

The Specious Present and Bi-directional Time in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*

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To the Lighthouse aims at profundity. It confronts "the vast, the general question": "What is the meaning of life?"; "What does it mean? How do you explain it all?"; "What does one live for?"; "why was it so short, why was it so inexplicable ..."¹ The question is posed in response to the "pathos" (167) of transience ("nothing stays; all changes ..." (195)) and, more poignantly, the shock of "tragedy" (144, 162), when life is experienced as the encounter with "strife, ruin, chaos" (164). In this context, the great challenge of human experience is the maintenance of proportion and balance, in the midst of "anguish" (100, 96), "anxiety" (68, 87, 101, 117), "desolation" (83, 167), "despair" (162), "misery" (50, 203), and "sorrow(s)" (7, 108, 130, 142, 143, 166, 181, 183) - in short, "the weakness and suffering of mankind" (225), in the face of the intractable "complexity of things" (111). Yet, in the novel, the mind is notoriously susceptible to destabilisation, by event or emotion, and must repeatedly seek to restore its equilibrium: "The disproportion there seemed to upset some harmony in her own mind" (209); "He upset the proportions of one's world" (213). Under these conditions, the meaning of life is found not through any fixed answer or permanent truth, which abides independent of the mind conceiving it, but in the ever-renewed struggle - one might more properly say, commitment - to configure one's own awareness as a "perspective" (187) or "point of view" (12, 79), capable of seeing the essential "pattern" (145), "coherence" (114), or "unity of the whole" (60) in the flux of "experience" (69, 173) whose content is as fleeting

¹ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, ed. Stella McNichol, Intro. Hermione Lee (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 175, 203, 97, 105.

as the movement of time itself: "In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was struck into stability" (176).

Though "the shock of the event" (122) – the suffering of particular loss or heartache – underpins the tragic "vision" (197, 226) achieved respectively by each of the three principle characters (Mrs Ramsay, Lily Briscoe, and Mr Ramsay), at the deepest level the source of tragedy in the novel concerns not what happens in time, but the movement of time itself. This is preliminarily evident, for example, in Mrs Ramsay's dread of transience – the recognition that "[n]o happiness lasted" (71):

it was all ephemeral as a rainbow – this sound which had been obscured and concealed under the other sounds suddenly thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with *an impulse of terror*. (20 [my emphasis])

The link between time and tragedy emerges most clearly in the middle section, "Time Passes", where the central tragic events in the novel (the deaths of Mrs Ramsay, Andrew, and Prue) occur parenthetically, indicating that these particulars are mere qualifications or adjectives of the substantive source of tragedy – the sheer passage of time. In the *Physics*, Aristotle posits time as essentially destructive, because it entails passage or movement, and movement removes from presence: "Time in itself is rather a cause of destruction; for it is the number of movement, and movement removes what is there already."² Any structure, any equilibrium of forces, is destroyed by time. In *To the Lighthouse*, the passage of time leaves, in its wake, what Lily Briscoe terms "strife, ruin, chaos". Even the stars succumb: "the waste of the years and the perishing of stars" (41). Prior security, no matter how long continued, means nothing after time eventually sweeps it away, as with the rent rock in the mountains or the loosened fold of Mrs Ramsay's shawl, hanging in the nursery: "once in the middle of the night with a roar, with a rupture, as after centuries of quiescence, a rock rends itself

² Aristotle's *Physics*, ed. and trans. W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 221^a26.

from the mountain and hurtles crashing into the valley, one fold of the shawl loosened and swung to and fro" (142).

Of course, any analysis of time in *To the Lighthouse* encounters the problem of distinguishing, in the novel, between (a) representations of the nature of time as it is in itself, objectively, and (b) representations of the nature of time as it is for human experience, subjectively. Indeed, the intellectual work of Mr Ramsay, the resident philosopher in the novel, foregrounds the relation between subject and object, in the understanding of reality: "Subject and object and the nature of reality" (28). According to his son, Andrew, Mr Ramsay seeks to know the object of his inquiry objectively, uncontaminated by subjective distortion: "'Think of a kitchen table then,' he told her, 'when you're not there'" (28). The same requirement for objective inquiry, involving independence from any particular point of view, is formulated by Donald Williams: "The description of what is really there, as it really is, must be independent of any particular point of view."³ Remarkably, in the middle section, "Time Passes", the act of thinking of an object "when you're not there" (in this case, the unoccupied Ramsay vacation home) is prolonged for ten years, with the result that the passage of time is itself the ultimate object of observation, with only the Lighthouse beam as witness:

The place was gone to rack and ruin. Only the Lighthouse beam entered the rooms for a moment, sent its sudden stare over the bed and wall in the darkness of winter, looked with equanimity at the thistle and the swallow, the rat and the straw. Nothing now withstood them ... (150)

Here time itself is construed as a destructive force, which inevitably overwhelms all that endures in it, unless external human agency intervenes: "Mrs Bast stayed the corruption and the rot; rescued from the pool of Time that was fast closing over them, now a basin, now a cupboard ..." (151-52).

³ Donald Williams, "The Myth of Passage", in Richard Gale (ed.), *The Philosophy of Time* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1978), p. 503.

In contemporary philosophy, a distinction is made between the mere passage of time and the change which occurs to things and processes during that passage. In itself, time is neither destructive nor constructive. It is simply, as Aristotle notes, the measure or "number of change in respect of before and after": "Time is not change, therefore, but that in respect of which change is numerable" (*Physics* 219^b2). Richard Taylor epitomises this view: "We presuppose that time is not by itself 'efficacious'; that is, that the mere passage of time does not augment or diminish the capacities of anything and, in particular, that it does not enhance or decrease an agent's powers or abilities."⁴ Williams elaborates: "There is passage, but it is nothing extra. It is the mere happening of things, their existence strung along the manifold." (105) However, in *To the Lighthouse*, the very measure of time is itself destructive or associated with destruction. That is, in "Time Passes", the unit or measure, regarding the passage of time, is night, and the movement of time, from unit to unit, is construed in terms of the succession of destructive nights, one after another: "Night, however, succeeds to night. Winter holds a pack a them" (139). Moreover, the notion of time as an intrinsically destructive force or agent is extended to entail the destruction by time of the distinctions proper to it and by which its own duration is measured: "(for night and day, month and year ran shapelessly together ...) until it seemed as if the universe were battling and tumbling, in brute confusion and wanton lust aimlessly by itself" (147). Here, through destroying the boundaries between the units by which its own duration is measured, time destroys the very principle by which things are said to be in time. As Aristotle notes, "things are in time in the sense which corresponds to being numerable ..." (*Physics* 221^a13 [original emphasis]). But in "Time Passes", the number by which time is measured is itself destroyed. In this context, all that remains is "the chaos and tumult of the night" (147).

⁴ Richard Taylor, "Fatalism", in Richard M. Gale (ed.), *The Philosophy of Time* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1978), p. 224.

Yet this dispensation is obviously contradicted by the fact that the period narrated in "Time Passes" lasts ten years. That is, though the section concerns the running "shapelessly together" of the units by which time is measured, the duration of the aggregate period is precisely measurable. Moreover, the periodicity of the Lighthouse beam, "coming regularly across the waves first two quick strokes and then one long steady stroke" (68), is itself measurable and invariable – as long as the keepers of the Lighthouse do their job as required. These contradictions, regarding the nature of time, can be resolved, once it is recognised that "Time Passes", at the deepest level, is not about the passage of time in itself, objectively. Instead, at bottom, the section concerns the passage of time as it is experienced *subjectively*, by the victims of tragedy and traumatic loss. The succession of destructive nights which ultimately fuse, as we have seen, into one chaotic and tumultuous night constitutes the most spectacular depiction – one might almost say, *ekphrasis* – in literature of the long dark night of the soul. Indeed, the section makes explicit reference to the passage of time in terms of the desperation of the soul, when "[t]he nights are now full of wind and destruction", and the "sleeper" arises "to find on the beach an answer to his doubts", as the means of "bringing the night to order and making the world reflect the compass of the soul" (140).

Perhaps the most poignant reference to the long dark night of the soul concerns the agony of Mr Ramsay, after the sudden death of his wife:

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. [Mr Ramsay stumbling along a passage stretched his arms out one dark morning, but, Mrs Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, he stretched his arms out. They remained empty.] (140)

The passage along which Mr Ramsay here stumbles is not spatial, but temporal. It concerns time passing during an excruciating

decade of his life. The agony of this dark passage is the contrary of the exuberance displayed by his youngest children on vacation, before the long period of tragedy and trauma began: "They were happier now than they would ever be again ... They came bustling along the passage" (65). The bewildering agony of the long dark night of the soul in *To the Lighthouse* emerges more forcefully when we recognise that the entire novel, as suggested at the outset of our study, is formulated in terms of the question regarding the meaning of life. Characters are recurrently beset by "human worries" (66), which in normal circumstances can be managed or deferred. But in periods of overwhelming desperation, the question imposes itself relentlessly: "the old question which traversed the sky of the soul perpetually, the vast, the general question which was apt to particularise itself at such moments as these ... What is the meaning of life?" (175). To live without an answer when one is desperately sought and needed is to suffer the most excruciating form of "the dark of human ignorance" (50).

The demand for meaning in life is fundamental to character in *To the Lighthouse*. But meaning, in turn, is fundamentally construed in relation to time. Indeed, the question of meaning in life, quoted at the beginning of this essay, is posed in terms of time: "why was it so short, why was it so inexplicable ..." (195). Moreover, on the first page of the novel, the very principle by which character is classified or divided into types concerns attitude toward time:

Since he belonged, even at the age of six, to that great clan which cannot keep this feeling separate from that, but *must let future prospects, with their joys and sorrows, cloud what is actually at hand*, since to such people even in earliest childhood any turn in the wheel of sensation has the power to crystallise and transfix the moment upon which its gloom or radiance rests. (7
[my emphasis])

The question of meaning in life interrogates the nature of time itself – at least as available to human experience. In the novel, time is problematic and disruptive because of the vulnerability of the

present to both the future and the past. The future is a source of worry and anxious uncertainty, while the past is a source of grief and regret. The future brings what cannot be foreseen: "Well, we must wait for the future to show ..." (143). The past removes what can never return: "it had become, she knew, giving one last look at it over her shoulder, already the past" (121). The challenge is to order the parts of time according to a principle other than mere succession, so that both future and past can enrich and stabilise the present, instead of threatening and disorienting it.

The notion of successive time (time measured in terms of the passage of successive units) is crucial in the novel. Mrs Ramsay compares "the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach" to "a ghostly roll of drums [which] remorselessly beat the measure of life" (20). Moreover, in a passage to which we shall soon return, she herself is referred to in chronometric terms, when, in order to revive her will to interact with the dinner guests and unite them in conviviality, she gives herself "a little shake that one gives a watch that has stopped", with the result that "the old familiar pulse began beating, as the watch begins ticking – one, two, three, one, two, three" (91). Perception of successive time is also associated with the Lighthouse keepers who "see some dreary waves breaking week after week" (9). Lily Briscoe construes her life in terms of the succession of her "thirty-three years, the deposit of each day's living" (58). James Ramsay, in a sustained fury at his father in the sailboat, endures the torment of successive time as "these grains of misery which settled on his mind one after another" (203). The sense of successive time tends to aggravate the ravages of tragedy. For in the context of tragedy, successive time is measured by the hammer strokes of fate: "ominous sounds like the measured blows of hammers dulled on felt, which, with their repeated shocks still further loosened the shawl and cracked the tea-cups" (145). Here, the passage of time is marked by sequential catastrophes, until events merge into one continuous ordeal of "strife, ruin, chaos". Their sequence no longer matters – only their continuing consequences. As we have seen, "[n]ight ... succeeds to night", until tragic catastrophe reduces life to one continuous darkness (139).

Both Mr and Mrs Ramsay are acutely aware of successive time – the passage of time as an inexorable continuity. But they respond to that continuity in opposite ways. To Mr Ramsay, successive time becomes an obsession – one whose danger he does not recognise: “He flicked his watch *carelessly open*” (74 [my emphasis]). Again and again, he broods on the passage of time, in the context of worrying about the status of his reputation in the future: “Ah, but how long do you think it’ll last? said somebody … A question like that would lead, almost certainly, to something being said which reminded him of his own failure” (116). As a “metaphysician” (43), fearless in the quest for truth, Mr Ramsay can “stand on his little ledge facing the dark of human ignorance, how we know nothing and the sea eats away the ground we stand on …” (50). Yet, in virtue of his “egotism” (42, 100), he is distressed by the prospect of time eroding his own fame, and construes the future as a perspective on the diminished and devalued past. By this means, he makes time a measure of incremental self-doubt, as when pacing metronomically “up and down the terrace”, fretting about his reputation (21). This attitude enhances his vulnerability to the passage of time. Hence, if the units of succession become tragic, involving a sequence of catastrophes, he is powerless to recoup or renew. All he can do is beg for pity and sympathy: “His immense self-pity, his demand for sympathy poured and spread itself in pools at her feet …” (167).

Mrs Ramsay is even more aware of successive time than her husband. As we have seen, awareness of fleeting time, the drum roll which “remorselessly beat the measure of life” (20), is never far from her attention. But her attitude toward transience is ambivalent. On the one hand, ephemerality for her is a source of “terror” (20); for it ensures that “[n]o happiness lasted” (71). On the other hand, transience enables “ecstasy” and “pure delight” in the exquisite fulfilment of the transitory moment: “It is enough! It is enough!” (72). Yet Mrs Ramsay’s connection with time goes much deeper than this. Indeed, she is subtly identified with the movement of time or, more precisely, with the function of moving time. As we have seen, at the Boeuf en Daube dinner party, before the guests have melded

into prandial unity, she feels the need to create cohesion: "Nothing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate. And the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her" (91). Here Mrs Ramsay is described in terms identical to those pertaining to the passage of time, as construed in the novel. More precisely, the actions of "merging and flowing", attributed to Mrs Ramsay, exactly correspond to the attributes of time. With respect to the latter action ("flowing"), time is also described as "the flowing, the fleeting" (114). With respect to the former ("merging"), the passage of time, as we have seen in earlier discussion of "Time Passes", is described in terms of merging dates and events ordinarily distinct and separate: "for night and day, month and year ran shapelessly together" (147). The connection between Mrs Ramsay and the movement of time is clinched by explicit comparison, in the same passage which mentions "merging and flowing", of Mrs Ramsay with the measurement or, to use Aristotle's term, *numbering* of time: "giving herself the little shake that one gives a watch that has stopped, the old familiar pulse began beating, as the watch begins ticking – one, two, three, one, two, three" (91).

This comparison of Mrs Ramsay to a watch ticking entrains a nest of contradictions whose examination will advance our analysis. To begin with, whereas time in the novel is portrayed in terms of its "annihilating character" (to transpose a phrase deployed by Paul Tillich), Mrs Ramsay is portrayed in terms of her creative character.⁵ Again we can quote: "the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her" (91 [my emphasis]). But the recurring series, "one, two, three, one, two, three", linked with Mrs Ramsay is the contrary of creativity, which tends toward the novel and that which has not yet been brought into being. How can the principle of creativity be formulated in terms of recurrence and repetition of that which has preceded? A preliminary way out of the difficulty involves closer examination of its terms. In the formula, "one, two, three, one, two, three", the units of measurement recur, one after another, but the event whose duration they measure is not itself

⁵ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1.194.

repeatable. Nor is each human life, elapsing in time, repeatable. Indeed, a death's head, in the form of a "horrid skull" belonging to a decapitated boar, hangs on a wall of the nursery (124). Unlike the time measured by a chronometer, which, in principle, continues indefinitely, the time measured by Mrs Ramsay's internal "one, two, three, one, two, three" is finite and mortal, and she herself, as we have seen regarding her "impulse of terror" (20) at the sound of ephemerality, remains acutely vulnerable to the anxiety of transitoriness. Yet despite this – indeed because of it – she exerts her entire being in the effort of creating a moment of unity, drawing individuals out of their respective preoccupations to share a "community of feeling" (123), binding each into a coherent whole which can be accessed later in memory, to provide a stable point of orientation and confirmation of meaning, in the midst of "this eternal passing and flowing" (176) that every life endures in its movement through time:

There it was, all round them. It partook, she felt, carefully helping Mr Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity ... there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out ... in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again tonight she had the feeling she had had once today already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that remains for ever after.

This would remain. (114)

This conviction invokes the central paradox regarding time in the novel: flux is the context for "stability"; transience is the context for "eternity"; mutability is the context for that which is "immune to change." The paradox is founded on the internal contradictions characterising or articulating the passage of time. The "flowing" and "fleeting" stem from the movement of the present toward the future, when that which is will be displaced by that which is to come. The stability and immutability stem from the movement of the present toward the past, when that which is will subsist as that

which was. Yet, at a deeper level, as we can immediately see, the flowing and fleeting of time moves in two directions at once: toward both the future and the past, with the result that the stability of the present is undermined as much by the past and by the future. To understand the implications of this point, we must first expand our inquiry. According to Williams, there is an historical watershed regarding perspectives on time. In earlier periods, thinkers tended to view the present in terms of movement toward the past, whereas later periods tend to view the present in terms of movement toward the future: "Augustine pictures the present passing into the past, where the modern pictures the present as invading the future ..." (104). Williams' claim is obviously oversimplified and inaccurate. Indeed, Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses* provides a terse refutation of the claim that "the modern pictures the present as invading the future": "Hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past."⁶ Nevertheless, Williams does successfully foreground the bi-directional character of the movement of time.

In *To the Lighthouse*, time is always flowing both ways. Movement toward the past involves as much change as does movement toward the future. Moreover, in thus involving change, the past can provide as much resolution to uncertainty in the present as is ordinarily expected of the future. With certain qualifications to be indicated later, it is as accurate to say, "we must wait for the future to show ..." (143), as to say we must wait for the past to show. The first step in explicating the bi-directional movement of time in the novel is to examine Mrs Ramsay's observation of the passage of the present into the past, at the end of the dinner party:

With her foot on the threshold she waited a moment longer in a scene that was vanishing even as she looked, and then, as she moved and took Minta's arm, and left the room, it changed, it shaped itself differently; it had become, she knew, giving one last look at it over her shoulder, already the past. (121)

⁶ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Intro. Declan Kiberd (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 238.

There is perhaps no more stunning example in literature of the transition from present to past than this description of Mrs Ramsay, "with her foot on the threshold", looking back at a scene which, even as she considers it, has "become ... already the past." But to uncover the implications of this moment, we must first detach it from the implications entrained by its immediate analogues and predecessors.

The gesture of looking back at a chamber from which one has just departed is a celebrated symbol for attachment to a past which cannot be retrieved. The *locus classicus* for this signification concerns the Greek myth wherein Orpheus, unable to control the impulse regarding which Hades or Pluto, god of the Underworld, has forbidden him, suddenly looks back at Eurydice, as she follows him out of Hades, only to realise that, by this very gesture, he forfeits the power to lead her from the afterlife back to the land of the living. The supreme analogue of this predicament in English literature entails Hamlet's gesture, on exiting Ophelia's closet, of looking back, "with his head over his shoulder turn'd", at the room from which he is distractedly departing.⁷ In Hamlet's case, the act of looking back is vividly associated with attachment to the past. Indeed, during his surprise visit to her closet, Hamlet's intention seems to entail an attempt to infuse awareness of the moment indelibly on his mind, so that, when the moment elapses, he will recall it as vividly as a memory of the past as he perceived it as an event in the present: "He falls to such perusal of my face / As a would draw it" (2.1.90-91). Here the present is experienced as a means of facilitating remembrance of things past - because the past is now precisely what Hamlet is severed from, with "a father kill'd, a mother stain'd", and a sweetheart lost (4.4.57).⁸

In contrast, in the scene involving Mrs Ramsay, the act of looking back is associated not with intense attachment to a past which can

⁷ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982), 2.1.97.

⁸ For detailed discussion of this scene, see Eric P. Levy, "'nor th'exterior nor the inward man': The Problematics of Personal Identity in *Hamlet*", *University of Toronto Quarterly* 68.3 (1999), 711-27; 717-19; rpt. in Michelle Lee (ed.), *Shakespearian Criticism*, vol. 59 (Farmington Hills, Mich.: The Gale Group, 2001), pp. 18-26.

no longer be enjoyed, but with deepened awareness of the movement of time in the present. Through reflection on this scene, the reader has the opportunity for deepened awareness of the movement of time in the novel as well. The "threshold" on which Mrs Ramsay stands, looking at the emergence of the past, is not merely physical, but also "symbolical" (80, 183). As such, it signifies or epitomises the temporal position of the present as the threshold of the past. But, of course, the present is equally the threshold of the future. As the threshold of both past and future, the present is the point where what becomes what was, and where what is will be changed by what is to come. More profoundly, as we shall see, in *To the Lighthouse* the present is construed as the boundary between two zones of becoming: the future and the past. There is no more fixity to the past than there is to the future, which, of course, is notoriously indeterminate. But before going further with our analysis of time in the novel, we must clarify the conventional view of time which it critiques and displaces.

A classic analysis of the conventional view was formulated by John McTaggart, a British metaphysician, who in 1921, just 6 years before the publication of *To the Lighthouse* in 1927, published the first volume of *The Nature of Existence*, a two-volume work whose title corresponds to the philosophical labours of Mr Ramsay on "the nature of reality."⁹ In that first volume, McTaggart undertook a now celebrated refutation of time, beginning with what has become an indispensable analysis of the two temporal series entailed in the concept of time. The first series concerns the distinctions of future, present, and past, while the second series concerns the distinctions of earlier and later:

I shall give the name of the A series to that series of positions which runs from the far past through the near past to the present, and then from the present through the near future to the far future or conversely.

⁹ For an attempt to correlate Woolf's art with the metaphysics of McTaggart, see Avrom Fleishman, "Woolf and McTaggart", *E.I.H.*, 36.4 (1969), 719-38.

The series of positions which runs from earlier to later, or conversely, I shall call the *B* series.¹⁰

As McTaggart notes, in the first series "time presents itself as a movement from future to past", while in the second series "it presents itself as a movement from earlier to later" (11, n.2). As time passes, an event changes its position in the first or *A* series, and moves from the far future, to the near future, to the present, to the near past, to the far past (or conversely):

It was once an event in the far future. It became every moment an event in the nearer future. At last it was present. Then it became past, and will always remain past, though every moment it becomes further and further past. (13)

But though an event necessarily changes its position in the first or *A* series, it cannot change its position in the second or *B* series. Once one event occurs before or after another, its position in relation to that other event will always remain either earlier or later.

There is much to examine here that will help us understand the notion of time emerging in *To the Lighthouse*. To begin with, as McTaggart shows, to be in time an event must occur in both the *A* series and the *B* series. To speak of time is to entrain the notion of position as past, present, or future, and the notion of position as earlier and later. All events are ordered to both series, and both series locate the event in a matrix of temporal relations through which it is involved with other events. With respect to the *B* series, in the novel the relations of earlier and later are progressively deconstructed. A prodromal example concerns the inability of Mr William Banks to remember the sequence of Ramsay children: "As for being sure which was which, or in what order they came, that was beyond him. He called them privately after the Kings and Queens of England" (27). Another example concerns Mr Ramsay's viewpoint, from which the passage of time affords perspective on the undifferentiated extensiveness of time: "What,

¹⁰ John McTaggart, *The Nature of Existence*, vol. 2, ed. C.D. Broad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), p. 11.

indeed, if you look from a mountain-top down the long waste of the ages?" (41). In the "Time Passes" section, during the onslaught of tragedy, the passage of time obliterates the *B* series relations of earlier and later, with the result that the distinctions of before and after become irrelevant: "for night and day, month and year ran shapelessly together" (147).

But the most significant change in the structure of time in *To the Lighthouse* concerns the *A* series: the transitions from future to present to past. To begin with, the novel is unique in categorising character according to temporal orientation, with respect to the *A* series positions of past, present, and future. This is made explicit on the first page, in reference to James, the six-year old son of the Ramsays: "he belonged, even at the age of six, to that great clan which cannot keep this feeling separate from that, but must let future prospects, with their joys and sorrows, cloud what is actually at hand ... (7). Later, Lily, through grief and artistic creativity, is clearly associated with orientation to the past: "She went on tunnelling her way into her picture, into the past" (188). Mrs Ramsay, as noted earlier, is the character pre-eminently oriented to the present, as evident, for example, in her ecstasy in plenitude of the moment: "It is enough." But Mrs Ramsay is not just oriented to the present. More profoundly, she deepens and extends the presence of the present, by transforming the relation of the present to the other tenses, past and future.

This point can be clarified by reference to Aristotle who, in the *Physics*, defines the now as the link of time: the node, that is, by which past and future are connected to each other: "The now is the link of time; for it holds together past and future, and is the common boundary between times (the beginning of one and the end of the other)" (222^a10). Mrs Ramsay's identification with the present – and especially with the function of the present as the link of time – is manifested both positively and negatively. In its negative aspect, her association with the link of time emerges after her sudden death inaugurates for the survivors a chain of catastrophes which disorient the present, and cause past and future to merge into one chaotic experience of loss and confusion. On her return to the

Ramsay summer home, after a ten-year interval, Lily explicitly registers this severance of the link which orders the relation of the present to past and future. Without that link, the present succumbs to a commotion of memories and perplexities respectively concerning the past and the future:

She had no attachment here, she felt, no relations with it, anything might happen, and whatever did happen ... was a question, *as if the link that usually bound things together had been cut*, and they floated up here, down there, off any how. How aimless it was, how chaotic, how unreal it was, she thought, looking at her empty coffee cup. Mrs Ramsay dead; Andrew killed; Prue dead too ... (160 [my emphasis])

In its positive aspect, Mrs Ramsay's association with the present as the link of time concerns her ability to create vivid experiences of cohesion in the present, which can in the future constitute the material for reconstructive remembrance whereby what has become past serves as a source of creative insight and inspiration:

she [Mrs Ramsay] brought together this and that and then this, and so made out of that miserable silliness and spite ... something ... which survived, after all these years, complete, so that she [Lily Briscoe] dipped into it to re-fashion her memory of him [Charles Tansley], and it stayed in the mind almost like a work of art. (175)

In this context, we can unfold the implications of our earlier statement that, in *To the Lighthouse*, the past has no more fixity than the future. As Lily's artistic remembrance here shows, when she undertakes "to re-fashion her memory of him", it is crucial to remember the past in the right way. This is not a question of distorting, misremembering, or blocking the past. Instead, it entails selecting and combining memories, in order that the comprehensive recollection which results can constitute a source of illumination, encouragement, and consolation in the life one actually leads: "There might be lovers whose gift it was to choose out the elements

of things and place them together and so, giving them a wholeness not theirs in life, make of some scene, or meeting of people (all now gone and separate) one of those globed compacted things over which thought lingers, and love plays" (208-209). The novel many times insists that there is too much in the past to remember, as when Lily suddenly recollects Mrs Ramsay sitting years ago on the beach: "Why, after all these years had that survived, ringed round, lit up, visible to the last detail, with all before it blank and all after it blank, for miles and miles" (186). Memory must function creatively, to answer the needs of the present and give strength and clarity to face the future, as when James seeks to define an emotion provoked by his father: "Turning back among the many leaves which the past had folded in him, peering into the heart of that where light and shade so chequer each other that all shape is distorted ... he sought an image to cool and detach and round off his feeling in a concrete shape" (200). Yet the precondition to such restorative remembering of the past is the faculty of perceiving in the present, in a way that unites disparate elements. That is the faculty pre-eminently displayed by Mrs Ramsay – the very figure whom James in this passage remembers. Indeed, as we have seen, when also remembering Mrs Ramsay, Lily Briscoe both recalls Mrs Ramsay's combinatory faculty and, in so doing, is enabled to exercise the same faculty to create a compound memory of the past which clarifies and enriches her own present.

The implications of this aptitude of the past for refashioning emerge when we review the conventional view of the past, epitomised by McTaggart. In his analysis, the past is simply positional. That which was an event in the future eventually becomes an event in the past, and in so doing merely changes position in the A series designations of past, present, and future. The passage of time entails no more than the transposition of events from one tense to another. What is to come is simply a harbinger of what is to pass away. A remarkable account of this conventional view of the passage of time is provided by the philosopher, C.D. Broad, in his celebrated work, *Scientific Thought*:

We are naturally tempted to regard the history of the world as existing eternally in a certain order of events. Along this, and in a fixed direction, we imagine the characteristic of presentness as moving, somewhat like the spot of light from a policeman's bull's-eye traversing the fronts of the houses in a street. What is illuminated is the present, what has been illuminated is the past, and what has not yet been illuminated is the future.¹¹

This temporal dispensation, epitomised by the image of a light beam sweeping along the order of events from future to past, is often referred to by philosophers as the spotlight view of time. It has very curious implications, whose examination will advance our understanding of the mimesis of time in *To the Lighthouse*. Everything that happens, happens in time. But in the conventional or spotlight view of time, nothing really happens in time. Nothing happens, because events exist irrespective of the tense in which they appear or are considered. Time is merely an accident or qualification of their own untensed substantiality. For example, the event *e* is construed as already existing in the future before it occurs in the present. Thus paradoxically, though in this view time is construed as passing, the things of time (i.e. events) subsist unchanged by its movement, such that future, present, and past merely designate modes of being what each event already and always is. Ironically, the most novel happening for Lily on this day will involve a change in her own awareness of time.

An analogue of this dispensation occurs in *To the Lighthouse*, when Lily compares her vivid sense of novelty in the present to that of a passenger in a train who "knows, looking out of the train window, that he must look now, for he will never see that town, or that mule-cart, or that woman at work in the fields, again" (210). The sequence of objects outside the window - some already behind the train, others directly opposite, still more not yet reached - corresponds exactly to the order of events - past, present, and future

¹¹ C.D. Broad, *Scientific Thought* (New York; Humanities Press, 1952), p. 59.

- invoked in the spotlight view of time. Lily connects this awareness of novelty with the "sense that everything this morning was happening for the first time" (210). But to happen, in this context, means to manifest in the present that which was awaiting disclosure while it was in the future and which, after being experienced in the present, will quickly recede into the past, like the objects viewed through the window of a moving train. Paradoxically, in this schema, the present holds nothing new; for what appears in it was already there in the future. Here, the present is simply the delayed registration of the future which precedes it and the anticipation of the past which will follow. At bottom, as analysis shows, the movement of the train is bi-directional - toward the past and toward the future. As a vector, the train moves forward, in the direction of that which has not yet been encountered. But in virtue of this movement, the objects seen from the train appear to recede into the past, in the direction of that which has already passed from view. To move toward the future is to impart movement toward the past to that which eventually enters into presence.

The peculiar vigilance regarding the bi-directional passage of time, expressed through the simile of passenger in the train, is central to the novel. Mrs Ramsay provides a primary example of it. On the one hand, on the first page of the novel, she refers to movement toward the future, when assuring her son, James, that he will journey to the Lighthouse on the next day, weather permitting: "Yes, of course, if it's fine to-morrow ..." (7). On the other hand, through her recognition of transience ("It will end. It will end" (70)), Mrs Ramsay is acutely aware of the movement of time toward the past, as during that transitional moment after the dinner party: "it had become, she knew, giving one last look at it over her shoulder, already the past" (121). After her death, her memory succumbs to the same movement into the past: "She recedes further and further from us" (190). In the world of *To the Lighthouse*, time is always passing, like the train transporting the passenger seated by the compartment window. Yet, though the movement of time is endless, the duration of the present is momentaneous. The sheer speed of temporal passage ensures that awareness in the present is

constrained by concern with before and after: what has not yet occurred and what has already passed away. How can there be permanence in the midst of such flux?

The only way to still the passage of time is to make more time present to the present – to include, that is, more time in present awareness than that which immediately presents itself to awareness. As we have already seen, one way of doing this entails creative remembrance: refashioning in the present the memory of the past. But as the dinner party scene shows, “coherence” and “stability” can also be achieved in the present, “in the face of the flowing, the fleeting” (114), through subsuming the ever-changing flux of momentaneous experience in a larger whole, such that consecutive events or perceptions co-exist in the same act of awareness. In this case, the consecutivity of separate perceptions, each occurring in a momentaneous present, is experienced as one simultaneous unity, which philosophers of time term the “Specious Present”. Further explication of the notion of the Specious Present will position us to investigate its relevance to *To the Lighthouse*. More precisely, such explication will enable us to distinguish between the temporal dispensations connected respectively with the train journey and the voyage to the Lighthouse.

The key to the notion of the Specious Present is continuity of prehension or unifying act of awareness. To understand what is entailed here, let us return to the notion of temporal passage, from future, to present, to past. We can measure the length of the future, by calculating forward from the point, *now*. We can measure the length of the past by calculating backward from the point, *now*. But how long does the *now* or the present last? In theoretical terms, the *now* is instantaneous, and has no duration whatsoever. Like a geometrical point, it has location, but not extension. However, in experiential terms, the present is not instantaneous. For the object of any act of awareness in the present logically precedes the act directed toward it. Broad formulates this principle technically: “We can say that at any moment t an instantaneous act of prehension grasps a total object which is not instantaneous but stretches back for a short period T from the date t at which the instantaneous act of

prehension takes place.”¹² The question of the Specious Present can now be expressed more precisely: how much prior to the present act of awareness or prehension does the prehended object extend? The answer defines the boundaries of the Specious Present. To clarify, consider the example of a ticking clock. I hear a tick now, but the act of hearing this tick includes hearing the tick preceding it. The act of hearing the ticking clock unfolds in what is termed the Specious Present, because the act includes as co-present not just the instantaneously present tick, but a finite series of ticks preceding it. The hearing of all those ticks occurs during the same Specious Present. Broad again helps with his formulation: “The two ticks of the clock in my example are *co-presented*; i.e., when the latter is being prehended the earlier is still being prehended though with diminished degree of presentedness” (*Examination*, 302). As McTaggart indicates, the duration of Specious Presents is not uniform, but varies according to the situation concerned, with respect to both the object prehended and the subject prehending it: “But the specious present varies in length according to circumstances. And *it is not impossible that there should be another conscious being existing besides myself, and that his specious present and mine may at the same time be of different lengths*” (28 - my emphasis).

The now, as we heard Aristotle say, is the link of time, joining the future to the past. But the post-Aristotelian notion of the Specious Present problematises or complicates this assertion. For at what point does the present end and the past begin? We remember Mrs Ramsay pausing on the threshold of the dining room, waiting “a moment longer in a scene which was vanishing even as she looked”, and which, as she leaves, had become “already the past” (121). That passage constitutes one of the most dramatic representations of the Specious Present in English literature – and one that vividly demonstrates the principle of diminishing presentedness, central to the notion of the Specious Present. For here the present is “vanishing even as she looked.”

¹² C.D. Broad, *Examination of McTaggart's Philosophy*, 2. vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), vol. 2, p. 321.

What is the import of this emphasis on the Specious Present? The answer can best be broached by beginning with the consequence of not expanding the Specious Present. Time is always passing, from future to present to past. Without increase in its own duration, the present is no more than the instantaneous registration of fleeting impressions, as symbolised by the awareness of the passenger on the train - a situation epitomising the flux of time, where "Nothing stays; all changes" (195). That train of fleeting impressions has no destination, only an eventual terminus, when awareness ends with death. There is no time for reflection, and therefore no time for illumination. In contrast, the moments in the novel explicitly involving awareness of the Specious Present - awareness, that is, of the present as the coherent unfolding of one unified experience whose sequential parts are co-present - conspicuously involve awareness of illumination and, most importantly, of calm and repose, qualities contrary to the movement and urgency associated with the temporal awareness of the passenger in the train. As we shall now confirm, the upshot of this is that the key to the meaning of life - the question, as we have seen, urgently and frequently posed in *To the Lighthouse* - lies in the Specious Present, or, more precisely, in the ability to respond to experience in such a way that the present can expand its boundaries beyond the current instant.

Closer investigation of the connection between Mrs Ramsay and the movement of time, discussed earlier, will clarify the matter under consideration. There are two occasions when Mrs Ramsay registers current experience in terms that foreground and valorise the Specious Present. The first involves her communion with the Lighthouse; the second concerns the ensuing dinner party. In the first, she is enraptured: "there came to her lips always some exclamation of triumph over life when things came together in this peace, this rest, this eternity; and pausing there she looked out to meet that stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of the three, which was her stroke" (70). In the second, she is similarly exalted: "There it was, all round them. It partook, she felt ... of eternity ... there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out ... in the face of the

flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again tonight she had the feeling she had had once today already, of peace, of rest" (114). Both experiences entail the apprehension of "eternity" amidst flux and of "rest" amidst movement, as well as the emphasis on illumination. We can now see that the encompassing presence which is there "all round them" during the dinner party is the Specious Present. But why is it accorded such pre-eminence or, more precisely, how does awareness of the Specious Present confer "triumph over life" and the tragic transience which life entails? The answer is found in Mrs Ramsay's relation to the Lighthouse.

Like the encompassing presence "all round them" at the party, the Lighthouse beam also "shines out ... in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, as when, in the "Time Passes" section, it "lingered stealthily" on the carpet of the vacant bedroom of the Ramsay vacation home, illuminating "the chaos and tumult of the night" (145,147). The Lighthouse beam similarly illuminates transience during Mrs Ramsay's meditation: "It will end. It will end, she said" (70). But in illuminating transience, the Lighthouse beam also illuminates a way of transcending it. In contrast to the sequence of instantaneously consecutive nows viewed from the train, the Lighthouse enables and represents a perspective disclosing the continuity of one experience, unfolding in the unity of a Specious Present, where successive impressions participate in the same self-enriching co-presence. Herein lies the answer to the question regarding the meaning of life, posed with such urgency and frequency in the novel.

To understand that answer, we must first see that the Lighthouse beam illuminates two antithetical constructions of the Specious Present in the novel. The first of these concerns the constancy of flux. Time is always passing. Flux is always present. Considered in itself as continuous passage, flux has neither past nor future - just the continuity of its own movement or, in alternate formulation, only the constant flowing of coming to be and passing away. This is precisely the time disclosed by the beam of the Lighthouse in the "Time Passes" section, where, as we have seen, the positional distinctions of past, present, and future dissolve in the ceaseless

tumult of happening. This temporal economy constitutes a negative version of co-presence, where "night and day, month and year ran shapelessly together" (147), and all temporal positions are fused in the same unremitting "confusion" (140). Acceptance of this negative co-presence can enable vision of a positive one. The positive construction of co-presence is also illumined by the Lighthouse, through the beam's mode of manifestation, such that its separate "strokes" or pulsations are united in one rhythmic "stroking", as when Mrs Ramsay awakens to see the beam rhythmically "stroking the floor" (172). Here the momentaneous present, lasting but an instant, is expanded into a Specious Present, with many separate, consecutive strokes *co-present* in the prehension of one continuous stroking. But in this case, as opposed to the prior negative one, the co-presence results from the combinatory prehension of a subject, not the sheer passage of time construed as transpiring without the awareness of any subject or what McTaggart, as we noted earlier, terms a "conscious being".

To reach the Lighthouse, in body or imagination, is to achieve insight into the meaning of life through insight into the passage of time. Flux is relentless. Nothing will stop it. But through accepting movement through time, clinging neither to past (as Lily does through grief) nor future (as Mr Ramsay does through anxiety about later reputation), awareness is enabled to register and valorise the present in a new way: not merely in terms of its transitory content, no matter how engrossing (as on the train), but more importantly as a result of conscious effort by the conscious being to fill awareness in the present with understanding of how this point was reached and courage to move beyond it. The three moments of Lighthouse vision in the novel, pertaining respectively to Mrs Ramsay, Lily Briscoe, and Mr Ramsay, all entail expansion of the Specious Present by reflection – implied or described – on both past and future. When communing with the Lighthouse, Mrs Ramsay remembers past moments of wholeness, when the Specious Present afforded intense happiness, and recognises that the current Specious Present will inevitably elapse in the immediate future: "It will end." Lily's act of painting is presented as a Specious Present, an ongoing experience

of co-presence, as when the past, in the guise of the ghost of Mrs Ramsay, is present as a shadow cast on the terrace. The future is co-present as well; for Lily thinks of the eventual reception of the painting now in progress: "Yet it would be hung in attics ... it would be rolled up and flung under a sofa ..." (195). Mr Ramsay's voyage to the Lighthouse is also a Specious Present, in the sense of an experience of co-presence. In journeying, he looks back at the island from which he departed: "staring at the frail blue shape which seemed like the vapour of something that had burnt itself away" (224). The spatial distance across which he gazes has earlier in the novel been associated with the temporal distance of the past from the present (as when Lily imagines the dead Mrs Ramsay beckoning "at the end of the corridor of years" (190)). Mr Ramsay is perceiving his own ability to move beyond the past whose loss devastated him. Similarly, in leaping onto the rocks of the Lighthouse, like a leader, Mr Ramsay shows his readiness to move toward his future, accepting at last the changed circumstances which it will entail.

In *To the Lighthouse*, the notion of the Specious Present is expanded to include not merely the co-presence of virtually synchronous instants, as in the examples of the ticking of a watch or the pulsations of the Lighthouse beam, but also the co-presence of past and future. In the three instances of Lighthouse vision, the bi-directional movement of time, toward the past and toward the future, is grasped in the Specious Present, by the three main characters, each in different circumstances and from a different perspective. For unlike the passenger in the train, the voyager to the Lighthouse is enabled to comprehend the passage of time not only through the ceaseless succession of present moments, but more profoundly by means of a simultaneous grasp of the tenses, past and future, in relation to which the present is positioned. The voyager to the Lighthouse is like "the inspired who, miraculously, lump all the letters together in one flash – the way of genius" (40). In this case, the letters are the tenses of time. Of course, the conscious beings in these instances are human, not divine. Divine awareness, in Boethius' celebrated phrase, achieves "the simultaneous possession

of a limitless existence", comprehending all time in the eternally present moment of attention.¹³ The divine experience of eternity is the ultimate version of the Specious Present. In contrast, human awareness, as represented by the conscious beings in Woolf's novel, can only approximate this temporal comprehension. For unlike divine awareness which is always the same, abiding eternally in static omniscience, human awareness changes every moment, continuously modified by recession toward the past and procession toward the future.

Nevertheless, human awareness can attain a simulacrum of "eternity" (114), construed as the simultaneous co-presence of all times in the present time. This entails not merely the sense, as expressed by Mrs Ramsay, that there is something in present experience "that remains for ever after" (114)], but more profoundly the awareness, in moments of exalted intensity, of the co-presence of other times. On these occasions, the Specious Present includes, in one act of awareness, the sense of connection with the temporal movement encompassing an entire lifetime. This is the most profound intuition regarding the meaning of life available to characters in *To the Lighthouse*, but it is also the most difficult for literary criticism to articulate. The root idea is that the Specious Present is expanded to include the co-presence of elements not only temporally close to the present instant, but also temporally distant, both before and after. The result is "a feeling of completeness" or the intuition of "some common feeling that held the whole together", which confirms, for the character aware of it, the essential and enduring value of his or her own character (208). From this perspective, the incessant movement of time, toward the future and toward the past, enables an abiding, incommunicable communion with the essence of one's own nature.

A remarkable passage in "Time Passes" epitomises this condition: "solitary like a pool at evening, far distant, seen from a train window, vanishing so quickly that the pool, pale in the

¹³ Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, liber 5, lines 9-11, qtd. in Georges Poulet, *The Metamorphoses of the Circle*, trans. Carley Dawson and Elliott Coleman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), p. xii.

evening, is scarcely robbed of its solitude, though once seen" (141). The image of the pool glimpsed from the window of a passing train can be explicated by reference to its constituent elements. The train from whose window external objects are fleetingly seen corresponds to the later metaphor, with which we are now familiar, of the bi-directional movement of the present, toward the future and toward the past. The solitary pool corresponds to the repeated metaphor of interiority or subjective core, as in Mrs Ramsay's reference to "the lake of one's being" (71) and Lily's allusion to "a pool of thought" (194). The momentary juxtaposition of these two metaphors suggests, on one level of signification, the relation between time and interiority. More precisely, it indicates the deepening inner unity and tranquillity that can result from contemplation of personal movement through time. Indeed, just such a sense of tranquillity enraptures Mrs Ramsay when communing in solitude with the Lighthouse beam, and making her peace with the inevitability of transience: "There rose, and she looked and looked with her needles suspended, there curled up off the floor of her mind, rose from the lake of one's being, a mist, a bride to meet her lover" (71). Truthfulness about the passage of time confirms truthfulness about herself and a most profound self-confirmation: "She praised herself in praising that light, without vanity, for she was stern, she was searching, she was beautiful like that light" (70). Of course, contemplation of personal movement through time can lead to the opposite result: not self-confirmation, but self-doubt, as when Mr Ramsay obsessively tries to peer into the future to determine the duration of his fame. But personal movement through time does eventually enable Mr Ramsay to achieve self-acceptance, during that voyage to the Lighthouse, in the course of which he moves from humiliation regarding change ("You find us much changed" (162)) to conviction in the endurance of his own inner strength to move beyond the reaches of former insecurities and dependencies: "as if he were leaping into space" (224). But he can do this only after

letting loss of the past clarify his perspective on his own passage through time.¹⁴

Yet the phrase, "contemplation of personal movement through time", is potentially misleading. For the temporal prehension concerned is not abstract, but vividly immersed in the awareness of presence. More precisely, awareness in the Specious Present includes the co-presence not just of events and perceptions virtually synchronous with the immediate instant, but also of those more distant from it, such that the present moment sustains a unity of experience encompassing an entire lifetime. Perhaps the supreme symbol in the novel for the Specious Present, construed on this level, concerns the air holding aloft the smoke issuing from a steamer, as Lily paints: "A steamer far out at sea had drawn in the air a great scroll of smoke which stayed there curving and circling decoratively, *as if the air were a fine gauze which held things and kept them softly in its mesh, only gently swaying them this way and that*" (198 – my emphasis). Like the air sustaining the swaying scroll of smoke, the Woolfian Specious Present sustains, in a single unity of prehension, the shifting contents of awareness, extended over the passage of a lifetime. Yet, as we have seen, this unity results not from the passive registration of perceptions, but from thought actively impinging on the temporal contents of awareness, refashioning them into a stabilising and illuminating whole. This unity must not be confused with the *totum simul* of divine awareness, in which the events of all times are present in one eternal moment, as if the beam of light in the spotlight view of time, rather than following the sequence of future, present, and past, suddenly and forever illuminated all the events at once. For in the *To the Lighthouse*, events do not subsist in the future before they occur, nor does the past remain constant once the events constituting it have happened. Instead, the unity available to awareness in the Specious Present resides not in present knowledge of what is fixed, either in

¹⁴ For a companion study of the novel, see Eric P. Levy, "Woolf's Metaphysics of Tragic Vision in *To the Lighthouse*", *Philological Quarterly* 75.1 (1996), 109-132; rpt. in Jennifer Baise and Linda Pavlovski (ed.), *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, vol. 101, (Detroit: Gale Group, 2001), pp. 342-52.

past or future, but in the power of prehension to create life-sustaining meaning through reconciling the present with the continuous passage of time.

The foregoing interpretation of the Specious Present and bi-directional time in *To the Lighthouse* does not accord with prevailing views of the Woolfian moment and the symbolism of the Lighthouse. While full summary of preceding approaches is not feasible here, two distinctive strands of commentary can be isolated and contrasted with the analysis developed in this study. Perhaps the most venerable and persistent reading associates the Woolfian notion of the illuminating moment with Bergson's philosophy of time, in which *duration* is construed as "the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances."¹⁵ In this construction, the movement of time fuses necessity and freedom. Here the relentless advance of duration, at once subsuming and superseding its own content, is driven by an internal dynamic whereby the "creation of new forms" results from an impersonal and universal principle requiring "generation and ... growth" (xxiv). In this metaphysic, time itself, in virtue of its movement, assures the momentum of self-transcendence: "Thus our personality shoots, grows, and ripens without ceasing" (8). But in *To the Lighthouse*, as we have seen, the enriching of interiority depends not on the operation of a metaphysical principle, but on the concentration of the conscious being on expanding his or her own prehension of time. A second strand of commentary links the voyage to the Lighthouse with loss of self. For example, David Daiches associates reaching the Lighthouse with the "surrender of one's ego to an impersonal reality", while James Naremore

¹⁵ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Random House, 1944), p. 7. For representative commentary, see Howard Harper, *Between Language and Silence: The Novels of Virginia Woolf* (Shreveport: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), p. 139; James Haffey, *The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as Novelist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), pp. 43-4; J.H. Roberts, "Toward Virginia Woolf", *Virginia Woolf Quarterly Review* 10 (1934), 587-602; Josalba Ramalho Viera, "Henri Bergson's Idea of Duration and Virginia Woolf's Novels", *Illa do Desterro: A Journal of Language and Literature* 24.2 (1990), 9-20; Ann Banfield, "Tragic Time: The Problem of the Future in Cambridge Philosophy and *To the Lighthouse*", *Modernism/modernity* 7.1 (2000), 43-75; 44-6, 70.

privileges "the intense desire to lose the self through love or union".¹⁶ In contrast, the present study foregrounds the project not to lose the self, but to deepen its content and enrich its value through adequation to the movement of time, in which all that comes to be eventually perishes and passes away.

¹⁶ David Daiches, *Virginia Woolf* (Binghamton: New Directions, 1963), p. 86; James Naremore, *The World Without a Self: Virginia Woolf and the Novel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 150.