearly the other woman's silence. Mrs. Ramsay seemed glad "to rest in silence, uncommunicative; to rest in the extreme obscurity of human relationships," feeling "more expressive thus" (256). She is an intransigent, a resisting subject for artistic interpretation, even in death.

Lily's insistence upon finding verbal meaning never leaves her, even as she nears the completion of her painting. She longs to tell someone her memories; "she wanted to say not one thing, but everything":

Little words that broke up the thought and dismembered it, said nothing. About life, about death; about Mrs. Ramsay--no, she thought, one could say nothing to nobody. The urgency of the moment always missed its mark. Words fluttered sideways and struck the object inches too low. . . . For how could one express in words these emotions of the body? express that emptiness there? (265)

She wonders if perhaps the "inscrutable" Mr. Carmichael "did after all hear the things she could not say." He would understand that everything changes, "but not words, not paint." What art attempts, remains, for it is the quintessentially human endeavor: to achieve form out of undifferentiated memories, feelings, sensations. She feels that a
shout, a cry of protest, a demand for an explanation might force meaning upon the world; all that she can say, however, is Mrs. Ramsay's name.

That unanswered call seems to strengthen her artistic resolve. "Phrases" and "visions" of Mrs. Ramsay are now not enough; they will not solve the problem of Mrs. Ramsay or of her painting. As she completes her painting and secures her "vision," Lily, as a visual artist, takes her place in the human struggle to find enduring truths about that "extreme obscurity," that "still space" at the heart of life. She uses words even to describe the completion of her painting--"I have had my vision"--and joins the ongoing battle to discover languages of maximum expressiveness, languages that will communicate even silence, words that will complement and unite all other artistic materials.

Poised between Mrs. Ramsay's life and Lily's interpretation of that life, between the two sections that detail the struggle for verbal expressiveness engaged in by domestic and artistic women, is juxtaposed a section that explores, in language, the state of the world without human habitation, without language. "Time Passes" demonstrates the chaos that reigns when the human enterprise of devising language systems is removed. Human languages, frustrating and inadequate as they often are, still represent the essential project of creating form and significance, without which the world is a dark and meaningless place. Woolf shows the civilizing
power of language by describing the Ramsays' house as first deserted, then inhabited by Mrs. McNab, a woman with communication skills so primitive that she almost seems part of non-human nature itself, and finally re-inhabited by the remnants of the Ramsays' circle of family and friends. What happens to the house, and by extension the world, when humans depart, is expressed in terms of voices, the voices of darkness, of the wind and the light, of Mrs. McNab, and finally "the voice of the beauty of the world." This last voice is related in its anonymity and comprehensive world view to the interlude voice in *The Waves* and to "the inner voice, the other voice" in *Between The Acts*; it signals the return of human beings to the house. Behind all these voices, the narrator provides the artistic presence that can explain and articulate the chaotic world that must be transcended by human effort and human language.

The section begins with conversation, then "a downpouring of immense darkness" (189), which swallows up both furniture and identity. The elements of silence, non-identity, and darkness reign together, as they do in many of Woolf's novels. Instead of people, the wind and the light from some star or ship, "or the lighthouse even," take on personality, moving around the house and musing on decay, human refuse, memories, giving off "an aimless gust of lamentation." But the answers, the truths that human beings, that Mrs. Ramsay or Lily Briscoe, might ask of nature or
the night or "divine goodness" are not forthcoming. One could never "read in the littered pieces the clear words of truth." "Almost it would appear that it is useless in such confusion to ask the night those questions as to what, and why, and wherefore, which tempt the sleeper from his bed to seek an answer." Within "the swaying mantle of silence," stillness and loveliness reign, in a similar but more benign version of Rhoda's kingdom of non-being in The Waves. But "into this silence, this indifference, this integrity," there dropped, the narrator recalls, "the thud of something falling." Death comes, the war comes, and a fundamental disharmony is injected into the natural world that destroys the potential for truth in solitude, and the soothing qualities of contemplation. In the continual human absence, the chaos of nature reigns in the Ramsays' house; nature becomes sinister and brutish, playing "idiot games" (203). The house seems to reflect, almost to have borne the brunt, of all the Ramsays' tragedies and by implication the larger destruction caused by war and inevitable death.

The house is rescued by the two old women hired to prepare it once again for human habitation. Mrs. McNab takes her place with the other mysterious female singers in Virginia Woolf's novels; she sings an old song now "robbed of meaning," sounding "like the voice of witlessness, humour, persistency itself, trodden down but springing up again . . ." (196-7). Her song expresses an ageless human endurance, as
elemental as nature itself. She and her cohort bring "that half-hearted melody, that intermittent music" of life back into the house. By night, "silence falls," but it is the silence of sleep, it is "quiet" that spreads. "Through the open window the voice of the beauty of the world came murmuring, too softly to hear exactly what it said--but what mattered if the meaning were plain?" (213). "The voice would sing its song," taking over from Mrs. McNab; from simple endurance, humans move to interpret and create. To The Lighthouse demonstrates the absolute necessity, and the nobility, of human attempts to encompass all parts of life, even its silent mysteries, in language systems.

Mrs. Ramsay hears the ideal voice, the poetry, beneath the "chatter" of her dinner party; in Between The Acts, the "natural speaking voice," and the anonymous, all-embracing voice of the artist are intricately interwoven. The characters, "book-shy" and "gun-shy" in 1939, live lives in precarious balance between the savagery that is part of man's history, and the longing for beauty that forever attempts to prevail. A sense of loss permeates this book, as it does in The Years and occasionally The Waves, the loss of what was beautiful, strong, dependable. There is a concern with ritual, with history and pre-history: the Oliver barn is like a temple, the recent Coronation remains fresh in memories, people have taken "the print of some three hundred years of
customary behavior," Mrs. Swithin reads of prehistoric beasts. Houses, churches, a knowledge of history: all seem frail bulwarks against the destructive potential in nature, the "monster" ancestors who have left their mark in all people. Isa's rather affected reactions to poetry suggest the shabby remnants of beauty and taste left to these between-wars people; one sees "a tarnished, a spotted soul" reflected in the library. Words rarely have a "normal" significance in this novel; they seem to hold either more or less than their ordinary meaning. As Miss La Trobe's pageant progresses, the separation between reality and art grows less distinct. People seem to adopt the play's poetic language, speaking in songs and rhymes; gradually, the narrator seems to assume the playwright's role during the intervals, between the acts, and the artistic voice gives expression to the essential similarities and divisions in people, beneath their mundane chatter. The reader hears what characters "actually" say and what they may be perceived to be communicating. The anonymous "voices" in Woolf's novels that take over when the human presence is removed, unconscious, or hopelessly inarticulate--voices described by the narrator of Jacob's Room; speaking in Peter Walsh's dream of the solitary traveler; in the "Time Passes" section of To The Lighthouse; in the introductory remarks in each chapter of The Years; in the interludes of The Waves--such voices permeate this last novel in a complex and deeply ambiguous way. The struggles
of women and artists to sort out and communicate the perceived truths of life are joined with the ageless artistic enterprise that seeks to express the most basic connections that link all people of all times. The real, the potential, and the ideal are inextricably linked by "voices."

The many facets of Mrs. Ramsay, the "domesticated woman," are here divided among three women: Isa Oliver, Lucy Swithin, and Mrs. Manresa. Isa, like Mrs. Ramsay, is more attracted to the rhythms of language than to the meaning of words; the unspoken hostilities in her marriage, rather than any sustained verbal communication, are emphasized, and her mothering function, confined to her children, is much less important than Mrs. Ramsay's nurturing role. Lucy is most concerned with expressing herself verbally; she fails frequently but is sustained by her religion, a matter more of signs and symbols than of language. Mrs. Manresa is the totally non-literary sensualist, at ease with herself, often vulgar, freely admitting her lack of verbal skills but able to say without hesitation whatever enters her rather limited mind. Also in contrast to To The Lighthouse, Between The Acts is more concerned with the artist as reflected in her work than in the development of the human being. Miss La Trobe's personal life is much less complicated and much less important to the novel than Lily Briscoe's. La Trobe can relate to people solely in their roles as her audience; individuals are "stray voices"
to her. Lily wants most to interpret Mrs. Ramsay through her painting; La Trobe wants to present all of human history, to re-create the world.

There is, then, a difference of emphasis in these novels: in *To The Lighthouse*, the individual sums up, or serves as a microcosm for the world; in *Between The Acts*, the state of the world sums up or mirrors the individual. But they share concerns with the attempts of women to express their unique view of experience in a world dominated by men, with the particular stresses placed on the artistic woman, and with a journey towards verbal meaning and truth. When Lily returned to the Ramsays' house, words became symbols for her, suggesting the importance of the day in her progress towards her "vision." The day described in *Between The Acts* is repeatedly marked by the "symbolical," portentous, "living" aspects of language, again suggesting the special importance of this annual village pageant. In both novels, Woolf indicates the possibility of revelation, of epiphany, by endowing language with unusual power and significance; conversely, in these novels and in others, she signals the impossibility of sharing truth by the use of incoherent, mindless, or convention-bound language.

Isa Oliver tries to fit poetry to the confusions of life, but she feels herself a prisoner of conflicting sensations. Like Mrs. Ramsay, she must balance her inner life with the demands of her family. Her private self, however,
is bound up with language; she never luxuriates in silence, as does Mrs. Ramsay. Isa plays with words in her mind. When she thinks of her husband, "the stockbroker," she adds "the cliché conveniently provided by fiction": the father of my children. She is attracted to Rupert Haines; she must be in love "since the words he said . . . could so attach themselves to a certain spot in her; and thus lie between them like a wire, tingling, tangling, vibrating--she groped, in the depths of the looking-glass, for a word to fit. . . ."31

Because of Haines, the words of Byron, quoted by Mr. Oliver, "made two rings, perfect rings, that floated them, herself and Haines, like two swans down stream." She writes poetry, although some of it is not "worth writing in the book bound like an account book in case Giles suspected. 'Abortive,' was the word that expressed her" (15). She moves through the world with an elaborately romantic poetry on her lips, taking sensual pleasure in the words and rhythms, but rarely creating real meaning or communication. When William Dodge overhears her muttering under her breath, she flushes, "as if she had spoken in an empty room and someone had stepped out from behind a curtain" (51). The mundane obligations of life--ordering fish for dinner, welcoming unexpected guests--seem to startle her, to catch her with her poetry down. She is always a presence, in her large, full-blown femaleness, even when she silently observes William Dodge
and Mrs. Manresa, "thereby making silence add its unmistakable contribution to talk" (39).

Isa's sensuality is her most emphasized characteristic, linked both to her overly-lush poetry and to the strains of her marriage. She "could hear in the dusk in their bedroom the usual explanation" of her husband's "infidelity" with Manresa, but "she had not spoken to him, not one word."

Still, she communicates her annoyance with him "as plainly as words could say it" (111). As the day progresses, she feels a connection with William Dodge; they are "conspirators; each murmuring some song my uncle taught me." She takes Dodge to the greenhouse, and he knows that she has guessed his homosexuality and likes it for the sexual burden it lifts from her. "For then [women] could say--as she did--whatever came into their heads." Exchanging names, "they talked as if they had known each other all their lives" (114). She speaks easily to him, "as they always did," women talking to men who are not sexually attracted to them. But Isa recognizes only two emotions, love and hate; "all else was verbiage, repetition" (91). Her connection with Dodge does not redeem her from her solitude as she wanders alone, interrupted by the voices of people passing. "But none speaks with a single voice. None in a voice free from the old vibrations." The voices are "corrupt murmurs" (156); she is solitary, isolated.
Gentle, dreamy Lucy Swithin is extraordinarily affected by language, especially the words of her history book, but she never really converses with anyone. Words create images in her mind, and remove her from the mundane world of septic tanks, and refreshments for the pageant; consequently, she seems absent-minded, preoccupied, "Old Flimsy" to the servants. She longs to express herself: during one of the pageant's intervals, she comes "backstage," in defiance of convention, and tries to make Miss La Trobe understand what her play has meant. "Their eyes met in a common effort to bring a common meaning to birth. They failed" (152). Lucy expresses "a fraction of her meaning" and then ambles off. Unknown to her, Miss La Trobe has understood. "'You've stirred in me my unacted part,' she meant" (153). People seem extraordinarily isolated in this novel, experiencing all revelations of meaning alone. During the last interval, Lucy and Isa agree that they have missed Miss La Trobe's meaning, "but you might say the same of Shakespeare" (175). One sees a recurrent image of Isa, wandering alone and murmuring poetry, and of Lucy, reading her Outline of History and seeing mastodons walk the garden.

In contrast to the troubled isolation of these women is the unreflective, garrulous "wild child," Mrs. Manresa. Her vulgarity is an ice-breaker, allowing everyone to think, "she's said it, she's done it, not I." Manresa gossips: "Can I say it aloud? Is it permitted, Mrs. Swithin? Yes,
everything can be said in this house" (42). For the rest of them, "words this afternoon ceased to lie flat in the sentence. They rose, became menacing and shook their fists at you" (59), but Mrs. Manresa admits that she "can't put two words together." Her reactions are broad and infectious: during the Elizabethan section of the pageant, she "trolloped out the words of the song with an abandonment which, if vulgar, was a great help to the Elizabethan age" (85). She is attractive to Bart and to Giles because of her uncluttered sexuality; she breaks through torturous private thoughts with her loud laughter and gossip. She is a sort of counterpoint to the complicated, conflict-ridden Isa, Lucy, and La Trobe.

Unlike Lily Briscoe, who uses her art to resolve, interpret and make meaningful the tangle of personal relationships, Miss La Trobe has no satisfactory personal existence and writes plays to express her ambitious, often lyrical, often satirical imagination. She is as alive to the beauty and significance of nature as she is to the problems of human history: for her, the "magnificently straight" birch trees suggest "an open-air cathedral" where swallows dance "to the unheard rhythms of their own wild hearts" (65). But she can only grind her teeth in rage as her audience fails to understand her pageant. Her need for an audience balances her contempt for them. "'O,' Miss La Trobe growled behind her tree, 'the torture of these
interruptions!" (79). Still, she is painfully eager to sustain the momentum of the play, even during the obligatory intervals. She fluctuates between despair ("She hadn't made them see") and triumph ("the voice had seen; the voice had heard"). The voice of favorable audience reaction is her primary concern. As for individual people, La Trobe hears only "scraps and fragments" of their talk: "Over the tops of the bushes came stray voices, voices without bodies, symbolical voices they seemed to her, half hearing, seeing nothing, but still, over the bushes, feeling invisible threads connecting the bodiless voices" (151). She feels herself an artist, "one who seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a re-created world" (153). But the world as it exists is nothing but hostile and sordid to her. After her extraordinary pageant, she is lacerated by faulty interpretation and amateurish acting, and seeks the anonymity of "a whisky and soda at the pub; and coarse words descending like maggots through the waters" (203). Her art never resolves anything for her personally; it seems an obsessive attempt to break into the lives of other people, to force them to see beyond her unattractive social manner to the rarity of her mind.

Miss La Trobe's pageant, one of an annual series of fund-raisers, acted by villagers before the gentry, grows gradually more "symbolical" as it is understood less and less
by its audience. The novel's narrator assumes the playwright's function, "between the acts," interweaving the novelistic realities of the Oliver family and the personal situations of their guests with the artistic event itself, the pageant. Characters behave more and more like actors in La Trobe's drama, as she implies that they are with her mirror-technique of "Today, Ourselves." By having characters assume the language of the play, the narrator illustrates the pageant's effect upon individual people, and seems to join La Trobe in her artistic effort. At the same time, this overlapping of the languages of daily life and of art, of poetry, objectifies what Mrs. Ramsay perceived beneath the "chatter" of her dinner party: each individual existence may be seen as part of the ongoing pageant of life, and the fundamental unity beneath the human diversity is expressed best by the artist. Further, it is the highest function of art to describe and interpret this unity, which is momentarily perceived by the sensitive non-artist in revelatory moments. The words of the pageant have both less and more of their ordinary value; they are blown away entirely, or they take on poetically evocative meanings. The sounds of nature are seen to participate in the artistic experience also: the fortuitous mooing of cows and the cleansing rainstorm enhance the play by covering awkward breaks and inaudibility, while the wind blows its words away. Machines interrupt and sabotage communication: the
malfunctio}ning gramophone, the sudden, portentous flight of war-planes. The narrator's insistence upon the inaudibility of much of the play comes to suggest a human deafness to the lessons of history, and to the healing power of art; balancing this deafness is the evidence of the pageant's effects upon various characters, illustrated in part by their assuming the language of the play. The novel comes to be an intricate mix of art, history, and daily life, all seen as part of some essentially authorless pageant, all linked by voices: present and past, animal and human, poetic and prosaic.

The pageant seems to rise out of its audience's own conversation: "Was it, or was it not, the play?" (76). Immediately, the narrator insists that "not a word reached the audience," "half their words were blown away," "the words petered away." Chaucer's pilgrims sing, "but only a word or two was audible. . . . The wind blew away the connecting words of their chant . . . " (80). The noise that hinders communication in Mrs. Dalloway and The Years is most often created by humans themselves, people oblivious to others, locked into their own minds and problems. Here, nature itself seems to conspire against art, even to provide an ironic counterpoint. For example, when Queen Elizabeth's speech becomes audible, and she reminds the audience that Shakespeare sang for her, her words are followed by the mooing of a cow and the twittering of a bird (84). But as the pageant goes on, Nature seems to join in with La Trobe,
to help her communicate even when the exact words of the play are lost. The words that the villagers sing behind Reason's speech are blown away by the wind; but the tune, the view, and the cows provide a "triple melody," revealing, as though the playwright had planned it, the unchanging lives of the poor and those forever close to the land, going on oblivious to Restoration comedies and the intrigues of lords and ladies. To continue the emotion between scenes, La Trobe directs the chorus to sing louder but only a few great names reach the audience. "Then the wind rose, and in the rustle of the leaves even the great words became inaudible; and the audience sat staring at the villagers, whose mouths opened, but no sound came." Just in time, a cow bellows the loss of her calf and the other cows join her. "It was the primeval voice sounding loud in the ear of the present moment," filling the world with "dumb yearning" (140). The "primeval voice" joins the recurring chorus of meaning-filled voices, supplying a kind of continuity to the human artistic enterprise. Later, a healing rain shower soothes the awkwardness of failed communication as La Trobe's "ten minutes of present time" are misinterpreted as another interval by the audience. The novel suggests that the artist's function as creator of form and significance can harness even the indifference of nature, yoking all natural and human phenomena in one visionary unity.
However, the suggestions about art made in Between The Acts are not received by the novel's characters, but by the reader. The characters are shown to seize upon the few words they can hear and understand, and to relate those words to their own private dilemmas. Thus, Isa hears only one line of the Elizabethan play, but decides "the plot was only there to beget emotions" (90). Bart catches "the infection of the language" from the Restoration play; for Giles, "the words rose and pointed a finger of scorn at him," urging him to go off with Manresa and "damn the consequences" (149). The Victorian Age section comes closer to home for the audience, and is introduced, in a sense, by the conversation of two widows, who are stimulated by a London street tune to remember their past. Some are resentful of La Trobe's sarcastic view of Victorian piety, others amused. The principal characters communicate their mutual unhappiness, "without words," feeling themselves prisoners in a cage. People seem to use the play for their own purposes, despite an almost-comical lack of audibility.

In To The Lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay herself perceives the ideal voice beneath the trivial chatter, and the narrator communicates her thoughts to the reader. Her character as a complicated, believable human being is never lost, nor do any of the characters in that novel break the bounds of the realistic. Only in "Time Passes" does a voice enter which is larger, more all-embracing than any character's. In
Between The Acts, the narrator, or the implied author, plays with the outlines of her characters, and suggests ideal perceptions and perfect understanding by putting in their mouths words they could not possibly "speak." Thus, after the first act, people are seen to imitate the cadences of the play, speaking in songs and rhymes (96), so that there seems to be no break between performance and reality. "Cobbet of Cobbs Corner" is given a "line," as if he were a character in the play: "What made her imbue the antique with this glamour—this sham lure, and set 'em climbing, climbing, climbing up the monkey puzzle tree?" (97). During the "Today, Ourselves" section, all the characters from the pageant come onstage and "each declaimed some phrase or fragment from their parts." Speech becomes "symbolical," since the phrases are from the play, from the words of the audience, and from the past ("Here, Papa, take your book and read aloud."). Unlike the early novels, where the narrator's evocative comments are clearly distinguished from the characters' voices, unlike The Waves, where all pretense of realistic speech is eliminated along with other novelistic conventions, in Between The Acts the "voices" of reality and art weave in and out without explanation. One watches the canvas grow larger and larger. These liberties with the boundaries of "story" are enhanced by the increasing importance of the anonymous, omniscient "voice."
"The inner voice, the other voice" (119) appears first as the audience reassembles for the second act. Beneath their chattering mundanities, the voice expresses the tedium, mediocrity, and separateness of their lives, speaking for them, giving expressive words to their essential similarities and sorrows. The "primeval voice" suggested by the cows, and the "symbolical voices" that La Trobe hears in the snatches of conversation that reach her as the audience strolls by, join with this interpreting "other voice" to suggest a whole chorus of transcendent meaning. The "other voice" returns specifically in Today, Ourselves." Here it is "the voice that was no one's voice," "the voice that wept for human pain unending" (181), and it recites a nursery rhyme as the pageant re-enacts the rebuilding of civilization after World War I, and the formation of the League of Nations. Before the audience, indignant over the weird use of mirrors and the chaotic language, can leave, "a voice asserted itself. Whose voice it was no one knew. It came from the bushes--a megaphonic, anonymous loud-speaking affirmation" (186). The voice asks, "let's talk in words of one syllable, without larding, stuffing or cant. Let's break the rhythm
and forget the rhyme. And calmly consider ourselves." It is both the voice of Miss La Trobe and of the anonymous artist, illuminating reality. After decrying human infamy, the voice points grudgingly to simple kindnesses and courage, and then lets music replace the "anonymous bray," affirming human unity and hope. The music cajoles them to discover some meaning hidden in the forms of art, to take "from chaos and cacophony measure" (189). "Was that voice ourselves? Scraps, orts and fragments, are we, also, that? The voice died away." Unconnected fragments or united compositions? Cesspools or Roman roads? The question here posed has relevance to the whole novel.

Finally, comically, this potential affirmation of human significance ends with the village clergyman's summation. At first, "the voice" speaks the audience's rebellion against their absurd spokesman, this "irrelevant forked stake in the flow and majesty of the summer silent world." The voice offers its own prayer: "O Lord, protect and preserve us from words the defilers, from words the impure! What need have we of words to remind us? Must I be Thomas, you Jane?" (190). Must we be reminded of our trivial, doomed identities? Then "the voice" yields to the human interpreter. Streatfield, like all the other performers, begins inaudibly. Then he presents his audience with a sermon and they receive it "in the traditional manner." Since they accept him as an authority, "words now put on meaning" (191). Even the
swallows "seemed cognizant of his meaning." Streatfield, determined to be optimistic and conscious of the fund-raising purpose of this pageant, sees the meaning of the play as the unity beneath diversity, proof of a spirit pervading and unifying all history. He goes from his conviction of human solidarity to a plea for more money. The pitch is interrupted by a fleet of planes overhead, a sarcastic comment upon the approach of war the destroyer, and perhaps upon a fundamental human triviality. Contemplating Albert, the village idiot, Streatfield's "command over words seemed gone." He wants nothing but his pipe; "he had no further use for words" (194). No one knows quite what to do: "Every sound in nature was painfully audible. . . . But no one spoke."

The gramophone speaks, playing "God Save the King." "The voice" speaks for the audience once more, affirming the beauty of the actors in their costumes and the joy of community. Then they leave, and the final "scraps and fragments" are heard: chatter, gossip, unconnected observations. Gradually, the gossip is interspersed with bits of poetry ("Tears, tears, tears"), glimpses of insight ("We're the oracles . . . a foretaste of our own religion"; "It's true, there's a sense in which we all, I admit, are savages still"), and important questions ("Can the Christian faith adapt itself?"; " . . . that if we don't jump to conclusions, if you think, and I think, perhaps one day, thinking
differently, we shall think the same?"; "did they mean the reflection is the dream; and the tune . . . is the truth?"; did you feel when the shower fell, someone wept for us all?"). The audience departs in an absurd jumble of the trivial and important. Unity and hopeless diversity seem more inextricably mixed in this novel than in any other. But Miss La Trobe, off to a pub, plans her next play, comforted by the words in her head. The seedy, unlovely woman still reflects an ongoing artistic effort.

The Oliver family, alone again, recover their equilibrium in familiar rituals. Bart's reason, Lucy's faith, Isa's and Giles' jealousy, lust, and love, all reassert themselves. The pageant fades, but Isa, torn by love and hate, thinks "surely it was time someone invented a new plot, or that the author come out from the bushes" (215). As night falls, the narrator recalls the eternal human struggle to emerge triumphant, "in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night." The "curtain" of modern life seems to rise from the long, prehistoric darkness, with a significant first act: "they spoke."

Between The Acts posits for art a role that is suggested or implied in earlier novels, but never objectified within the works themselves. Woolf weaves together the fictional audience—the novelist's premise or "story"—with certain anonymous, visionary voices with interpretative functions,
to suggest that her own artistic enterprise of stretching prose into the evocative, endlessly suggestive realm of poetry corresponds with the attempts of all sensitive people to make contact with each other using completely expressive language systems. She suggests a more impersonal view of art than is presented in To The Lighthouse: art as instruction and as a kind of magic ritual. Finally, however, this novel, like To The Lighthouse, is in large part about the communication difficulties particular to women. The Oliver women and Miss La Trobe, like Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe, are engaged in making sense of their world through the rhythms and meaning of language, and they are stymied by their own problems of reticence and self-consciousness, and by the obtuseness of others. In both novels, language is seen as the essential sign of human civilization and rationality. Language reaches the level of art when it expresses the basic, underlying truths about human beings. One woman's painting, and another's pageant of history, are seen as attempts to select from the endless procession of events, in order to communicate the significance of one woman's life, and the underlying similarities but crippling separateness of all lives.
IV. Language and Silence: The Waves

The Waves is perhaps more "about" language itself than any other of Woolf's novels. The characters do nothing but verbalize; the novelistic conventions that Woolf found so restricting are here stripped away, and the six minds have language only with which to present themselves. Consequently, the meditations upon language in The Waves are of singular importance, and can be isolated and studied as prototypes for the varied treatments of the theme in the other books. One may note that the other novels concentrate more completely on one or two functions of language, while The Waves presents many contrasting views as its characters age and develop. The other novels detail some of the aspects of the theme—the role of language in maturation, verbal barriers, the private language of love, the omnipresent interruptions—by dramatizing them in a more recognizably novelistic form. But The Waves is an attempt to give a language to the individual's essence, his innermost being. Woolf's belief in the unique ability of poetry, or poetic prose, to render the "semi-transparent envelope" of reality most fully, informs this technique. Here, all the density and enigma that radiates from the concentrated images of poetry are rendered in prose.

Narration is largely given over to the characters, who are immune from time in the sense that the development of
their perceptions as they age is suggested more by the increased length of their soliloquies and the greater complexity of their image patterns, than by a change from childish to adult speech. Their shared images suggest overlapping perceptions; similar preoccupations indicate the fundamental human similarities underneath convention and personal inadequacies. The failure, then, of people to communicate what is important, as in the inability of her friends to save Rhoda from suicide, is more graphically represented here than in any other of Woolf's novels. The reader alone is given proof of the grounds for understanding and the potential for meaningful verbal interchange.

In *The Waves*, Virginia Woolf attempts to present all human experience, so much of it plagued by silence, reticence and interruptions, as transformed by her art into words. She gives phrases to silence, she articulates incommunicability. The fluency and eloquence of this book charge it with a deep irony; she permits her characters, primarily Bernard, to question whether language is adequate to convey the complexities of experience. Existing with the inevitable skepticism is an abiding faith in the potential of verbal communication to express the deepest and most enduring truths, a faith that the accomplishment of *The Waves* gives credence to.

Each of the six characters has a special attitude toward words that reveals much about his or her essential nature. Many of the soliloquies deal with the struggle to communicate,
the urge for self-expression, the drive to explain and justify feelings, attitudes, choices. These six are not ordinary people, even in the "factual" side of their lives. Only two marry and have children; two are sexually promiscuous, one of these homosexual; two are radically detached from the mainstream of social life, and one commits suicide. Their lives are expressed in a language of maximum self-awareness, as manipulated by an artistic hand, a phrase-maker. Although these are not conventional characters, the three men and three women of The Waves are distinct personalities, with distinct attitudes toward the role of language in human communication. It is illuminating to consider each separately, noting how their attitudes develop from the garden of childhood to the restaurant in which Bernard sums up his own life and the lives of his friends. As examination of the writer Bernard's many important meditations upon language reveals most of Woolf's own lifetime preoccupation with verbal communication, and so may lead to generalizations about the treatment of this theme in all of Woolf's novels.

Jinny is perhaps the least concerned with the significance of words. From earliest childhood, she is shaken by bright lights, vivid colors, physical sensation. Since her imagination is entirely of the body, she "cannot follow any word through its changes," cannot "follow any thought from present to past." She lives entirely in the moment, a
"quivering net" of light and sensation. She sees only herself in the looking glass. She lusts for life, for day, in a world of sounds, movement, parties and admiring men.

Since she is most at home as the magnetic center of a party, her attitudes towards language are perhaps best revealed in section three. In the "momentary pause," the "dark moment" before she enters the sounds and bright lights of society, Jinny is acutely aware of sensation: "I feel myself shining in the dark. Silk is on my knee. My silk legs rub smoothly together." People arrive without speaking: "Like lightning we look but do not soften or show signs of recognition. Our bodies communicate" (245). Exquisitely conscious of the bodies of men, and their reactions to her, she calls them in words of one syllable: "All gold, flowing that way, I say to this one, 'Come.' Rippling black, I say to that one, 'No.'" (246).

In the schoolroom, Jinny described words as "yellow" and "fiery," making her long for "a fiery dress, a yellow dress" (188). Now, "scent and flowers, radiance and heat, are distilled here to a fiery, to a yellow liquid" (246). Words for her are but another sign of physical sensation, pointing towards wordless body communication, unimportant in themselves. She describes a conversation with a nameless, admiring man as a means of connection, crossing "the empty space between us," dropping the "veils":
The bar at the back of my throat lowers itself. Words crowd and cluster and push forth one on top of another. It does not matter which. They jostle and mount on each other's shoulders. The single and the solitary mate, tumble and become many. It does not matter what I say (247).

The meaning or significance of the precise words spoken is unimportant; contact is all, contact preliminary to the contact of bodies. She will move on to another man; the "risk," the "adventure" is most important. Armed with her beauty and sensuality, Jinny maintains her roots even as she flows. "I can imagine nothing beyond the circle cast by my body" (264). Thus, words are not symbols to her; they do not refer to and participate in anything beyond themselves. They are merely tools of the body's contacts. "All is real; all is firm without shadow or illusion" (273).

Jinny is like Bernard in her lust for stories, but she is content with facts, a believer in facts, a lover of gossip: "Thus, in a few seconds, deftly, adroitly, we decipher the hieroglyphs written on other people's faces" (297). She is not tormented, as he is, by an inability to link those facts, those stories together. She sees things only "in outline" and must "drop all these facts" without any conclusions about life or human beings. She must rejoin the crowd when her body beckons. Singing love songs, she enters the forest and is "embalmed" in sexual sensation. Facts and language recede.
As she ages, she acknowledges her dread of growing old and losing her attractiveness. Like Bernard who fears that he will someday call a self that will not come, Jinny fears that "I shall soon raise my arm in vain and my scarf will fall to my side without having signalled" (310). But she takes heart from every aspect of the life of society, from beautiful clothes and cars, from "these broad thoroughfares," these "sanded paths of victory driven through the jungle" (311). Communication is accomplished by signs, a shorthand that facilitates the gaining of one's desires: "I will sign with a sharp gesture to a cab whose driver will signify by some indescribable alacrity his understanding of my signals" (311). Her sense of control and potency rarely desert her. Eternally hopeful, always ripe for adventure, she marches forward.

At Hampton Court, she proclaims her singular advantage over the others: "The torments, the divisions of your lives have been solved for me night after night, sometimes only by the touch of a finger under the tablecloth as we sat dining ..." (329). Guided by her looking glass, assuming disguise after disguise, she receives her impetus to live, "as you sit writing, adding up figures at desks" (330). Her intimacies leave no trace, are simply "conflagrations." She leaves no relics, yet she is unafraid. Her refusal to see beyond the body, beyond the moment, protects and sustains her. She triumphs over time, "over the abysses of space," "with rouge,
with powder, with flimsy pocket-handkerchiefs" (334). Yet her fire must, ultimately, burn out. Jinny's last line: "After our fire, there is nothing left to put in lockets" (338). She burns everything up in the moment, using language as she uses makeup and pretty clothes: to facilitate transitory physical unions. The ambiguous aspect of words, their symbolic function, does not concern her. Her "unread books" are placed on tables just for show, along with her "extravagant flowers" (311).

Neither silence nor speech disturbs Jinny; she prefers neither. Her life of the body goes on, needing above all color, variety, change, amusement. The world of language is not the territory for her explorations; she moves in and out of "the forest" of passion, an essentially wordless, nocturnal world: "All is rapt, all is nocturnal and the parrots go screaming through the branches" (298). After the spasm and the relaxation, she gathers her resources during the "momentary pause" and enters the procession again.

If Jinny is indifferent to language as content and uses words primarily as allurements to draw men to her, Susan distrusts language because it reminds her of her limitations. As a child, in love with Bernard, she is frustrated by her inability to follow his trailing phrases. She sees one thing only, never sequences, and is happiest with words of one syllable. The words in her book are "white words, like stones
one picks up by the seashore" (188). They are without color, solid, definable. Bernard's flights of fancy threaten her and she comes back always to the country, to natural happiness, to wordless communication based upon an instinctive response to basic, unamalgamated emotions. ("I love and I hate.") "I shall pass an old woman wheeling a perambulator full of sticks; and the shepherd. But we shall not speak" (211).

Susan connects herself most closely with things, natural objects, seasons: "Not sighs and laughter; not circling and ingenious phrases; not Rhoda's strange communications when she looks past us, over our shoulders; not Jinny's pirouetting, all of a piece, limbs and body. What I give is fell" (243). When her lover comes, "to his one word I shall answer my one word" (243). She foresees and desires a life like her mother's, "silent in a blue apron" (243). Conversation to her is "undressing an old woman whose dress had seemed to be part of her, but now, as we talk, she turns pinkish underneath, and has wrinkled thighs and sagging breasts. When you are silent you are again beautiful" (266). As passionate as Jinny, she differs in her insistence upon possession: "I love with such ferocity that it kills me when the object of my love shows by a phrase that he can escape. He escapes, and I am left clutching at a string that slips in and out among the leaves on the tree-tops. I do not understand phrases" (267). Words do not establish sequence for her; the
natural rhythms do. She sees life in "blocks," in dwelling places, "quenching the silver-grey flickering moth-wing quiver of words with the green spurt of my clear eyes" (325). She cannot fly; she looks down always.

Susan does not merely fit herself into the natural cycles; she takes them for her own. Everything is hers: "the silence and the bell; the call of the man fetching cart-horses from the fields--all are mine" (242). She does her duty silently, accepting her fate in all but the few moments in which she muses over what she has missed. As she ages, those moments of dissatisfaction come more frequently. Motherhood confines her to the house, narrowing her sense of identification and possession "to a fine thread round the cradle" (294). Thoroughly domesticated, she knows the changing of the seasons "only by the steam on the window-pane, or the frost on the window-pane" (294). She has taken on her mother's silent life, her mother who "died of cancer." She thinks of Jinny and the noisy, exciting city life she will never know: "no sound breaks the silence of our house . . ." (295). Memories of Bernard and his escaping words force from her the admission that "life stands round me like glass round the imprisoned reed" (309). Almost content with an abundance of natural happiness, with children and home and fields and possessions, still she gapes "like a young bird, unsatisfied, for something that has escaped me" (338).
Susan chooses the world of the natural cycles, living among people for whom silent striving is more natural than speech, among people who do not judge her. Yet she is conscious at each stage of her life of something she has missed, something not accessible to words of one syllable, not immediately evident in the progress of the seasons. She is loved by Percival but loves Bernard; like Percival, she provides the material for a poetry she can never understand.

Louis struggles throughout his life to amalgamate the conflicting elements within him, as represented by the office and the attic. He desires worldly success so that he can conceal his feelings of inferiority, but he also longs to write the one, all-embracing poem. He clings to a cold, detached individuality, yet wishes above all things to be part of the rhythms of communal life. He loves luxury, yet is continually drawn to the sordid and chaotic. He uses language as a weapon, to reduce the world to order, his order; he demands a reason for existence but can never fit "the beast stamping," the wordless primeval world of passion, action and violence, into his scheme. He survives, while Rhoda, with whom he links himself most closely, is destroyed, because he learns to act his part, to reduce the different aspects of himself to the order of progress and commerce.

From the first, Louis is sensitive to rhythms—the beast that stamps and stamps, the clock that ticks—but feels
himself outside them. He struggles with the paralyzing sense of living in the present and in all past history simultaneously; the intrusion of the physical world, such as Jinny's kiss in the garden, recalls him to the body he fears and despises. Thus, he establishes an early affinity with Rhoda, who "has no body as the others have" (189).

Bernard is kept from writing great literature because the moments of detachment needed to give words "their final refrigeration" are difficult and painful for him; he needs the stimulus of conversation. Louis lives continually in those states of detachment, yet is always susceptible to other people's praise or blame, always uncomfortable about his accent and appearance. His poem goes unwritten because he cannot compromise his need for an absolute meaning in life, some unshakeable coherence. The order of business, while it satisfies his longing for worldly success, substitutes the language of slogans and catchwords for the steel ring of poetry, of metaphysical order, that Louis wishes to present to the world.

Painfully sensitive about his Australian background, Louis likes the orderly process, the hardness of tradition, authority and religion, because they remove distinctions and make him feel part of the procession, a spoke in the wheel. He feels reverence for Dr. Crane as a representative of the social order: "On his lips quotations from the Bible, from the Times, seem equally magnificent" (214). Traditions are
safeguards for him, but the problem of the wild, deathlike, passionate and inarticulate world (the sullen thud of the waves, the stamping of the chained beast) remains. He longs to fix the moment in words, to forge a "ring of steel." He despises "dabblers in imagery," (he will not "acquiesce, as Bernard acquiesces, . . . telling stories" [220]), instead, he imagines "some other order, and better, which makes a reason everlastingly" (201). He saves himself from disintegration, as Rhoda cannot, because even before his worldly success, "I force myself to state, if only in one line of unwritten poetry, this moment" (220). Obsessed with his destiny as the eye of human history, the junction of past and present, it becomes possible for him to offer allegiance to the business world with its belief in progress and sense of mission.

The function that Louis sees for language, for poetry, is suggested most clearly in section three, where he sits in a restaurant reading and watching life go on all around him. He is disturbed by the disorder of these members of Bernard's "chorus," distressed by their "sensations," their animal physicality, the triviality of their conversation. Yet he picks up, as always, the rhythms of the eating-house, the "waltz tune," and feels himself forever outside, alien. Despite his contempt, he longs "to feel close over me the protective waves of the ordinary" (240). Needing a sense of power, a way to assert his superiority, he will reduce them
to order with words. He despises aimless conversation; for him, language has value only as the material for enduring monuments, great literature that remains hard and unchanging on the page. He reads his book, the great poetry that is ignored by most of the world: "And I cannot translate it to you so that its binding power ropes you in, and makes it clear to you that you are aimless; and the rhythm is cheap and worthless; and so remove that degradation which . . . pervades you . . ." (240). But when he has "healed these fractures and comprehended these monstrosities," he will "give back to the street and the eating-shop what they lost when they fell on these hard times and broke on these stony beaches" (292). He will reduce to order the hesitations, the repetitions, "and the words that trail drearily without human meaning" (240-41). He will force meaning upon them.

But the connections elude him, just as the one true story eludes Bernard; he is constantly distracted by his vulnerability to praise and blame. He hears "the roar of London," in "one sound, steel blue, circular," the living material of poetry from which he is forever excluded. He longs to shape this roar into "a steel ring of clear poetry that shall connect the gulls and the women with bad teeth, the church spire and the bobbing billycock hats . . ." (264). At the dinner for Percival, he "conspires" with Rhoda, conscious of the death contained in love, of the beastliness of their adoration as they send the beloved out to die. He
hates human contact, conversation, almost as much as Rhoda does, because it smells of mortality and selfishness, of constant change. Like Rhoda, he has difficulty participating fully in the simple rituals of life. When individual egos re-assert themselves, and the party is about to bid farewell to Percival, Louis hears "the casual, quick, exciting voice of action, of hounds running on the scent. They speak now without troubling to finish their sentences. They talk a little language such as lovers use. An imperious brute possesses them" (274). The disorder of passion repulses and frightens him; it is deeper than pain, stronger than love. Forever alienated, he longs to hold forever the brief moment when mortality was stayed and they were all united in Percival.

By section six, Louis has found the way to keep himself whole, complete, and functioning in present time: he has dedicated himself to commerce and has tamed the beast by reducing it to his name. He still plans to "assemble a few words and forge round us a hammered ring of beaten steel," but Britannia must rule: "The weight of the world is on our shoulders" (292). He can use these slogans unblinkingly, just as he admired the platitudes of the schoolmaster Crane, because they have the weight of tradition behind them and so have the power to anchor him in time. He still keeps his attic room in a sordid part of the city, where Rhoda now comes; he still reads poetry. But he must nail his
impressions "and out of the many men in me make one; exist here and now . . . ." (293). Having wrenched out his own order, Louis becomes rich and respected, but he still escapes to his attic, resuming in solitude his attempt to understand the meaning of it all, "to draw from the living flesh the stone lodged at the centre" (316). It is his destiny to weave together "the many threads . . . of our long history . . . ." (316). He suspects that he will never "make reason of it all--one poem on a page, and then die" (316). But his attempt continues.

At Hampton Court, Louis reveals how fragile is his thread of meaning, how susceptible to indifference, laughter, and his own vanity. He would order the world, but chaos intrudes. Youth and beauty are blackened for him by the knowledge of death and cruelty; he cannot find the "one line" of meaning that will link everything together. He has made an imperfect union of the office and the attic. Conspiring again with Rhoda, he notes how the others re-establish their identities with words; he and she hear a different song, search together for the translation of "the confused and composite message" that the dead and the living send (336). But, as Rhoda points out, they can never "perceive from a sufficient height" (336), untouched by the demands and judgments of others. The others return and with them "illusion" and "all the insanity of personal existence without which life would fall flat and die . . . ." (337). It takes most
of Louis' energy to act his part in the drama; he will never be free enough to write the one true poem.

Louis feels himself forever outside the rhythms of life, but he is not as radically disconnected as Rhoda. Her life is consumed in the search for an identity, a talisman, "something hard," that will anchor her in the world of time and space. Incapable of detached observation, unable to sort or order her impressions, she lives in a world of perpetual hallucination and constant terror. All moments are separate and violent; she has no sense of the ordinary sequence. Consequently, language as a means of communion is but another part of human life in which she cannot participate. The shareability of words is denied her, because she lives outside the world of common experience and understood reference points.

From the beginning, Rhoda is different from the others. She sails white ships in a basin, relishing a sense of power over their fates. The other ships founder but hers sails on alone "and reaches the islands where the parrots chatter and the creepers . . ." (187). She does not finish her sentence; since the characters often predict future events in their soliloquies, one is tempted to speculate, even at this early stage, that in her waking dream of a singular destiny, Rhoda will not reach the island but will be submerged in silence. The others predict in words, Rhoda in the absence
of words. She is given no comment on the words in her copybook, but she does have a significant reaction to the arithmetic problem presented to her. She can get no meaning from the numbers, she cannot connect herself with the common signification. "Meaning has gone" (189). Instead, she has a vision of death in a desert, outside "the loop of time." She cannot participate in signs, linguistic or numerical, but only in visions expressed in her own private symbol system.

At school, robbed of her identity, ("I have no face" [197]), she searches frantically for someone, "some face," to wear like a talisman against annihilation. She does not live in the self-defined world of Jinny and Susan who "say Yes" and "No" (204). "They know what to say if spoken to . . . while I have to look first and do what other people do when they have done it. . . . They have things to say privately in corners. But I attach myself only to names and faces . . ." (204). Rocked by violent emotion, desperate to excite the admiration of "these immaculate people," she tries to survive in other people's realities. She must hit her hand against a door to call herself "back to the body" (204).

She longs for night and darkness because in the day "they ask questions, they interrupt . . ." (213). She reads a poem and enters into it, unable to maintain distinctions between self and not-self. Since words are consistently
identified in *The Waves* with assertions of individual identity, Rhoda's distorted perspectives and lack of a personal existence in time and space keep her from using language as a tool of communal life. Civilization is but a veneer: "Silence will close behind us . . . silence closes over our transient passage" (219). Life is sensation and noise, surrounded by steadily-encroaching silence.

At the party, where Jinny is in her element, Rhoda feels "the tiger leap" every time another person approaches her. Conversation is a weapon used against her and her own words merely defensive masks: "Tongues with their whips are upon me. Mobile, incessant, they flicker over me. I must prevaricate and fence them off with lies" (248). The egos of other people, as represented by their language, threaten her because she has no face with which to meet theirs. Only faces without features, unrecognizable and unchanging faces devoid of the threat of identity, are beautiful to her: they remind her of a world "immune from change," a world of "marble columns and pools on the other side of the world where the swallow dips her wings" (248). She must pass through "this drawing-room flickering with tongues that cut me like knives, making me stammer, making me lie . . . ." (249). She is "not composed enough, standing on tiptoe on the verge of fire, still scorched by the hot breath, afraid of the door opening and the leap of the tiger, to make even one sentence. What I say is perpetually contradicted. Each time the door
opens I am interrupted" (249). Consumed by fear, bombarded by sensations, Rhoda cannot make her perceptions cohere in language.

She attends the dinner for Percival because she wants "above all things to have lodgment" (266). The pull of friendship and memory draws her, giving her fuel to continue living. She will try to be like the others: "I wait for you to speak and then speak like you" (266). Rhoda's reaction to Percival is interesting, because his presence elicits from her an uncharacteristic language; she does, for a moment, speak like them. She sees Percival as a stone around which minnows swarm. He makes everything real and comforting; he extends her vision

in some trance of well-being, in some rapture of benignity. . . . The world that had been shrivelled, rounds itself; remote provinces are fetched up out of darkness . . . part of our proud and splendid province, since Percival, riding alone on a flea-bitten mare, advances down a solitary path, has his camp pitched among desolate trees, and sits alone, looking at the enormous mountains (370).

It would seem that Percival's absolute reality, his mute solidity, makes Rhoda "normal," lends her a sense of power and identity. With Louis, however, she sees the death contained in their adoration, foresees "downfalling" and "decay." The power of Percival upon her makes her reaction to his death especially revealing.
Percival's death deprives Rhoda of "all palpable forms of life" and she is in danger of being "blown down the eternal corridors forever" (285). If figures of identity and purpose, heroes, can be destroyed, then there is no hope for her. She enters a lace shop and finds it one of the "warm hollows grooved in the heart of the uproar; alcoves of silence where we can shelter under the wing of beauty from truth which I desire" (286). But the shopgirl speaks, and ugliness and triviality re-assert themselves; as always, Rhoda is shaken from her dream by human voices. She has a vision of the worst in all her friends, as they each, in their compromising ways, forget Percival. This knowledge of the forgetfulness of the living she will offer to Percival --"withered violets, blackened violets" (287).

As Bernard went to the art museum to commune with the dead, Rhoda goes to a concert where she has her often-quoted perception of structure, the square upon the oblong. But first a woman sings: "She has provided us with a cry. But only a cry. And what is a cry?" (268). The human voice cannot reveal to her "the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing"; for that she needs music without words. The structure of reality cannot be shaken or defined by the human voices that Rhoda fears and despises; it must be one of the geometrical structures that she is drawn to all her life. The common "dwelling-place," she finds, is ugly and base: "Here are mean streets where chaffering goes on in
street markets, and every sort of iron rod, bolt and screw
is laid out, and people swarm off the pavement, pinching raw
meat with thick fingers. The structure is visible. We have
made a dwelling-place" (289). This acceptance of naked
reality, a kind of death for Rhoda, allows her to participate
fully in the reality of Percival's death. Filled with des­
pair, she identifies the place where Percival has gone with
her dream refuge: "We will gallop together over desert hills
where the swallow dips her wings in dark pools and the
pillars stand entire" (289). The world of the living, the
world of time and human voices, is unspeakably base, "without
fruit or blossom" (289).

The identification of "the square upon the oblong" with
civilization, the common culture from which Rhoda is forever
alienated, is made more clearly in section seven. She re­
members that she first perceived this structure at an after­
noon concert "among somnolent people":

'The house which contains us all,' I said, lurching
against people's shoulders in an omnibus after Percival
died; yet I went to Greenwich. Walking on the embank­
ment, I prayed that I might thunder for ever on the
verge of the world where there is no vegetation, but
here and there a marble pillar (318).

Rhoda abhors the organic, the "vegetation" of the world, all
that is engaged in perpetual battle against certain oblivion.
Only the hardness of geometrical structure can anchor her,
temporarily, in time.
This section's soliloquy, spoken as she climbs a mountain in Spain, reads rather like a suicide note, summarizing Rhoda's dread of life and hatred of people: "How you have nudged, how you have interrupted. . . . I have been stained by you and corrupted" (317). People dissolved her soul, demanding "lies, bowings, scraping, fluency and servility" (317). (That inclusion of "fluency" suggests the opposition of Rhoda's temperament with Bernard's; Bernard uses fluency to make sense of the world while Rhoda is forced into fluency by the cruelty of others.) She re-capitulates her life, her youthful attempts to "fit in," to cover the hideous reality of communal existence with "shade after shade" (318). She tried to cover the sordidness with dreams, "with fleeces, with vestments," with words: "I flung words in fans like those the sower throws over the ploughed fields when the earth is bare" (318). But nothing was fertilized in the desert she lived in; Percival died and the essential structure, the reality of death and decay, "the house which contains us all," was revealed to her.

She travels up the hill, imagining that "this mule back is my bed and I lie dying" (319). Ophelia-like, carrying "flowers only, the cowbind and the moonlight coloured may," she imagines herself falling from the precipice into the sea beneath: "The white petals will be darkened with sea water. They will float for a moment and then sink. Rolling me over the waves will shoulder me under. Everything falls in a
tremendous shower, dissolving me" (319). But she is re­
prieved one last time, recalled once again by something hard
(the inn) and by faces. She survives to rejoin the others
at Hampton Court.

At this final dinner with her friends, Rhoda envies
them those common reference points that are denied her, the
"children, authority, fame, love, society" that support and
anchor them. She carries the same burden of the primeval
past sweeping into the present moment as Louis does, but
she has no career to buffer and control her extreme sensi­
tivity:

A wind ruffles the topmost leaves of primeval trees.
(Yet here we sit at Hampton Court.) Parrots shrieking
break the intense stillness of the jungle. (Here the
trams start.) The swallow dips her wings in midnight
pools. (Here we talk.) That is the circumference that
I try to grasp as we sit together (331).

They speak together but to her their "voices sound like trees
creaking in a forest" (331). She cannot participate in any
of the human attempts to impose order on the world. She has
no personal life to impress upon chaos: "I must go through
the antics of the individual" (331). No one can save her
from her fate.

Yet, as silence descends upon the six of them, and they
each participate in a moment of perfect communion, even Rhoda
can exhibit some hope in community:
Yet there are moments when the walls of the mind grow thin; when nothing is unabsorbed, and I could fancy that we might blow so vast a bubble that the sun might set and rise in it and we might take the blue of midday and the black of midnight and be cast off and escape from here and now (331).

But the moment does not last; individual identities return with language and for Rhoda, that return thrusts her outside again: "How short a time silence lasts," she notes to Louis, her co-conspirator. She is calmest in this "still mood," this "disembodied mood," when the structure of ordinary life seems benign.

As the others walk on, Rhoda and Louis stay behind, to "conspire." The song they hear is a wordless one, the song of birds, ships, trains. "Not a sound, not a movement must escape us" (336). But their shared moment of intense participation in the unceasing tide-like movement of time must remain incomplete; Louis, "disturbed by faint clapping sounds of praise and laughter," and Rhoda, "resenting compromise and right and wrong on human lips, trust only in solitude and the violence of death and thus are divided" (336).

The others emerge from the darkness and become "only men, only women." They take on faces and then names, and are "people we know." Once again, Rhoda is assaulted by irreconcilable feelings of love and hate. The others have individuality and expect the same from her, thus cramping her freedom and intruding upon her dream. "Yet they have only to speak, and their first words, with the remembered tone
and the perpetual deviation from what one expects and their hands moving and making a thousand past days rise again in the darkness, shake my purpose" (337). She will have no personal existence; she cannot participate for long in common memories and experiences. Language is a product and tool of communal life, and Rhoda is forever outside the community. She recedes into silence and takes her life.

Neville is an important figure in any discussion of the thematic role of language in *The Waves*, because he is closest to Percival, who in his silence inspires much significant speech, and Bernard, the phrasemaker and spokesman. Neville has much to say about language and his development must be carefully considered.

Certain of Neville's essential character traits are established in the first section, in the garden. First, his fastidiousness. He complains when Bernard, who has taken his knife, goes from him to comfort Susan: "He is like a dangling wire, a broken bell-pull, always twangling. . . . I hate dangling things; I hate dampish things. I hate wandering and mixing things together" (187). His desire for order, for completed form, is reflected in his response to the words in his copybook: "Each tense means differently. There is an order in this world; there are distinctions, there are differences in this world . . . " (188). Words seem
to walk in line for him, their shades of meaning capable of precise differentiation. None of Bernard's "warm soluble words" for Neville, none of his stories. Physically delicate, greeting his time alone as "this reprieve from conversation" (191), Neville early reveals his insistence upon precision, his impatience with capriciousness, his respect for the exact discriminations that language makes possible.

He arrives at school "like a lord to his hall appointed" (196), eager to breathe the "noble Roman air" and to enter "a library, where I shall explore the exactitude of the Latin language and step firmly upon the well-laid sentences, and pronounce the explicit, the sonorous hexameters of Virgil; of Lucretius; and chant with a passion that is never obscure or formless the loves of Catullus . . ." (196). Unlike Louis, he despises the platitudes of the headmaster, a representative of contemptible conventions and institutions: "The words of authority are corrupted by those who speak them" (198). Increasingly, Neville reveals what will become the ruling passion of his life, his "blind spot," the "old hallucination": his homosexual attraction for the pagan world of naked boys and goat-skins, as exemplified by Percival. Percival has a different meaning for each of the six characters; for Neville, "He is allied with the Latin phrases on the memorial brasses" (199). Percival, for him, is the god of a vaguely sadistic pagan world: "He should have a birch and beat little boys for misdemeanours . . ."
He is remote from us all in a pagan universe" (199).
Neville's passion for this world will do much to shape his attitudes: most significantly, his attitude toward language. The beautiful, active boys to whom Neville will gravitate are non-verbal and non-contemplative. His longing for them, arising partly out of contempt for his own unattractiveness and delicacy, will cause him to question the importance and effectiveness of language to communicate "what we most feel."

Always a keen observer, Neville frequently analyzes Bernard and his story-telling, with a mixture of impatience and tenderness. Unlike Susan, he can follow the "bubble" of his friend's stories, can enter the "abandonment," "for Bernard is a dangling wire, loose, but seductive" (200). But he is acutely conscious of Percival's silent power over Bernard's story-telling and, though he adores Percival, he can also feel Bernard's humiliation: "Among the tortures and devastations of life is this then--our friends are not able to finish their stories" (201). He is amused by Bernard's stories at first. "But when they tail off absurdly and he gapes, twiddling a bit of string, I feel my own solitude. He sees every one with blurred edges" (209). He cannot speak to Bernard of his passion for Percival; he will not be made a "story." Neville lives most intensely in the separate, highly charged moments with his current beloved, and does not believe in the truth or value of stories. Yet, at times, he seems to envy Bernard, who is forgiven for his
absent-mindedness because he can amuse with his stories (208).

Neville's inability to "amuse," his sense of personal inadequacy, draws him to people like Percival, even though Percival "cannot read." Perhaps to reassure himself, perhaps as an indication of the blindness of his passion, Neville endows Percival with an all-embracing, non-verbal wisdom: he believes that "when I read Shakespeare or Catullus . . . he [Percival] understands more than Louis. Not the words--but what are words?" (207). Neville longs to play cricket and think only of the game, to "feel the flight of the ball through my body" (207). But the physical life is denied him: "I shall be a clinger to the outsides of words all my life" (207). He credits Percival with the intuitive understanding, the steady, single-minded concentration, that he himself lacks. He knows that he will send Percival poems and Percival will reply with picture postcards, leaving his letters "among guns and dogs unanswered" (216). Still, he idealizes him: "He reads a detective novel, yet understands everything" (224). Percival is a monolith surrounded by his satellites, the "indolent," the "unconscious," the "powerful young men" (231). Out of his self-contempt, Neville finds their inarticulate existence entirely beautiful, because their lives are so radically different from his.

As Louis noted, Percival inspires poetry. Watching him in his mute splendour, Neville feels dormant words begin to
rise in him: "I am a poet, yes. Surely I am a great poet" (231). Inspired by his emotions, words rise in waves—but Neville is too unsure of himself, too conscious of his weaknesses, to let his words take flight and become great poetry:

Words and words and words, how they gallop—how they lash their long manes and tails, but for some fault in me I cannot give myself to their backs; I cannot fly with them, scattering women and string bags. There is some flaw in me—some fatal hesitancy, which, if I pass it over, turns to foam and falsity (232).

Neville is too essentially passive, too driven by his physical needs, to give his talents a single-minded devotion. "Speaking" to Bernard at school, while Bernard is playing Byron, Neville elaborates further his inability to pursue fully his creative and scholarly gifts: "That would be a glorious life, to addict oneself to perfection; to follow the curve of the sentence wherever it might lead, into deserts, under drifts of sand, regardless of lures, of seductions; to be poor always and unkempt; to be ridiculous in Piccadilly" (235). But he is too nervous "to end my sentence properly," he paces, he tries in vain to penetrate Bernard's veil of phrases long enough to expose his tormented heart. "I would rather be loved, I would rather be famous, than follow perfection through the sand" (235-36). At the dinner for Percival he defends this pursuit of love for its promise of constant change and discovery, but also realizes the impossibility of happiness: "I shall never have what I want, for I lack bodily grace and the courage that comes with
Percival dies, but the search for one person to sit beside continues, and Neville's use for language narrows to the private conversations between two people in a room. At Percival's dinner, Neville had decried the falseness, the irrelevance of speech: "Yet these roaring waters... upon which we build our crazy platforms are more stable than the wild, the weak and inconsequent cries that we utter when, trying to speak, we rise; when we reason and jerk out these false sayings, 'I am this; I am that!' Speech is false" (271). When he mourned Percival, he asked "Why talk and eat and make up other combinations with other people?" (280). But as time passes, the importance of a room where "we can be silent, or speak without raising our voices" (299) becomes central for him. Out of this private conversation, about ordinary people and geniuses, likes and dislikes, "we spin round us infinitely fine filaments and construct a system" (300). They read together "writers of Roman severity and virtue" but Neville's constant attraction for the "naked cabin-boys squirting each other with hose-pipes" keeps him from being a "disinterested seeker." His life has meaning "only under the eyes of love" (299). And the current loved one encompasses the whole world for Neville: "the poem, I think, is only your voice speaking" (301). That private conversation becomes saturated with meaning, a construction of form and order upon "the waste and deformity of the world."
Neville finally outgrows his need for one room, and his vision and sympathies broaden. His fastidiousness, his sensitivity for the fine detail and infinitely small complexities, his ability to read into the moment and into his current lover all meaning and significance, gives him the power to see the poetry of everyday life. Just as he endowed his lovers with all the insights of great literature and their private conversations with all meaning, so now all of life has become a poem, a play. He no longer despises his own passivity; he lets the poetry of the world wash over him. Shakespeare's characters, and Dante's, live on Shaftesbury Avenue: "This is poetry if we do not write it" (312). In contrast with Louis, who despises the amorphous, everyday world and wants to bring order to it with unchanging words on a page, Neville finds poetic meaning and beauty in all the infinite variations of human life as it is lived. Speech no longer seems false; it is part of the fiction, the literature of everyday life, and has a power and truth all its own. There are people talking, or hardly troubling to talk. He says, she says, somebody else says things have been said so often that one word is now enough to lift a whole weight. Argument, laughter, old grievances—they fall through the air, thickening it. I take a book and read half a page of anything. They have not mended the spout of the teapot yet. The child dances, dressed in her mother's clothes (312-13).

Words in books and words falling through the air have the same weight, the same enduring meaning; literature and life
merge.

He considers Rhoda and Louis and their anguished search for entire truth and perfect virtue. They do not see the drama being acted out in every room, the living poetry:

It is not enough for them, this ordinary scene. It is not enough to wait for the thing to be said as if it were written; to see the sentence lay its dab of clay precisely on the right place, making character; to perceive, suddenly, some group in outline against the sky (313).

The poem—on the page, in the room—takes concentration and effort to interpret. One must be open to every nuance, never allowing the poet, the claims of the ego, to interrupt. Nothing can be rejected, "and when the door opens accept absolutely" (314). In this way, one can "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" (314). But when the sound he waits for, the sound of footsteps approaching his door, enters his consciousness, he is once again "swept away by the old hallucination." The hunger for one person to sit beside still provides the essential refrain. Thus, Neville's need and ability to find infinite riches in the smallest details of life ennobles his promiscuous sexual activities. Each moment contains the whole meaning of human existence.

But when he confronts Susan at Hampton Court, in her "maternal splendour," he finds it necessary to re-assert his identity by justifying his life. He feels the old insecurity
and must proclaim the superiority of his deep, concentrated
vision to her broad, tradition-laden sense of pattern and
continuity. He recalls the different signs of different
loves. He is "clouded and bruised with the print of minds
and faces and things so subtle that they have small, colour,
texture, substance, but no name" (324). He sees everything,
he has felt everything; the world opens beneath him, "a
book" (324). Everything is poetry. He still has the desire
to oppose himself to the chaos and formlessness of the world,
but his last words express a weary wish "to rejoin the body
of our mother from whom we have been severed" (338). Ex­
hausted, passive, spent, "scarcely to be distinguished from
the river," Neville's extreme sensitivity and alertness
desert him. After the enormous strain of living a life with­
out repetition, where "each day is dangerous" (323), he
yields finally to fatigue—and to Bernard's summing-up.

It is through Bernard that Virginia Woolf most completely
explores the possibilities and limitations of language. His
central importance is reflected in the placement of his
speeches; he speaks first in every section except the fifth
(in which Neville, appropriately enough, leads off the
eulogies for Percival) and the sixth (in which he is absent.)
At the dinner for Percival, Neville perceives that Bernard
almost fills Percival's uniting function (259). Bernard
arranges the meeting at Hampton Court; in that penultimate
section, after the others have spoken their final, weary words, he leads into his own summation, the final chapter in which he alone speaks. And he is important also in his role of phrase-maker, in his lifelong fascination with words and their varying abilities to describe what is truly significant. His reflections upon language are central to the total meaning of *The Waves*, and provide philosophical summaries of Virginia Woolf's many examinations of the nature of words.

Many of Bernard's attitudes towards language surface in the first section, when he is a child just learning to discriminate between the self and the not-self. In his five one-sentence reports of first perceptions, Bernard most frequently looks up; this tendency is reflected in his vision of words as birds that "move through the air in flocks" (188), and in Susan's complaint that he "rises up higher, with words and words in phrases" (185). As he follows Susan, sensitive to the beauty of her eyes and to her misery and curious about the cause of her distress, he exhibits a marked impulse to name, to call emotions by the right word: "There is agitation and trouble here. There is gloom. . . . There is anguish here" (184). Most important, he proclaims an early faith in words that, "moving darkly," "in the depths of your mind will break up this knot of hardness" (185). He sees words as instruments of communion, of the merging of identities: "we melt into each other with phrases." While learning Latin, he notes the variety and unpredictability of
these words flying "now this way, now that way, moving all together, now dividing, now coming together." Going out to play, he wishes to "tell stories." Thus, as a child, Bernard names, comforts, tells stories, sees words as birds flying, as means to establish human communion.

Out of the garden, and frightened by the prospect of school, Bernard finds that phrases can also be buffers between himself and an indifferent world. Before, with Susan, words could "break up this knot of hardness"; now, "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" (195). He begins to judge people by the truth of their words, always sensitive to the meaning of language and growing more confident about the powers of verbal expression. He begins to keep a notebook, keeping records of observations that will be "useful" someday, for his novel. But he can remain the detached observer only so long; soon he requires the stimulus of conversation. It is this dependence upon an audience that will prevent him from giving his words the "final refrigeration" they need to become art.

As a schoolboy, Bernard uses words as buffers and joiners both; he writes down useful phrases but his stories trail off when reality intrudes in the form of Percival or the train conductor. His language cracks solitudes but somehow keeps him from people. In this second section,
Bernard "speaks" to Neville, tries to tell him a story about Dr. Crane. He notes his inability to see the "profound distinctions" among "the horrid little boys," Percival among them. But images bubble up inside him and he must, with Neville listening, "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" (208). Again, words are instruments of order and sequence; Bernard makes up Dr. Crane, taking him into his living quarters, noting his regrets, his pomposity, making connections and drawing significances. But the budding novelist cannot finish his story because "stories that follow people into their private rooms are difficult" (209). Lacking experience, Bernard cannot conceive of an ending to his stories, and so he trails off into silence. Seeing sequence everywhere, but unable as yet to draw the sequences into a pattern, Bernard, as Neville notes, "sees everyone with blurred edges" (209). Consequently, Neville cannot speak of his passion for Percival with Bernard: "It, too, would make a 'story'" (209). Communication is avoided and Neville senses how little real connection Bernard's stories have with the human lives all around him. Bernard himself will share this perception of the limited truth of stories as he ages.

At the University, Bernard and Neville engage in a "conversation," an exchange revealing both of the continual
inability of these six people to communicate what we, as readers, know to be their acute perceptions of each other, and especially of the way in which Bernard's phrase-making abilities keep him from his closest friends. With Neville, Bernard becomes untidy and impulsive, because he senses Neville's disapproval; he feels gifted because his flow of language delights Neville; he senses that Neville feels, as Susan did, that he "escapes" in phrases. Their conversation stimulates him, makes him brilliant, but his room is littered with unfinished letters. And Neville senses that Bernard's phrases will prevent him from confessing his secret, from exposing his innermost heart. Bernard has no single self for Neville to hold and receive solace from, and Neville needs the comfort of one person. Unable to reach Bernard, he throws him his poem, the words he aims at life's vulgarity and disappointment, and leaves (236).

Bernard reflects upon the contraction into a single being that Neville demands. He holds the line between them represented by Neville's poem, but is grateful that "that alien presence" has removed itself so that Bernard can summon his "familiars," his stories, and become once again whole. He has perceived Neville's anguish--"the sinister figure of love presided at our encounter"--but cannot share it. Thus, these friends who indicate by their shared images and accurate perceptions that they are united in a kind of spiritual community, are still unable, except on certain
fleeting occasions, to bring that union into the moment, to make their sympathies cohere in language. In a real sense, they communicate only with the reader.

In section four, before the dinner for Percival, Bernard's reflections provide a preview of his final "summing-up," and also illuminate a view of language as a product of civilization, with all the values and limitations, virtues and vices, of communal life. Because he has chosen to marry and take his place in society, Bernard feels, for the moment, part of the undifferentiated noise of humanity. He resists for a time the "individual life," he has lost the edge of his mind: a state which indicates the satiety, the complacency induced by love, the dropping off of the ego. He enters Rhoda's habitual dwelling-place, where features are rubbed from faces, time ceases, and the world reverts to its wordless, primeval past: "beneath these pavements are shells, bones and silence" (254). But soon his identity "splits off," like the child who learns the distinction between self and not-self. Bernard relives, in moments, his personal history; he moves from sensations to a sense of self, to stories about the others. He takes his place again as "a natural coiner of words, a blower of bubbles." He elaborates himself with his observations, differentiates himself from those he describes, listens to the voice that bids him take note of things, and foresees a night when he will be called upon to provide "a meaning for all my
observations—a line that runs from one to another, a summing up that completes." He recognizes again his need for an audience, his downfall, that which "ruffles the edge of the final statement." (It is that "something hard," the edge of the mind, of the statement, one's singular identity, that departs and takes language with it.) This "sunless territory of non-identity" has been a world to be explored, like Elvedon—also, one to be returned from. It is the place to hear the tide, the everlasting waves, that go beyond "this circle of bright light, this drumming of insensate fury" that constitutes the individual life. But sensations, desires, and the need to be himself draw him back. He thinks of "people to whom I could say things" (255), the friends who retrieve him from the sunless territory and dissipate "these vapours." He must talk to somebody, anybody; curiosity and possibility return, and he thinks he could describe everything with "a veil of words." (At other times, he has drawn the veil off things with words.) Words are rockets, entirely unexpected, as unstable as the world and so able, in their way, to reflect that world. Words permit him to mix with "unknown quantities": "to speak, about wine even to the waiter, is to bring about an explosion" (256). And so Bernard goes to meet his friends.

This extraordinary section provides a capsule summary of some of Woolf's reflections upon the possibilities and provinces of language in this book. Language is firmly
linked with the individual ego functioning in the world of time and space; when one sinks into the "sunless territory" of non-identity, one visits the silent, enduring, primordial other-side of life, that which is unbound by time and space. Since this wordless land is "sunless," a distinct connection is drawn between language and light; other people's words retrieve us from darkness. Language is the illuminator of the moment; its powers drop off when individual identity falls away. These observations are, of course, Bernard's, yet they seem to reveal much about the other characters as well, about Rhoda's torment particularly. The difficulties of language to express the unConcrete, time-liberated, ego-less moments will be most completely explored in Bernard's summing-up.

At the dinner for Percival, when each attempts to explain his response to the world, Bernard sees his sense of sequence, his knowledge that one word follows another, as a handicap, a limitation, that keeps him from a creative solitude. Without words, he enters the sunless territory and is nothing. But words, while giving him life, are frequently "meretricious," "made up of what evasions and old lies" (267). The stimulus of language in some respects weakens Bernard's character, drawing him to people regardless of who they are, for whom he becomes one of many Bernards: "Different people draw different words from me." Incapable of the heroism of "authentics" like Louis and
Rhoda, he will never even succeed in creating a perfect phrase. He predicts that he will be forgotten as soon as his voice dies out, "because there is something that comes from outside and not from within." He is incapable of great art because he lacks a firm constant self in solitude (yet his fate must be contrasted with those of the "authentics" he so admires: Louis who reduces himself to the order of commerce, and Rhoda who takes her life.) As the dinner ends, and Bernard's moments of "ravenous identity" are gluttoned along with his other appetites, he opens his eyes with an indifferent curiosity onto the essential mystery of human beings. Struck by the failure of stories to explain "this margin of unknown territory, this forest of the unknown world," he asks "but what are stories?" (275). With loneliness the insoluble problem, Bernard doubts for a moment whether language can express anything but facts; he gives those facts in the language of the conventional novel (275). Beyond the facts, "all is darkness and conjecture."

Bernard's doubts about his lifelong fascination with language come most to the fore in moments of crisis. When Percival dies, Bernard must contemplate death in silence and solitude, the states that are normally most foreign to him. He steps out of the "machine" for a while and considers the world without the center that was Percival. He addresses the "blank and brutal face" of death, with contempt for its trifling power (and makes an entry in his
notebook about it—even in this extremity, Bernard collects observations.) Claims of curiosity, words screaming from headlines, beckon him back; but he resists a while longer. He senses a time when "things will become too difficult to explain." The sequence, which compels him to invent phrases and tell stories, implies time and mortality. Again, the relationship of language with civilization, the life of society, the world of time and place, is suggested.

To escape from the sequence, Bernard turns to the visual arts. For him, pictures do not refer to anything, as words do; they just exist timelessly and so bring back the dead. He remembers his own "infirmities," his easy phrases. Seeking to express his memories, he finds that "they cannot be imparted," that "nothing that has been said meets our case" (284). He compares poets to scapegoats, chained to the rock of language, and so to mortality and finitude. Painters exist in the sublimity of silence, but silence weighs down this artisan of words. He needs life around him, the "usual sounds," and so he goes to Jinny; he submerges what has been added to his interpretation of life by his short time outside the "machine."

The middle-aged Bernard arranges a meeting with his friends at Hampton Court, feeling immersed in memory now instead of youthful anticipation. Making phrases as always, this time about the freedom and fertility of his mind, he asks, "and what are phrases? They have left me
very little to lay on the table, beside Susan's hand; to take from my pocket, with Neville's credentials" (326). He knows that his phrases have amused and comforted his friends, but solitude is still his undoing. His fluency hides a "little dagger of contempt and severity," but that dagger never plunges; it is deflected by his curiosity, his stories. He still searches for the one true story, and he keeps his phrases "like clothes in a cupboard, waiting for someone to wear them" (327). Like Neville, Bernard worries that he does not cling to life, that he makes no mark, has formed no conclusions. He is diffused, infinitely susceptible to other people's moods and to silence.

Silence falls after dinner, and dissolves Bernard's self, making him featureless and indistinguishable. As always when outside the world of conversation, of time and space, Bernard contemplates the world and senses the essential lifelessness of space. Only language can impart significance; in silence, life on earth seems a trivial accident. But soon Bernard hears the sounds of the world and is retrieved from "the howling winds of darkness"; he recovers himself and finds his voice; he enters the battle against lifelessness again.

Thus, with the accumulated phrases and impressions of a lifetime, Bernard attempts to tell to his vaguely-familiar dinner partner the "story" of his life. Although that life has been a "globe, full of figures," other people only
understand sequence, the orderly arrangement of detail. Like children, we tell ourselves stories, decorated with beautiful phrases. And Bernard is tired of stories and phrases, of the neat falseness of artistic representation:

I begin to long for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement. I begin to seek some design more in accordance with those moments of humiliation and triumph that come now and then undeniably (341-42).

He needs a language that will express the moments outside of the sequence, that will match "the confusion, the height, the indifference and the fury" of nature. Throughout his life, Bernard has expressed increasing dissatisfaction with the ability of language to communicate life's essential meaning, the deepest experiences. But now, a story-teller still, he will open his personal "picture-book" and comment in the margins.

"In the beginning"—there was not the Word, but the nursery, the world of sensation. Bernard proceeds to retell The Waves in "fictional" terms, supplying his listener with a few of the notes he took. He draws portraits of his friends and details his own development, his ability to be both detached and involved, his attraction to the chorus, the easy, unassuming, coarse, "almost wordless, almost senseless" side of life. He tries to describe first love, and is again stymied and imprisoned by language. He longs for music "to replace these flagging, foolish transcripts"
(350). He manages to describe that "flying moment" precisely and vigorously but asks "what is the use of painfully elaborating these consecutive sentences when what one needs is nothing consecutive but a bark, a groan?" (350). And then he returns to the fiction within the fiction, the premise of the "old novel," the notion "that we can make out a plain and logical story, so that when one matter is despatched--love for instance--we go on, in an orderly manner, to the next" (350).

Throughout this complicated, concentrated summation, Bernard comments upon language, upon the very attempt he is engaged in of rendering his life in words. Speaking implies trust, hope, continuity. When he entered social life, he learned punctuality and artful story-telling but it is a mistake, this extreme precision, this orderly and military progress; a convenience, a lie. There is always deep below it, even when we arrive punctually at the appointed time with our white waistcoats and polite formalities, a rushing stream of broken dreams, nursery rhymes, street cries, half-finished sentences and sights . . . (353-54).

Yet his phrases helped him to enclose the sudden illuminations, the shower of impressions. He compares a sentence to "a string of six little fish that let themselves be caught" (354), like these six people (Bernard continually observes himself) who offer themselves to his (and our) detached observation. They made a symphony, they were soloists in an orchestra; he wonders again whether music
is not the best medium to express their lives.

But the symphony of life fades in and out of consciousness; Tuesday follows Monday and one takes one's place. So "one cannot despise these phrases laid like Roman roads across the tumult of our lives, since they compel us to walk in step like civilised people with the slow and measured tread of policeman though one may be humming any nonsense under one's breath at the same time . . . ." (356).

The simple words of domesticity, "the mere process of life is satisfactory" (358). The "little language" seems sufficient. But Percival's death crashes into the sequence and, like the passion of love, resists language: Bernard realizes that

for pain words are lacking. There should be cries cracks, fissures, whiteness passing over chintz covers, interference with the sense of time, of space; the sense also of extreme fixity in passing objects; and sounds very remote and then very close; flesh being gashed and blood spurting, a joint suddenly twisted—beneath all of which appears something very important, yet remote, to be just held in solitude (359).

But pain subsides as passion cools; we go on living, we cover the dead with phrases and symbolize. Despising that covering over, that "lily-sweet glue," still Bernard returns, "to seek among phrases and fragments something unbroken" (361).

He pauses here and wonders, "Should this be the end of the story?" Should this tale end with a confession of
the incomprehensibility of life? "But if there are no stories, what end can there be, or what beginning? Life is not susceptible perhaps to the treatment we give it when we try to tell it" (362). Percival is dead but Bernard's impulse to live rises again, like the eternal rising and falling of waves, and he takes up his individual life. And with the assumption of individual responsibility, Bernard can once again order his world in language: "The trees, scattered, put on order; the thick green of the leaves thinned itself to a dancing light. I netted them under with a sudden phrase. I retrieved them from formlessness with words." Language is his weapon against formlessness, the irrationality of natural cycles that continue oblivious to man. It is his assertion of identity, his challenge to death, which is the ultimate surrender to formlessness.

But he recalls a last experience of losing his individual identity and seeing to the bottom of things, the kind of experience that has been identified throughout the book with a dropping off of language and the faith in language. Suddenly, the "rhythm stopped," the words ceased. As he had feared when young, he calls to his self and nothing comes: "No echo comes when I speak, no varied words. This is more truly death than the death of friends, that the death of youth" (374). Again, language is identified with opposition to death, with life's struggle, with the defiant self. He enters that sunless territory again; desire
vanishes. "No sound broke the silence of the wintry landscape" (374). Entirely disillusioned, he sees life as a "dust dance," and mocks his feeble attempts to bring order and sequence with words: "I, carrying a notebook, making phrases, had recorded merely changes; a shadow, I had been sedulous to take note of shadows" (375). Like a child's first perception of the world, the world seen without a sense of self, the undifferentiated landscape returns to him. "Perceiving merely," "unable to speak save in a child's words of one syllable; without shelter from phrases" (376), Bernard confronts the world. But the world seen without the measure of individual identity has no human significance and cannot be described in human language. "How describe or say anything in articulate words again?" (376). The moment does not last for Bernard; as usual, habit, blindness, "loveliness returns as one looks with all its train of phantom phrases" (376). Significance returns, and with it language.

But he has been impressed once again with the fragility of individual identity, the difficulty of telling the story of a life. In order to give his audience this life of his, he must collect not only people and events but dreams and unborn selves, "those old half-articulate ghosts" who resist sentences. He must also include the brute "whose speech is gutteral, visceral"--the body, passions, desires. He finds the "sufficient height" that eluded Louis and
Rhoda; he looks down upon the world and everything becomes beautiful. Released from his time-bound self, he is no longer "the man who kept a book in his pocket in which he made notes" (379). He takes upon him "the mystery of things" and enters the interlude consciousness, the unceasing, de-signified world of natural cycles:

Day rises; the girl lifts the watery fire-hearted jewels to her brow; the sun levels his beams straight at the sleeping house; the waves deepen their bars; they fling themselves on shore; back blows the spray; sweeping their waters they surround the boat and the sea-holly. The birds sing in chorus; deep tunnels run between the stalks of flowers; the house is whitened; the sleeper stretches; gradually all is astir. Light floods the room and drives shadow beyond shadow to where they hang in folds inscrutable (379).

But human voices wake us; Bernard is recalled by his dining partner back to the mundane and mortal. The feeling of transcendence never lasts, so the need for language returns. After reviling the other man for bringing him back to a consciousness of the enemy, he thanks him "in words of one syllable" for allowing him to perceive again, for his regained sense of "the complexity and the reality and the struggle" (381). The man leaves, and Bernard begins to talk to us, to himself again. He praises the solitude and silence that he has always dreaded, "that has removed the pressure of the eye, the solicitation of the body, and all need of lies and phrases" (381). He discards his book of phrases that are useless to describe love and
death and the experience of selflessness: "I have done with phrases" (382). He longs for the silence and solitude to go on and on.

But that state has always equalled death for Bernard; always he has been recalled by the world of the living. So now the restaurant is closing; identity and responsibility must be reassumed; he must catch the train. He must re-enter the world of language and struggle. It is dawn, "the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again" (383). Desire returns, the desire to fight against death again; the impulse towards heroism is ignited by the fact of death, the indifference of nature. The terms of the contest are set: time-bound, language-bound man must fight against the easy sinking into death and formlessness.

Thus, Bernard's summation does more than recapitulate the earlier sections of the book. It moves in the rhythms of silence and speech, comments upon the falseness of plot, travels in and out of experiences of selfhood and selflessness. Language is clearly identified with the battle against death, with the sense of individual identity, with the human construction of form upon the natural state of formlessness. Bernard is frustrated by the limitations of ordinary language; The Waves may be seen as a formulation of extraordinary language.
If *The Waves* is in a sense a meditation, it is in large part a meditation about language. In it can be found all of the major insights about the functions and dysfunctions of words that are dramatized in the other novels. Having traced each character's attitude toward language, one may isolate certain prototypical observations.

Most significantly, language is seen as a product of civilization, with all the values and limitations, the virtues and vices of communal life. Those radically apart from social life either cannot speak or cannot be understood. Rhoda's perception of life as sensation and noise, surrounded by steadily encroaching silence, recalls Septimus and his futile struggle to find significance in the noise that surrounds him. These two suicides fight against a terror that arises primarily from their persecution at the hands and in the voices of those with no comprehension of or tolerance for private languages. Neither has a firm, confident sense of self to withstand or discriminate among the communal onslaughts. Their failure to participate in the common rituals of life prevents them from sharing in the common reference points that make verbal communication possible. Septimus misreads the signs, the motor-car and the skywriting; he has his own system of meaning. Rhoda attends a party at which Jinny thrives, and interprets the identical social environment as malevolent, threatening
her very existence. If the failure to communicate troubles virtually all Woolf's characters, these two respond most radically to their exclusion from the realm of community and sharing, the realm of language. Both have a sense of continual interruption; both have a simultaneous sense of the visionary and the real world; both fear the coming of the beast, Rhoda's "tiger" and Septimus' "monster," who hides behind civilization's thin veneer. In this, Louis is like them, but he saves himself from oblivion by anchoring within the comforting, slogan-filled world of commerce. In a less radical way, the loneliness of Sara Pargiter is dramatized by her fanciful, enigmatic manner of speaking. Isa Oliver's isolation is epitomized by her secret book of poetry, whose contents she mutters under her breath. Katharine Hilbery escapes from the confusions of language into the clarity of mathematics. Charles Tansley's isolation results from his inability to join the human community by participating in social conversation. Conversely, as Rachel Vinrace secures her identity, she learns to speak to others. Bernard is most fluent when he has an audience. Eleanor Pargiter needs others to interpret and explain her fleeting impressions. Mr. Ramsay is happiest declaiming to admirers.

Since it is intimately bound to communal life, language is also seen as an assertion of the individual ego or identity as it functions in the world of time and space.
Language is connected with light and day, with the middle ground of experience; it is the illuminator of the moment. Bernard sees words as rockets, appropriate to express and make significant an unpredictable world. When the ego drops off, language ceases. Moments of release from identity, seen both as liberating and dangerous, occur often in the novels and are always connected with the insufficiency or inappropriateness of language. Bernard's phrase for this silent land that one visits periodically is revealing: "The sunless territory of non-identity."

Rachel Vinrace lives in this territory frequently when *The Voyage Out* begins, because she is as yet without a firm sense of self. She "stammers" in company and prefers the wordless evocations of music. Gradually, through the influence of love, she defines herself and learns to communicate meaningfully and to demand the closest possible connection between language and truth. She enters the "sunless territory" again when she and Terence walk into the jungle and realize their love for each other. Words lose all meaning in the experience of passion; earlier, Richard Dalloway's kiss, following the storm at sea, has the same effect of cancelling the torturous process of knowing another through conversation. When she and Terence return from the dark place and rejoin the others, words return to them and they begin to construct their own private language of love. Illness then cuts Rachel off from this communion; meaning
separates itself from language. She dies in the middle of the night.

Mrs. Ramsay imprints her identity most unmistakeably when she speaks and when she communicates her wishes by a powerful silence. Still, she welcomes the moments when she loses her personality as wife, mother, and hostess, and becomes "a wedge-shaped core of darkness." She comes out of this relaxing solitude gradually, as she finds herself repeating little remembered phrases, and then quickly when she realizes that her husband needs to speak to her. The section "Time Passes" begins with conversation but then "a downpouring of immense darkness" swallows up both furniture and human identity. Darkness is once again connected with the element of non-identity and silence.

Entering this dark place usually involves a reversion in time, either back to childhood and "words of one syllable," or to primeval time and silence. Childhood in Woolf's novels is a time when one "tries on" language in the form of certain single, important words (like Susan's "I love and I hate.") Growing up involves making connections and acknowledging complexities, inventing phrases, and certain characters never grow in this way. Jinny and Susan remain on this "one syllable" level, Jinny because she is most interested in physical passion, which is always connected, in Woolf, to the primitive or pre-language state; and Susan because she fears complexity. Jacob is killed before he
can develop, and his few recorded words are frequently monosyllables. Rachel Vinrace's initial immaturity is in part manifested by her difficulties in speaking, her maturity signalled by an enhanced ability to use and understand language. Moving from the word to the phrase, then, is a progression into adulthood, into civilization and culture. The story that will connect all the phrases, those open-ended, unfinished attempts at finding sequence, can be seen as the highest goal of art, perhaps unattainable except in certain fleeting moments. Bernard's "summing-up," Lily Briscoe's "vision," Mrs. Dalloway's communion with Septimus and the sense of completeness she provides at her party, Mrs. Ramsay's ability to unite disparate personalities and to bridge life and death, Eleanor Pargiter's fitful illuminations, Miss La Trobe's pageant: all may be seen as transitory brushes with connection, looking "from a sufficient height" and seeing unity and an all-encompassing meaning. Many of these characters reach their momentary pinnacles by means of language; all feel a pressing need to communicate their revelations to others. That "need for an audience" is a mixed blessings; it keeps the human community together but it also distracts and frustrates the potential artist. Still, language is seen in the other novels in the way Bernard ultimately perceives it: as a heroic and defiant gesture against unreason and disorder. If man is time-bound, he is also language-bound, and must fight with
the tools he is given against an easy sinking into death and formlessness. The struggle to assert one's identity in language, and to connect verbally with others, is inseparable from the struggle to live. Speaking implies trust, hope, continuity; despite formidable obstacles, words preserve civilization by preserving order.

To move back to the primitive, back to "shells, bones and silence," is to yield to disorder, to chaos, or to search for a non-human, even anti-human order. Rhoda is drawn to this place, where features are rubbed from faces; Louis too is ever conscious of "the beast" and of the primitive urges that lurk behind civilized people. The primitive world is seen as deathlike, frightening, and it is frequently connected with incomprehensible sounds. The Years, especially, documents this persistent realm: Martin's and Sara's walk through Hyde Park is a passage through a lunatic world of people talking to themselves, either unconsciously or because no one understands them; the caretaker's children sing their incomprehensible song. The Years is a history of people living dangerously close to anti-human forces, epitomized by war. Illness brings one into this place or time, as it does for Rachel and Septimus. Noises and irrelevant speech constantly threaten to overpower conversation and important communication in Mrs. Dalloway, The Years, and Between The Acts. Physical passion is strongly linked with the primitive and wordless and, even
for Jinny, can resemble a nightmare world, a "forest." So, although it is instructive for Bernard to step out of the sequence now and then, the "sunless territory" is always a world to be returned from. One's sense of self calls one back. But when that daylight world seems indifferent or hostile, people may use language as a buffer. Bernard does this frequently, as do Septimus, Mr. Ramsay, Neville and Louis, Sara Pargiter, and Isa Oliver. Sometimes, the world reacts violently to this anti-social behavior, as it does to Septimus. Sometimes, the world is seen to proceed on its disastrous course, despite all human attempts to save it, as most graphically described in the air raid section of The Years.

The doubts that Bernard expresses about the ability of language to convey truth, about the efficacy of stories, is implied throughout Woolf's work. Words have a certain solidity; how can they be made to express the "darkness and conjecture" behind the factual world? How can one express in language one's distrust of words? Her partial answer is to infuse poetry into prose, and to move away from representational dialogue. In the novels preceding The Waves, characters speak to one another in their "natural speaking voice," as North Pargiter calls it. Their flights of fantasy, their most profound and private intimations, are given language by the narrator, who transforms the chaotic progression of thought into coherence and who "hovers"
around characters, making connections and explaining motives. The two novels following The Waves, The Years and Between The Acts, while they contain more of the novelistic conventions than The Waves does, continue to utilize non-representational speech. That is, Sara Pargiter, and many of the characters in Between The Acts, have dialogue assigned to them which is highly enigmatic, metaphoric, or somehow inappropriate to the plot situation. Just as in The Waves where the designation "said" is used to introduce unspoken soliloquies, Virginia Woolf in her last novels brings into the realm of discourse a highly formal, artistically manipulated language. She suggests, in part, that only the novelist, or the narrator, is capable of presenting a word-filled potential world of maximum expressiveness. The tormented attempts of her characters to surface in this sea of perceptions, intuitions and sensations, to make contact with someone else, reflects the strength of the enemies to communication: the force of personal feelings of inadequacy, individual fears of social censure, as well as the power of non-human forces like snowballing world events, death, time, even the satiation brought on by domestic routine and boredom.

Beside all the doubts and frustrations about language that the books record, however, stand the novels themselves. Through her literary art, Woolf communicates to her reader with great precision. The accomplishment of her work
contrasts with this persistent theme. Art can make the
collections; making connections is art, even if the paint-
ing or book gets buried in a closet, even if the unifier
is the frail human personality itself. The attempt to
communicate is like the struggle against death: hopeless,
but the highest expression of humanity.
V. Language and The Narrator: CONCLUSION

In all Virginia Woolf's novels, the narrator is, in a sense, the most important user of language. It is the narrator who allows the inner lives of characters to demonstrate their underlying similarities, the narrator who translates unsatisfactory communication into meaningful observations about the human potential for genuine dialogue, the narrator who steps in to describe the ongoing natural world, the world of dreams and of silence. In her experiments with narrators, Woolf most clearly merges the theme of language with the verbal form of her novels. As her dissatisfaction with conventionally omniscient narrators grows, and her sadness over the continuing failures and missed opportunities of human communication deepens, her narrators take more clearly upon themselves the artist's responsibility to communicate when characters falter, to expand the boundaries of "story" in order to fill the novel's world with the voices of memory, of history, of philosophical reflection, of artistic theory and purpose. Art, finally, is shown to be the most promising unifier; the writer's gift for language is also a duty to express what the pressures of living keep the ordinary person from expressing. "Implied author" and "narrator" merge. The artist's is the voice "free from the old vibrations."
Her narrators vary in their function and "personality." In *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*, one finds confident omniscient narrators, who provide information about characters' inner lives and backgrounds, and occasionally step in to interpret or philosophize about issues raised in the stories. The narrator of *The Years* allows the erratic train of years and seasons presented to suggest, without narrative interpretation, the continuing frustrations of the Pargiter family. This narrator transcribes a great deal of dialogue; the large amount of recorded speech contrasts ironically with the small quantity of real communication achieved. Only in the descriptions that begin the chapters, descriptions of the natural world and of the large, ongoing parade of social life, does the narrator provide suggestions and implications that go beyond the story of the Pargiters. The narration of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To The Lighthouse* moves nimbly from character to character, allowing the record of inner lives to create cumulative impressions. In sections like "the solitary traveler" in *Mrs. Dalloway* and "Time Passes" in *To The Lighthouse*, the narrator, in the absence of human consciousness, presents philosophical reflections from an artistic perspective removed from the boundaries of the story. While Peter Walsh sleeps, while the Ramsays live and die, year after year, the narrator steps in and explores issues like the appearance of the world, of a house, without human habitation, a world of silence. In *The Waves*, that world
of silence, of the things people do not say, constitutes the entire book, and the phrase-making narrator orders that world into language. The narrator of *Between The Acts* seems gradually to assume the task of the playwright, Miss La Trobe, expanding the village pageant so that the boundaries between art and life dissolve.

In none of these books does the narrator assume the defined and highly-characterized personality she does in *Orlando* and, especially, *Jacob's Room*. The narrators of these two novels are relatives; they are whimsical, facetious, prone to rhetorical questions, highly skeptical about their reporting abilities and, by implication, about the possibility of knowing another person. They are characters in their own right, determined not to be omniscient; their stance makes fun of the pretensions of "conventional" novelists who purport to know everything about their creations. They are the experimenters with the perimeters of language.

The subject matter of *Orlando* is the most fanciful of all Woolf's work, and the narrator she characterizes purports to be just the opposite: logical, rational, truthful. This narrator insists upon her status as "biographer" and "historian," a recorder of facts only, and the continual distinctions drawn between historians and novelists or poets provide one of the chief sources of satire. (To refer to this narrator as female, as the narrator of *Jacob's Room* identifies herself to be, is convenient but not truly accurate, since
the narrator remarks, "[w]e enjoy the immunity of all biographers and historians from any sex whatever . . ." This vaunted sexlessness, comically appropriate for the teller of Orlando's story, is itself part of the satire on those who would tell the story of a life in a completely impersonal, objective way, using only facts.) The historian avoids "that riot and confusion of the passions and emotions which every good historian detests" (9). She is straight-forward: "To put it in a nutshell, leaving the novelist to smooth out the crumpled silk and all its implications, he was a nobleman afflicted with a love of literature" (47). She is devoted to truth: "To give a truthful account of London society at that or indeed at any other time, is beyond the powers of the biographer or the historian. Only those who have little need of the truth, and no respect for it--the poets and the novelists--can be trusted to do it, for this is one of the cases where truth does not exist" (126). Society is something "the poets and the novelists alone can deal with; with such something-nothings their works are stuffed out to prodigious size; and to them with the best will in the world we are content to leave it" (126-7). When Orlando is engaged solely in thought and imagination, rather than action, her biographer mourns the absence of "life," "the only fit subject for novelist or biographer" (174-5). Here, the novelist is distinguished from the poet; the novelist identifies life with action. The satire on "facts," the
questioning of what truth really is and of what is truly important in a person's life, is sustained throughout.

The biographer frequently discusses her responsibilities. She is determined to be as reliable and clear as possible, and sometimes finds it necessary to explain or justify her choice of words. Her extreme self-consciousness allows a tongue-in-cheek attitude towards everything from romantic young men to literary artists. When Orlando is given to melodrama, the narrator's comic, punning alliteration reflects the boy's affectations: "the words coming on the pants of his breath with the passion of a poet whose poetry is half pressed out of him by pain" (29). As chapter two begins, a chapter which will describe the first of Orlando's long sleeps, the biographer admits to a difficulty. Up until now, she has had "documents" and so could "fulfill the first duty of a biographer, which is to plod, without looking to right or left, in the indelible footprints of truth; unenticed by flowers; regardless of shade; on and on methodically . . ." (42). But now comes an episode "dark, mysterious, and undocumented. . . . Our simple duty is to state the facts as far as they are known, and so let the reader make of them what he may." The narrator poses certain philosophical questions about Orlando's "little death," but then eschews philosophy: "Having waited well over half an hour for an answer to these questions, and none coming, let us get on with the story" (44). After all, the biographer's ideal
reader has imagination enough to fill out the "bare hints," to "hear in what we only whisper a living voice" (47). The narrator's tremendously lush descriptive style, coupled with her self-image of the factual, impersonal historian, provides much of the novel's humor. Her musings upon the strange story she tells reflect the puzzlement of a devotee of facts over an outlandish personality: nature, she decides, "has so much to answer for besides the perhaps unwieldy length of this sentence" (50). Her concern for "authenticity" is interspersed with utter fantasy, as in the elaborate description of Orlando turning into a woman. Facts, it would seem, are inadequate barometers of the tremendous variety of human experience.

The narrator of Jacob's Room emphasizes the conditional nature of her knowledge; she can report actions and gestures, but can only guess at thoughts and motivations. The essential mystery of human beings, their fundamental unknowability, is insisted upon. Conversations and events are presented from different perspectives, implying that none is more accurate or truthful than the others, even the narrator's view. The narrator also keeps time flexible, continually expanding and contracting it. People's histories provide transitions between the stages of Jacob's life; he grows older as the various events in others' lives are recorded. With this flexibility, the narrator suggests constant change and renewal.
She also provides the universal view of things—"They say the sky is the same everywhere"—and links specific characters with general human experience: the minister's wife's diffuse sadness is related to the plight of any clergyman's wife, "when she walks on the moor."34 The narrator's ability to generalize, to see the large view of life even if the details cannot be precisely discerned, to relate individual lives to the ongoing, eternal cycles of life: these talents give her at times the personality of a sage, wise and experienced, skeptical, philosophical.

At other times, however, the narrator seems to be a sort of educated mouse, spying on Jacob and his friends, or a moth, hovering over the empty room of this young man with his particular "distinction." The busy life of the students, their discussions and dreams, are recorded in tentative terms, the narrator claiming only a certain familiarity with the ways of undergraduates. "Was it an argument? A bet on the boat races? Was it nothing of the sort? What was shaped by the arms and bodies moving in the twilight room?" (44). She catches certain words in isolation: "'... Julian the Apostate... .' Which of them said that and the other words murmured round it?" Sometimes, the narrator speaks for the silent Jacob, or reports, in parentheses, what she assumes to be Jacob's thoughts. But her problem is "ten years' seniority and a difference of sex" (94). She wants to help him, to comfort him: "Ah, what's the use of saying it?" (95).
Here, she assumes the role of an older, female friend of Jacob's, who is trying to convey his significance, as well as to communicate her own observations, theories, interpretations. She notes the absence of any adequate account of our passions. Everywhere are adventures and dramas, "chasms in the continuity of our ways. Yet we keep straight on" (96). When we meet and attempt to communicate, we fail; "and if you persist that a command of the English language is part of our inheritance, one can only reply that beauty is almost always dumb" (96). The narrator of Jacob's Room is stymied by the human reticence that troubles most of the characters in Woolf's other novels.

But a sense of life that is larger than any human being, more permanent, reverberates throughout this novel, in the various "voices" with which the story is filled. In the first section, the voice of Archer calling his brother permeates the scene, a call that will be repeated by Bonamy at the end of the novel. "The voice had an extraordinary sadness. Pure from all body, pure from all passion, going out into the world, solitary, unanswered, breaking against rocks—so it sounded" (8-9). This is a voice related to the anonymous voices of art and beauty that figure in later novels, a voice reflecting human joys and sorrows. The scene is filled with suggestions of loss and fear: Mrs. Flanders thinks of accidents, shadows fall on her page and the air is chilly, Mrs. Jarvis considers the plight of widows, Charles Steele is
an artist aging in obscurity, Archer calls sadly for Jacob, Jacob is frightened by "an enormous man and woman," he is lost, sobs, finds a skull. The disembodied voice makes more resonant the foreshadowing of later tragedy, and the narrator's voice blends with it, describing Mrs. Flanders from many perspectives, including her neighbors', and moving in and out of the minds of other village people. Later, the narrator will speak out of the memories of aging Cambridge alumni, remembering their college days (46), and will reflect ironically the daydreaming of Jacob, distracted, though he will not admit it, by the women in King's College Chapel (32-3). "A wavering, quavering, doleful lamentation" (77) suddenly fills the streets of London, and one may note that "the voices, angry, lustful, despairing, passionate, were scarcely more than the voices of caged beasts at night" (81). The legends on tombstones are "brief voices," the voice of memory "a measured voice" (133). "'The Kaiser,' the far-away voice remarked in Whitehall, 'received me in audience'" (173). Outside Jacob's window, after his death, Bonamy hears "a harsh and unhappy voice" that "cried something unintelligible" (176). Jacob's short, near-silent life seems surrounded by familiar and mysterious voices, some with direct relevance to him and his fate, others completely indifferent to him.

The atmosphere of Cambridge is conveyed largely through the implied contrast between the glories taught and the rusty
old bores who teach, between the university's belief in talk and the limitless potential behind Jacob's silence, between the great languages and the stilted conversations between instructors and students. The awkwardness of Mr. Plumer's luncheon for undergraduates is conveyed by the abrupt, monosyllabic attempts at speech, and the sardonic report of "a silence which had already lasted five minutes and a half" (34). Books clutter the house, but conversation is agony. The ironic juxtaposition of the profound and the trivial reinforces the idea that human personality is both self-contained and part of the ongoing human pageant, that we cannot know whether a young man named Jacob Flanders is or is not worthy of our attention. The narrator's preference for the truth of gesture and action over the unreliability of words suggests a certain distrust of language as a way of characterizing a young man. Words come from a common pool used over and over; gestures are always unique and individual.

That distrust of language is also conveyed by the great importance of letters in this novel. There is a corresponding connection between all the letter-writing and the narrator's style. Letters are "speech attempted," communication tried, means by which we try to know each other. But if humans are fundamentally unknowable even in direct conversation, this indirect discourse can never hope to succeed. The narrator insists that we can never really know each other, and states that "whether we gain or not by this habit of profuse
communication it is not for us to say" (125). The voices emanating from letters help to unify the novel, which begins with Betty Flanders writing tearfully to Captain Barfoot. Mr. Floyd proposes to Mrs. Flanders by note, and her response "was such a motherly, respectful, inconsequent, regretful letter that he kept it for many years" (21). Mrs. Polegate writes to Captain Barfoot, advising that Jacob be sent to Cambridge, and Mrs. Flanders has gotten a report about Archer's progress in the Navy (29). In the extended description of London life, we see the "post-office vans" and a child trying to mail a letter (64).

The narrator includes a prolonged meditation upon letters; all of them, even the briefest and most pedestrian, are "speech attempted" (93). Though they "lace our days together," letters, and telephones, do have their limitations, their uncertainties; they rarely transmit what is truly important. "And everywhere we go wires and tubes surround us to carry the voices that try to penetrate before the last card is dealt and the days are over." One wonders, "Am I doomed all my days to write letters, send voices, which fall upon the tea-table, fade upon the passage, making appointments, while life dwindles, to come and dine?" Still, "speech attempted" is better than no communication at all, and perhaps "we might talk by the way" (93).

The narrator recalls the great letter writers, Byron and Cowper, who regularly "turned from the sheet that endures
to the sheet that perishes," in order to touch another human heart. They wrote their letters as we do, "when the dark presses round a bright red cave." But the medium, written language, puts obstacles in our path: "words have been used too often; touched and turned, and left exposed to the dust of the street. The words we seek hang close to the tree. We come at dawn and find them sweet beneath the leaf" (93). The perishability of words leads the narrator to the transcience of human relationships: Florinda betrays Jacob. One can never be sure of another's feelings, and language, both spoken and written, often deceives.

The narrator of Jacob's Room comes finally to be more real than the young man she "hovers" around. The many voices that weave the fragmented story together, the different but equally valid perspectives on the same person or event, the little scenes and conversations plucked out of the many that make up a life, the messages, letters, calls: all are selected by the many-faceted narrator to communicate the essential mystery of human personality, and the ways people, including writers, attempt to know others. If there is a distrust of language in the book, it exists beside the extraordinary vividness that the narrator brings to her task. She is at once mouse, moth, chameleon, mimic, satirist and philosopher, uniting all the voices in her all-embracing sympathy.
The unusual narrators of *Orlando* and *Jacob's Room*, although they are richly communicative, reflect in their own highly personalized musings the difficulties of human communication. They make explicit what is implied in the other novels, meditated upon by the characters themselves in *The Waves*: humans are sorely limited in their verbal powers, beset by innumerable obstacles in their fight to express themselves. The narrators of most of Woolf's novels overcome the human barriers to communication. They are the successful wielders of words; they present the ideal alternative to inarticulate, society-bound humans. Their voices, and the more-than-human visionary voices that periodically take over for them, suggest the limitless possibilities for expressive language given to the artist. The artist, the novelist, while she details the lives of people frustrated in their use of words, presents, in contrast and by implication, her own liberation from the societal constraints that so hinder language. Only the artist can fully draw from the common pool of words those combinations that best express the enduring human truths.

In a sense, that combination of hope and despair over the possibilities of language, that tension between the expressed doubts about words and the eloquent evidence of the novel itself, characterizes all of Virginia Woolf's novels. In the worlds she creates, one finds failures of language, especially Rhoda and Septimus, who cannot share in
the common reference points that make communication possible, as well as verbally successful characters, like Bernard, who are able to stretch language so that it fits most human situations. But in these characters, and in the large population of moderately or occasionally successful speakers and listeners, one hears an insistent desire, a fundamental need to express thoughts, feelings, intuitions, discoveries in verbal form. No character is entirely content with revelations in solitude; all share in the struggle to formulate the self, and by extension the world, in language. In this, they reflect their creator. Virginia Woolf's preoccupation with words as vital, even sentient tools in the service of identity and community permeates her fiction. To trace the development and refinement of language as one of her major themes is to draw closer to the heart of her artistic purpose.
NOTES


8 Naremore, p. 182.


10 Johnson, pp. 111-12.


13 Guiguet, p. 368.


22 Schaefer, p. 186.

23 Naremore, p. 179.

24 Naremore, p. 246.

25 Chambers, p. 102.


34 See note 32 *Jacob's Room*, p. 17.


