

# ETERNAL LIFE SEEN IN THE WORKS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

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## Chapter I Introductory Remarks

### 1. The World of the Nineteen-Twenties

Unreal City

Under the brown fog of a winter noon.<sup>1</sup>

The world of *The Waste Land* shows us the world of the nineteen-

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<sup>1</sup> T. S. Eliot: *The Waste Land*, ll. 207-208.

twenties most accurately.

The nineteenth century was the age of reaction against the moralistic and religious age of the eighteenth century. The outlook on the world was very rational. Natural science and the law of cause and effect spread all over the country. People believed that reason always led us to a better way. Shaw, Wells, Galsworthy, too, tended to believe in a natural tendency of things to get better.<sup>1</sup> But in spite of their optimistic belief the War broke out. Their belief that every thing is led to a better way by reason was completely upset. Moreover, many theories which upset their old belief were expressed in natural science or in psychology. "A dissolution of standards—social, ethical, philosophical, aesthetic, religious—the melting down of all the current coin of conduct and thought"<sup>2</sup> might have been seen, as R. L. Chambers said, in the nineteen-twenties even without the War. But the effect of the War on them was so fatal that we could not imagine it by our experiences in the Second World War.

Their old belief was failing, but there was nothing that they could believe. They could neither believe in the reason of the nineteenth century nor the religious thought in the eighteenth. They were pushed into the chaotic world after the War without any credit. It is sure that "the world was indeed a 'Waste Land,' its denizen 'the Hollow Man.'"<sup>3</sup> Virginia Woolf is one of the most characteristic writers of this generation. In this world of confusion, then, what kind of things did she write about?

## 2. The Literature of Nineteen-Twenties

The writers of this generation were, as R. L. Chambers said, peculiar in having no common ground, no common frame of reference into which their works could fit.<sup>4</sup> As the social background and the old credit were no longer their comfortable nor creditable enclosure, their

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<sup>1</sup> *Eigo Kenkyu*: p. 39, Fraser, "English Novels and Poems".

<sup>2</sup> R. L. Chambers: *The Novels of Virginia Woolf*, p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

interests were naturally turned back to their own hearts. Of this circumstance, G. S. Fraser said as follows:

The novelist of the 1920's, we might say, is not looking through a window at the world, he is setting his own face and the faces of others in a mirror.<sup>1</sup>

In all of them, Virginia Woolf was the most individualistic novelist. She saw this world as an aggregation of individuals. Individuals were the motive power of the world. She accepted the death of the individual as a final death and she thought, as other writers in this generation feel, that to see what values there are in life one had to go directly to the experience of the individual itself. Then she wrote again and again about the life of individuals, their death, and the influence of death on the rest. She said in her *Modern Fiction*,

Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being "like this". Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. . . . The mind receives a myriad impressions. . . . From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday. . . .<sup>2</sup>

She praised young writers like James Joyce because "they attempt to come close to life."<sup>3</sup> She praised the Russian writers, for "it is the soul that is the chief character in Russian fiction."<sup>4</sup> Wells, Bennett, Galsworthy are all materialists, according to her, because they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body and social circumstances. She wanted to find out "what's behind things."<sup>5</sup> In writing of the ordinary mind on an ordinary day with as little external mixture as possible, she was not contented with merely recording her impressions as they fell upon the mind but she gave them some order and recreated something from them. In her *The Voyage Out*, a novelist, Hewet said:

"We want to find out what's behind things, don't we? . . . Look at the light down here," he continued, "scattered about anyhow. Things I feel come to me like lights. . . . I want to combine them. . . . Have you ever seen fireworks that

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<sup>1</sup> G. S. Fraser: *The Modern Writer and His World*, p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> Virginia Woolf: *The Common Reader*, p. 189, "Modern Fiction."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225, "The Russian Point of View."

<sup>5</sup> Virginia Woolf: *The Voyage Out*, p. 266.

make figures? . . . I want to make figures. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

We must read from her works what's behind them. I want to find out the hidden life from her works. The writers of the Nineteen-thirties blamed her (and all the writers of her generation) as a writer who took a negative attitude, but they also turned back to their own souls at last. Considering the same insecure world of today, it is not useless, I think, to read the works of a writer who devoted herself to writing of the deep inner life of ordinary people in the insecure world between the First and Second World War.

## Chapter II Life

Virginia Woolf always continued to pursue various kinds of life in her works, as I wrote. I want to choose from many examples two characters,—Mrs. Dalloway, the heroine of *Mrs. Dalloway* and Mrs. Ramsay, the heroine of *To The Lighthouse*, (if we can call her “heroine” because there is no conventional heroine in her works, every character is vivid, and there is no plot or conclusion or emphasis.) From these two characters I want to discover eternal life in ordinary people. These two characters are apparently different from each other in many points, but, at the same time, they resemble each other. Their most important resemblance is the vitality which is in them. Both of them live the present life, the real life with their strong vitality. To live the present life sincerely is to live in the future; they show us this fact in the real experiences of their lives. As I think that literature has some relation with our life, it seems to me not so useless to pursue their lives in these novels. The life of individuals has many aspects—death, love, solitude, beauty. In pursuing human life, I shall naturally touch upon these points.

*Mrs. Dalloway* begins from the morning when the heroine, Clarissa Dalloway goes down a street in London to buy flowers for her party that night, and ends in the middle of her party. There is no special

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266.

event on the day. The very ordinary life on an ordinary day is written here, and we know the facts of their past twenty years before the day, too, by the memories or subconsciousness revelation of the characters in this novel. Clarissa is the wife of a featureless politician and leads a rich and secure life, but in the past there was some kind of love-affair with a passionate youth, Peter Walsh. Peter fell in love with her very passionately, and it seemed that she also loved him. But she married Richard Dalloway, and Peter went away to India. At her party her old friends, Peter Walsh, Sally Seton, and new acquaintances of the Dalloways are gathered, and all her life is exposed. On the other hand, there is another story in it. It is the story of Septimus Warren Smith and his wife. Septimus was a capable young clerk, but his mind, now, is a little out of order because of the shock of the War. They do not meet with the Dalloways in actual life, but they meet each other at her party in the doctor's talk. He tells the Dalloways that the young man killed himself. With these two stories, we can see the details of characters of the people in this novel, their past life as much as their present life, the life of London, and all sides of ordinary life—love, loneliness, beauty, death and true life.

In all of them Clarissa Dalloway dominates this novel because of her strong vitality. Clarissa is apparently not an admirable woman.

She knew nothing; no language; no history; she scarcely read a book now, except memoirs in bed.<sup>1</sup>

She could not think, write, even play the piano. She muddled Armenians and Turks; loved success; hated discomfort; must be liked; talked oceans of nonsense; and to this day, ask her what the Equator was, and she did not know.<sup>2</sup>

To her, the roses that Richard gave her are more important than the Armenians. "It is her nature to enjoy herself. She enjoys practically everything."<sup>3</sup> She is an ordinary woman such as we can see everywhere. She does not want to see things deeply but "knows people almost by instinct."<sup>4</sup> She may not be a very intellectual woman, but

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf: *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

her only gift that of knowing people by instinct is very sure and credible. She loves her present life also by instinct. "What she loves is this, here, now, in front of her."<sup>1</sup> She thought walking along the street,

In people's eyes, in the swing tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motorcars, omnibusses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June.<sup>2</sup>

Of course she has the tendency to give herself up to the memory of her past life as other women of this type do; for instance, her heart goes back to the memories of old summer days at Burton, when she inhaled the fresh air of the morning of London.

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French window and plunged at Burton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like a flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave. . . .<sup>3</sup>

Her memories are continued on and on, to the garden at Burton, to the conversation with Peter, and to Peter who is now in India and will come back to England one of these days, in June or July. She could remember scene after scene at Burton. But it was not to escape from the present life. The past is to her a part of the present already. She never escapes from the present. Even if she loses her way for a moment, she soon gets her way in her present life again with her strong vitality. Peter says on this point as follows:

She was upset by his visit. She had felt a great deal; . . . how they would change the world if she married him perhaps; whereas, it was this; it was middle age; . . . then forced herself with her indomitable vitality to put all that aside, there being in her a thread of life which for toughness, endurance, power to overcome obstacles, and carry her triumphantly through he had never known the like of.<sup>4</sup>

There is always love for life and will to live in her. There is no reason

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

why she loves the present life so passionately, but she always loves the present life in its confused variety. She saw some importance in the naked life of ordinary people rather than in the preacher's talk. Even in nature, she feels real life rather than in books.

June had drawn out every leaf of the trees. The mothers of Pimlico gave suck to their young. Messages were passing from the Fleet to the Admiralty. Arlington Street and Piccadilly seemed to chafe the very air in the park and lift its leaves hotly, brilliantly, on waves of that divine vitality which Clarissa loved. To dance, to ride, she had adored all that.<sup>1</sup>

Virginia Woolf wrote in *The Common Reader* that

It is not the priest who shuts our desires most effectively; it is the man who has known them, and loved them himself.<sup>2</sup>

Clarissa Dalloway might have said the same thing, if she were as intellectual as Virginia Woolf. She does not say such things and does not even think of such things perhaps, but she knows them by her instinct in her subconsciousness. Her philosophy, if we can call it so, is not in thought but in real life. She gives parties. Other people think that she gives parties for her husband's success in the Cabinet. Sally laughed at her for it, Peter laughed at her, even Richard, her husband, laughed at her party, too. But did she give parties for her husband's advancement merely? Of course, not. It is sure that she likes success, but it is not for success merely. She could not explain the reason why she gave her parties. She could only say that "what she liked was simply Life,"<sup>3</sup> and "they were an offering."<sup>4</sup> She said,

But could any man understand what she meant neither? about life? She could not imagine Peter or Richard taking the trouble to give a party for no reason whatever.<sup>5</sup>

And she thought deeply about life. She felt life was very queer.

Here was So-and-so in South Kensington; someone up in Bayswater; and some-

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *The Common Reader*, p. 231, "The Russian Point of View."

<sup>3</sup> *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 168.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

body else, say, in Mayfair. And she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering to combine, to create; but to whom?

An offering for the sake of offering, perhaps. Anyhow, it was her gift. Nothing else had she of the slightest importance; could not think, write. . . .<sup>1</sup>

There is no reason in her party, in her love for life. She only loves real life. It is enough. And it is her vitality. Life is not doing, but being. Then she admired the simplicity of Richard Dalloway "which made him go and do things while she and Peter frittered their time away bickering."<sup>2</sup>

The same vitality in Clarissa terrified and at the same time enchanted other people.

Clarissa had wonderful energy. Parties terrified Lady Bruton.<sup>3</sup>

But did Mrs. Ramsay in *To The Lighthouse* who had the same vitality terrify other people?

In *To The Lighthouse*, what we can see about Mrs. Ramsay is her present and her future after her death. Again there is the ordinary life of ordinary people. The first part of this novel, "The Window," is the ordinary family life in a summer resort. They intend to go to the lighthouse next day, but Mr. Ramsay insists with scientific accuracy that it won't be fine tomorrow. It makes his child detest him. Mrs. Ramsay between them is trying to soften their hearts with her deep affection. Like Clarissa she is not intellectual. She also loves the present life deeply, and is also "instinctive"<sup>4</sup> as Lily Briscoe said. Sometimes she read books, but her reading was not reading books. She was read by books. Her husband liked to think that "she was not clever, nor book-learned at all. He wondered if she understood what she was reading. Probably not he thought, but she was astonishingly beautiful."<sup>5</sup> Though she is not a book-learned woman, she has the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>4</sup> Virginia Woolf: *To The Lighthouse*, p. 98, "The Window."

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.



power to bring people's hearts together and to make life pleasant and beautiful. Her husband is soothed by the sight of her reading stories to her child.

Without his distinguishing either his son or his wife, the sight of them fortified him and satisfied him and consecrated his effort to arrive at a perfectly clear understanding of the problem which now engaged the energies of his splendid mind.<sup>1</sup>

She never escapes from the present life. She said "Life stands still here."<sup>2</sup> When Minta and Paul were betrothed and seemed very happy, she said in her heart to her daughter Prue, "'You will be as happy as she is one of these days.' 'You will be much happier,' she added, 'because you are my daughter.' She meant that her own daughter must be happier than other people's daughters."<sup>3</sup> This is her vitality. She said these words with strong conviction.

Neither Mrs. Dalloway nor Mrs. Ramsay have any great thought and are not book-learned, yet both of them have the wisdom to live their present life, have the will to life. Both of them have strong vitality, but their ways of life are very different, though they are led by the same vitality. The strong vitality is very effective in each case, while the effects on other people's minds are far different from each other.

The most remarkable difference between them is that Mrs. Dalloway has some dissatisfaction with her life, but Mrs. Ramsay is completely contented, and that Mrs. Dalloway is very solitary without a real friend, but Mrs. Ramsay is just the opposite.

Clarissa chose the secure Richard rather than the passionate Peter as her husband, lest she should lose her self. She thought that

in marriage a little licence, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him. (Where was he this morning, for instance? Some committee, she never asked what.) But with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into. And it was intolerable, and when it came to that scene in the little garden by the fountain, she had to break with him or they would have been destroyed, both of them ruined, she was convinced. . . .<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>4</sup> *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 11.

She always insists that there must be some dignity in every one, it is in the solitude of people, and we must adore it. This is, in other words, self individuality. When her husband went away in silence having something that he wanted to say to her, she dared not ask him what he thought.

And there is a dignity in people; a solitude; even between husband and wife a gulf; and that one must respect, thought Clarissa, watching him open the door; for one would not part with it oneself, or take it, against his will, from one's husband, without losing one's independence, one's self-respect—from one's husband, something after all, priceless.<sup>1</sup>

She detests love and religion because they violate the self that, she thinks, must not be violated by any other people.

Love and religion! thought Clarissa, going into the drawing-room, tingling all over. How detestable, how detestable they are! . . . Had she ever tried to convert any one herself? Did she not wish everybody merely to be themselves?<sup>2</sup>

And she respected the old woman looking out of the window, quite unconscious that she was being, watched, for the old woman was completely herself. She thought,

There was something solemn in it—but love and religion would destroy that, whatever it was, the privacy of the soul.<sup>3</sup>

Thus she continued to keep her solitude in her married life and continued to adore human solitude. But was she contented with her solitary life that she chose? We cannot say "yes". When Peter came back from India that morning directly to Clarissa and they kissed after some talk, she thought "if I had married him, this gaiety would have been mine all day!"<sup>4</sup> Soon after that she remembered that her husband lunched with Lady Bruton and she felt herself very alone.

Lunching with Lady Bruton, it came back to her. He had left me; I am alone for ever, she thought, holding her hands upon her knee.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

She respected solitude, and then there was always something cold in her. Peter thought "that was the devilish part of her—this coldness, this woodenness, something very profound in her, which he had felt again this morning talking to her,"<sup>1</sup> while she suddenly felt "desperately unhappy"<sup>2</sup> for no reason. She hunted after the reason why she felt so unhappy, and thought that the reason is that people "criticised her very unfairly, laughed at her very unjustly, for her party."<sup>3</sup> She had her strong vitality and self, and they made her choose to keep solitude. For this reason, people are enchanted by her, while they criticise her unfairly. And that made her feel very alone and unhappy. Thanking heaven that she had refused to marry Peter, she envied Peter who was in love with some other woman now. "There is conflict between emotion and truth, between the desire for solitude and the longing to share experience."<sup>4</sup> She always envied a sort of abandonment in Sally—a sort of abandonment, as if she (=Sally) could say anything, do anything, which she (=Clarissa) hadn't got herself.<sup>5</sup> She had not a real friend, but only acquaintances. Sally had been a friend. Peter had been a friend.

With the two of them (more even than with Richard) she shared her past.<sup>6</sup>

But Peter went away from her after her marriage, and always criticised her. Sally criticised her adversely because she married Richard. Sally talked to Peter at Clarissa's party as follows:

She had owed Clarissa an enormous amount. They had been friends, not acquaintances, friends. . . . But—did Peter understand? She lacked something. Lacked what was it? She had charm, . . . But to be frank (and she felt that Peter was an old friend, a real friend . . .) to be quite frank, then, how could Clarissa have done it?—married Richard Dalloway? a sportsman, a man who cared only for dogs. . . .<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>4</sup> Blackstone: *Virginia Woolf*, p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262-3.

Even her own daughter, Elizabeth, a product of her marriage, was taken away by Doris Kilman, a detestable Christian. When Elizabeth and Doris Kilman went out on the street, Clarissa could not help crying "Remember the party! Remember or party to-night!" with a sudden impulse, with a violent anguish, for this woman was taking her daughter from her.<sup>1</sup> Clarissa took upon herself a solitary life lest she should lose her dignity, her self, and lost something instead.

On the other hand, Mrs. Ramsay did not lose what Clarissa lost, on account of her unselfish life. She was contented with her present. She never spoke about what would have happened if she had been married to someone else . . . as Clarissa did. She loved the present life, as I said, and had a strong vitality, but the same vitality worked in her just oppositely as in Clarissa. She gave every thing in her. Lily Briscoe, a young friend of Mrs. Ramsay's, thought, when she could not do anything for Mr. Ramsay, after the death of Mrs. Ramsay,

The man, she thought, her anger rising in her, never gave; the man took. She, on the other hand, was forced to give. Mrs. Ramsay had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had died.<sup>2</sup>

To give is not duty to her but nature in her. She always took care of other people. She always loved people, gave people something by her nature.

Poor William Banks, she (=Mrs. Ramsay) seemed to be saying, as if her own weariness had been partly pitying people, and the life in her, her resolve to live again, had been stirred by pity. And it was not true, Lily thought; it was one of those misjudgments of hers that seemed to be instinctive and arise from some need of her own rather than of other people.<sup>3</sup>

Clarissa refused Peter because "with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into."<sup>4</sup> Mrs. Ramsay did not care for this. Mrs. Ramsay gave everything to her husband and went into her husband's heart freely. Mrs. Ramsay and Mr. Ramsay are, in sense, the counter-

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> *To The Lighthouse*, p. 176, "Lighthouse."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98, "The Window."

<sup>4</sup> *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 11.

part of Clarissa and Peter if married. Though Mr. Ramsay did not say a word, Mrs. Ramsay knew that her husband wanted her to say that she loved him.

And as she looked at him she began to smile, for though she had not said a word, he knew, of course he knew, that she loved him. He could not deny it. And smiling she looked out of the window and said (thinking to herself, nothing on earth can equal this happiness)—

“Yes, you were right. It’s going to be wet tomorrow.” She had not said it, but he knew it. And she looked at him smiling. For she had triumphed again.<sup>1</sup>

This understanding in silence between husband and wife and this happiness of hers are what are never seen in Mrs. Dalloway. This other married couple shares everything. She gave everything to her husband, and by so doing she got “Triumph,” happiness, contented life. It will be clearer as we read the following paragraph.

Her husband slapped his thighs. Their (=Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay’s) eyes met for a moment; but they did not want to speak to each other. They had nothing to say, but something seemed nevertheless, to go from to her. It was life, it was the power of it, it was the tremendous humour, she knew, that made him slap his thighs.<sup>2</sup>

She always cared for other people from the depth of her heart, and it came back to her. Every person loved and was grateful to her. When Paul was at the height of happiness because of his engagement to Minta, he felt “she knows all about it. I need not say anything,” and he was saying to her as he showed her the watch, “I’ve done it, Mrs. Ramsay. I owe it all to you.”<sup>3</sup>

The dinner is the climax of the first part of *To The Lighthouse* as the party is the climax of *Mrs. Dalloway*.<sup>4</sup> In the dinner Mrs. Ramsay was surrounded by many real friends, her husband, children, and friends. On the other hand, Mrs. Dalloway, at the party, had no real friend at all; all were mere acquaintances. Mrs. Dalloway lost her life by pursuing it passionately. Mrs. Ramsay found her life by losing it. She lavished

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<sup>1</sup> *To The Lighthouse*, p. 144, “The Window.”

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138, “The Window.”

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>4</sup> Blackstone: *Virginia Woolf*, p. 116.

and spent herself.<sup>1</sup> She is completely unselfish and always cared for other people. But it is not duty but instinct to desire everybody to be happy. She was completely herself. In a sense, she was herself more than Mrs. Dalloway who always insisted that every person should be one's self. Mrs. Ramsay's youngest child, James, said remembering her dead mother "She alone spoke the truth; to her alone could it be spoken. That was the source of her everlasting attraction for him, perhaps; she was a person to whom one could say what came into one's head."<sup>2</sup>

In the third section of *To The Lighthouse*, we see the shadow of Mrs. Ramsay on other people after her death. In this part, Mrs. Ramsay has died, but in a sense, she is alive still. We find Mrs. Ramsay everywhere, in every person. There, the same people except Mrs. Ramsay are gathered in the same summer resort. Ten years have passed since the first scene. Mr. Ramsay and his children intend to go to the lighthouse in remembrance of the unaccomplished plan [to visit it in the past. Mr. Ramsay wants to go there, but his children do not want to do so. They rebel in their minds against their father's compulsion. They are bewildered because of losing their one centre, Mrs. Ramsay. The vivid life of the old days is not seen anywhere. They go to the lighthouse with those separate hearts. The time of tension continues for a long time. Mr. Ramsay tries to soften the hard atmosphere first, then he begins to read some book, and loses himself in reading. His two children, his youngest son and daughter, continue to rebel against their father, remembering their dead mother—her honesty, her sympathy. As the ship drew to the island where the lighthouse stood, their hearts became softened by degrees without any reason. When they reached the island, these two children's hearts were in such a state as this:

They (=children) watched him (=Mr. Ramsay), both of them, sitting bareheaded with his parcel on his knee, staring and staring at the frail blue shape which seemed

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<sup>1</sup> *To The Lighthouse*, p. 44, "So boasting of her capacity to surround and protect, there was scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by; all was so lavish and spent; . . ."

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

like the vapour of something that had burnt itself away. What do you want? They both wanted to ask. They both wanted to say. Ask us anything and we will give it to you. But he did not ask them anything. He sat and looked at the island and he might be thinking, we perished, each alone, or he might be thinking, I have reached it. I have found it, but he said nothing.<sup>1</sup>

What kind of power induces the air of harmony and the sympathy of their hearts? It is the revelation of Mrs. Ramsay. It is the love of her, so to speak, her immortal life. Her completely unselfish life penetrates into other persons and creates a new life in them for ever and ever.

Meanwhile Lily Briscoe remained in the house painting the picture which she had tried once and set aside unfinished. Formerly there had been the figure of Mrs. Ramsay reading a book to her child, but now it was not there. She thought one thing or another about Mrs. Ramsay as she could not paint the picture successfully.

What is the meaning of life? . . . This, That, and the other; . . . Mrs. Ramsay bringing them together; Mrs. Ramsay saying 'Life stands still here'; Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent)—this was of the nature of revelation. In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and leaves shaking) was struck into stability. Life stands still here, Mrs. Ramsay said. 'Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!' she repeated. She owed this revelation to her.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time as the Ramsays' ship reached the lighthouse, she finished her painting "with a sudden intensity"<sup>4</sup> as if she saw a shape clearly. There, again, we see the immortal life of Mrs. Ramsay. She loved people and was loved. She got real life by losing herself, and the life which was wholly lived by her penetrates into other people and begets new life. Her body is dead, but her life is not dead. It is immortal. Mrs. Ramsay shows us that one gets eternal life by living a real life completely, sincerely, by losing one's trifling self.

The same thing we can say in the case of Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway*. He had lost his "sense of proportion"<sup>4</sup> because

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243-244, "The Lighthouse."

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>4</sup> *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 134, "Sir William called it not having a sense of proportion."

of shell-shock in the War. Sir William Bradshaw, and Doctor Holmes, forced him to go to the hospital separated from his wife. He and his wife disliked to be separated from each other. After they came back from the house of Sir William, they had a completely pleasant time in common. They talked about Mrs. Peter, and discussed the hat which Septimus's wife, Rezia, was making for Mrs. Peter. They talked of this or that, whatever came into their minds directly. They were thinking only of the present pleasure. They were enjoying the present life only, nakedly, honestly, eagerly. They were entirely themselves. Nothing else did they think on. It was a very beautiful scene of quiet love between husband and wife. Rezia thought that "Never had she felt so happy! Never in her life!"<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile the hand of Sir William to separate them was approaching them every moment. It is, in other words, the hand of death. Here I could not help remembering the scene of "A Game of Chess" in *The Waste Land* of T. S. Eliot.

And we shall play a game of chess,  
Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.<sup>2</sup>

This scene may be different from that of Septimus and his wife, but we can see the same tone under it. Both of them show us the moment of life which is compared with death. Life is worked in relief more vividly and more beautifully by the existence of death. But, at any rate, Septimus and Rezia did not think of any other things but were only living their present life. At last the hand of the doctor reached them. Septimus killed himself though he did not want to die. He said at the last moment of his life in this world,

There remained only the window; . . . the tiresome, the troublesome, and rather melodramatic business of opening the window and throwing himself out. It was their idea of tragedy, not his or Rezia's (for she was with him). Holmes and Bradshaw liked that sort of thing. (He sat on the sill.) But he would wait till the very last moment. He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings? Coming down the staircase opposite, an old man stopped and stared at him. Holmes was at the door. "I'll give it you!"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>2</sup> T. S. Eliot: *The Waste Land*, ll. 137-8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.



We can see, here, the love for life or the will to life of Septimus. He did not want to die. But he killed himself. It is because he loved the present life so passionately that he could not bear the power that destroyed the present life. He killed himself to make the present life permanent. We can say "Septimus made the moment something permanent," just as Lily said of Mrs. Ramsay. Of course, he is not an ordinary man, therefore his way is a little different from that of ordinary men. There must be some people who blame him because of their interpretation that he killed himself because of his lack of courage. But, at the same time, it must be possible to interpret his death as life. His death made a very great effect upon Mrs. Dalloway. After Clarissa heard of his suicide from Bradshaw she forgot herself, for the time being, thinking of this young man. She felt anger for Bradshaw, and she felt some strong affinity for this unknown young man. She was glad that he had killed himself.

But what an extraordinary night! She felt very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living.<sup>1</sup>

In this affinity and in this pleasure, there might be her reaction against Sir William Bradshaw or her reaction against science. She might have been thinking of death as the end of every thing and that therefore Bradshaw could not do anything to this dead young man with any force of science. This young man had won against Bradshaw with his death, Clarissa might have thought. But the greatest power which moved her strongly was the immortal life beyond his death. When he killed himself, he, of course, did not think of the future world after death. He did not kill himself expecting any future life. He simply thought of his present life. He loved the present life and did not want to die, as he said. He killed himself to reject the man who destroyed his present life. He lived his life thoroughly to its end, then got new life by losing it. Clarissa was greatly moved by his death and found something like harmony in her present life which includes death.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

The young man killed himself; but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him; with all this going on. There! the old lady had put out her light! the whole house was dark now with this going on, she repeated, and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun. She must go back to them.<sup>1</sup>

Lastly, I want to see the meaning of death which is necessarily incidental to life. In the works of Virginia Woolf, death is not a tragic thing. To speak more accurately, the death of the body is not a tragic thing, because the spirit does not die by the death of the body as we have seen in the case of Mrs. Ramsay and in Septimus. Life is immortal in spite of the human necessity of the death of the body. Septimus felt his dead friend as alive, and he said that "Evans was speaking. The dead were with him."<sup>2</sup> Evans died in the War, but to him he was alive now. True death to Virginia Woolf is the death of the spirit, the death of self. She said in *The Waves* that

No cock crowed; no smoke rose; no train moved. A man without self, I said. A heavy body leaning on a gate. A dead man.<sup>3</sup>

What must be conquered is the death of self.

Secondly, death is an element which is always in life and makes life more beautiful and more vivid with its sense of limitation. The sense of "time" is noticed by the existence of death. In the case of Septimus and his wife, their present life is felt to be more beautiful and more striking by the existence of death after it.

Never had she felt so happy! Never in her life! . . .

'But I must look so queer!' she cried, running over to the glass and looking first this side, then that. Then she snatched it off again, for there was a tap at the door. Could it be Sir William Bradshaw? Had he sent already?<sup>4</sup>

The other reason why Septimus's death moved Clarissa so strongly is that it made her feel the fact firmly that in every life there is always death, unescapably.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> *The Waves*, p. 202.

<sup>4</sup> *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 199, 200.

Oh! thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here's death, she thought. . . . What business had the Bradshaws to talk of death at her party? A young man had killed himself. And they talked of it at her party—the Bradshaws talked of death. He had killed himself—but how? Always her body went through it, when she was told, first, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Ramsay was knowing this fact, then she thought,

—for what could be more serious than the love of man for woman, what more commanding, more impressive, bearing in its bosom the seeds of death; at the same time these lovers, these people entering into illusion glittering eyed, must be danced round with mockery, decorated with garlands.<sup>2</sup>

Death is always in life and it gives life more beauty and life. We can see this fact clearly in the following two paragraphs:

[Prue Ramsay, leaning on her father's arm, was given in marriage that May. What, people said, could have been more fitting? And they added, how beautiful she looked!] . . .

[Prue Ramsay died that summer in some illness connected with childbirth, which was indeed a tragedy, people said. They said nobody deserved happiness more.]<sup>3</sup>

When we think on death, two kinds of death must be thought of—death of body and death of soul. At any rate, human life is repeated for ever and ever bearing death always in it.

Life is pleasant: life is good. After Monday comes Tuesday, and Wednesday follows.<sup>4</sup>

### Chapter III Conclusion

I have seen the life which is described in the novels of Virginia Woolf in the comparison of Mrs. Dalloway with Mrs. Ramsay. Both of them love their present life naturally. Both of them have the will to live their present life with their strong vitality. In both cases, this strong vitality is very effective to other persons, but the same vitality works in each of them just oppositely, therefore the life and its effects are far different from each other.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255-6.

<sup>2</sup> *To The Lighthouse*, p. 116, "The Window."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 154, 155, "Time Passes."

<sup>4</sup> *The Waves*, p. 192.

Mrs. Dalloway loved her life and was extremely anxious not to lose her self. She chose as her husband the secure Richard rather than the passionate Peter because of her desire to keep her self secure. She was very kind to her friends, as Sally said,<sup>1</sup> but kindness to friends and love for her self were completely similar things to her. She wanted every person to be his or herself. To keep her self she did not care for anything whatever. By so doing, what kind of life did she get herself? Was she contented with her life? We cannot think so. She was always criticised by every one unfairly, as she said, and was always lonely. She had not a real friend,—Peter went away from her, she had not time to visit Sally, Doris Kilman detested and despised her, Lady Bruton invited her husband to her luncheon without her, even her daughter was taken by Kilman. Though she admired human solitude, she could not help feeling that she was unhappy. She lost something from her desire to keep her own self. The consciousness of losing something gives her manner something cold. She suddenly feels that she was unhappy with no reason, while she does not care for what she lost. She puts all aside and goes on to live her present life. That is her vitality. By this strong vitality, Peter is still enchanted, though he is criticising her way of life and saying that he is not in love with her now. In the last scene of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Peter keeps on wanting her to come, criticising her way of life with Sally. In the meantime Clarissa is forgetting herself to think on life and death being moved by the death of an unknown young man who killed himself on the day. Presenting the subject of death and true life, *Mrs. Dalloway* is brought to an end.

Mrs. Ramsay, on the other hand, lived a very different life from Mrs. Dalloway's life with as strong a vitality as Clarissa had. She loved the present life as much as Clarissa did. She also had the will to live her present life with her strong vitality, but she had not the coldness which Clarissa had. The difference between them comes from the

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<sup>1</sup> *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 266 “. . . how generous to her friends Clarissa was! and what a rare quality one finds it, and how sometimes at night or on Christmas Day, when she counted up her blessings, she put that friendship first. They were young; that was it. Clarissa was pure-hearted; that was it.”

fact that Mrs. Ramsay did not care about keeping her self so much as Clarissa did. But she was completely herself; she did not pretend and was very honest. She loved everyone heartily and was interested in the happiness of every person. For the happiness of other people she did not mind giving everything she had; she did not want to keep something left for her self. She gave everything, but instead of it she got always something unexpectedly. She did not lose what Clarissa lost. She got life by losing it. Of course, there was solitude or her self in her, too. She felt it sometimes when she was alone. She felt "oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others."<sup>1</sup> But she did not stick to it. Every person is certainly alone in the depth of each one. There is something which could not be shared with any other person. Mrs. Ramsay, too, had her solitary self, but her solitude was not so sad as Clarissa's. She was always surrounded by real friends in contrast to Clarissa. She merely lived her present life honestly, giving, giving, giving, and died. Her true love for others, and her life, remained in other people for ever. She got immortal life by losing her trifling self and living completely her present life. By living in the present thoroughly one comes to live in the future.

We cannot say that Virginia Woolf thought Mrs. Ramsay's way of life to be better than Clarissa's, for she did not call into question the value of the way of life of each person. She did not mean to compare the ways of life. She only represents life itself. But we can say that Mrs. Ramsay is a more harmonious and accomplished human figure than Mrs. Dalloway.

We find that the cases of the two lives are developed in the life of Bernard in *The Waves*. In him, the life of Mrs. Ramsay is certainly a developed form of the life of Mrs. Dalloway. He loved the present life as both of these two women did. He loved life itself and did not expect anything else from it. "Life is pleasant. Life is good. The mere process of life is satisfactory,"<sup>2</sup> he said. He saw some vitality

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<sup>1</sup> *To The Lighthouse*, p. 72, "The Window."

<sup>2</sup> *The Waves*, p. 185.

in every process of life, even in nature.

The sun is hot. I see the river. I see trees specked and burnt in the autumn sunlight. Boats float past, through the red, through the green. Far away a bell tolls, but not for death. There are bells that ring for life! Look how the willow shoots its fine sprays into the air! Look how through them a boat passes filled with indolent, with unconscious, with powerful young men.<sup>1</sup>

He had a strong conviction of the vitality in him when he said "My daughters shall come here, in other summers; my sons shall turn new fields; Hence we are not raindrops, soon dried by the wind; we make gardens blow and forests roar; we come up differently, for ever and ever."<sup>2</sup>

Though Bernard was not clever but an ordinary man, he had the wit to live on his present life. He had once been pursuing his self persistently and seeking to find some phrases for life. What is life? Who am I? He could not find any meaning. He went around to see his old friends to find it. What he could find was only his loneliness.

All had their rapture, their common feeling with death; something that stood them in stead. Thus I visited each of my friend in turn, trying, with fumbling figures, to prise open their locked caskets. I went from one to the other holding my sorrow—no, not my sorrow but the incomprehensible nature of this our life—for their inspection. Some people got to priests; others to poetry; I to my friends, I to my own heart, I to see among phrases and fragments something unbroken—I to whom there is not beauty enough in moon or tree; to whom the touch of one person with another is all, yet who cannot grasp even that, who am so imperfect, so weak, so unspeakably lonely.<sup>3</sup>

In this long reference, we see his state of mind and his nature. After a long chase of his own self, he got merely this loneliness and this powerlessness. After it he suddenly felt that his self had disappeared, then he felt an unspeakable peace.

This self now as I leant over the gate looking down over the fields rolling in waves of colour beneath me make no answer. He threw up no opposition. He attempted no phrase. His fist did not form. I waited. I listened. Nothing came, nothing. I cried then with a sudden conviction of complete desertion, Now there is nothing. . . . Life has destroyed me. . . . This is more truly death than the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

death of friends, than the death of youth. I am the swathed figure in the hair-dresser's shop taking up only so much space. . . . No cock crowed; no smoke rose, no train moved. A man without a self, I said. A heavy body leaning on a gate. A dead man. . . .<sup>1</sup>

He knew the feeling of peace when he lost his self. It was a kind of spiritual awakening which no one could explain with words. From this enlightenment, he got new life. True life could not be seen when one is seeing the world through one's self-coloured eyes. It is only when as Blackstone said, "the self has been destroyed, indeed, that a new world can be seen."<sup>2</sup> He drew out the new will to life with his new life. Here, he plunges himself into death. Death is the only enemy that he must conquer, now. The death which is written here is not the mere death of body, but the death of all life.

And in me too the wave rises. It swells; it arches its back. I am aware once more of a new desire, something rising beneath me like the proud horse whose rider first spurs and then pulls him back. What enemy do we now perceive advancing against us, you whom I ride now, as we stand pawing this stretch of pavement? It is death. Death is the enemy. It is death against whom I ride with my spear couched and my hair flying back like a young man's. . . . I strike spurs into my horse. Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!<sup>3</sup>

*The Waves* ends in the sentence following this paragraph.

The waves broke on the shore.<sup>4</sup>

As we read this sentence, we think over the fact that the sun will rise tomorrow and the waves will break on the shore as today. People die, and time passes away, but life is repeated for ever and ever.

Yes, this is the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again.<sup>5</sup> People die and live in the future with "unvanquished and unyielding" soul. The life which is repeated eternally must be praised.

Life is pleasant; life is good. After Monday comes Tuesday, and Wednesday follows.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201, 202.

<sup>2</sup> Blackstone: *Virginia Woolf*, p. 187.

<sup>3</sup> *The Waves*, p. 211.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

Virginia Woolf wrote about ordinary life itself again and again. All the characters in her novels are living their present life truly in their own way. Eleanor in *The Years*, too, lives her life with her eyes staring at the real life and loves her present life, though *The Years* lacks the power of life in comparison with her earlier novels.

To conclude this essay I want to see the permanent and contemporary significance of Virginia Woolf. We must notice two points as constituting her contemporary significance. She maintained that writers must represent "an ordinary mind on an ordinary day." What must be represented is the life (or soul) itself and not the social circumstances nor the places where his characters live. In a good novel, there must not be the comedy, nor tragedy, nor catastrophe but only the mere process of life. We catch an extraordinary number of impressions which seem apparently to have no relation with each other. The writers must write about those impressions including as little external mixture as possible. These are her chief advocacies. She is regarded as a most important author of the stream-of-consciousness school. But her importance is in the subject which she continued to represent: life itself. The technique which is called "stream-of-consciousness" results from her subject. This rebellion to the old type novel is very important. Moreover, that she succeeded in it is important and significant.

She represented the life of the insecure world between the two world wars very well. She did not want to describe the face of the world, but in the life of the people, the life of the world is expressed well. Her novel itself shows the loneliness and the tragedy of the nineteen-twenties. These two points—she wrote successfully about life itself rebelling against the old novel, and represented the figure of the world of the nineteen-twenties—must be noticed as her contemporary significance.

Whether or not the works of a writer are handed down to posterity is a question which is decided by history. What we can say about the permanent significance of a writer is but a rough prediction. But I think that her deep interest in life is a significant thing in every age and in every world. The life of Mrs. Dalloway is not limited to London,



nor to June. It may be seen in New York, or in September. The lives of Mrs. Ramsay and Bernard and Eleanor are not limited by any place or time. It is because she wrote about life itself. To live this moment's life completely and go to death losing one's trifling self but being oneself, and by so doing to live in the future is the subject which may well be praised by every person in every place and in every age. In one's deep inner self, there is something common with every human being. I remember, now, *The Song of Myself* by Walt Whitman.

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,  
And what I assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

There was never any more inception than there is now,  
Now any more youth or age than there is now,  
And will never be any more perfection than there is now,  
Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now.

I exist as I am, that is enough,  
If no other in the world be aware I sit content,  
And if each and all be aware I sit content.

I know I am deathless,

My foothold is tenoned and mortised in granite,  
I laugh at what you call dissolution,  
And I know the amplitude of time.

And I say to mankind, Be not curious about God,  
For I who am curious about each am not curious about God.  
I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least,  
Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself.<sup>1</sup>

Walt Whitman is one of the greatest poets in America in the nineteenth century. His poetry is admirable one even now. Virginia Woolf is a novelist who has the same kind of thought as Walt Whitman had. Moreover, she has a more beautiful imagination and art of constitution

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<sup>1</sup> *American Literature*, (ed. by Robert Shafer), p. 48-80, "Song of Myself" by Walt Whitman.

as well as keen sensibility. Her works have real body, when compared with the works of Whitman,

As we think over our insecure world, it becomes more significant as we read over her works again and again, works which are written about the deep inner life of individuals,

Virginia Woolf killed herself on the twenty-eighth of March in 1941. She was fifty-nine at the time. Her suicide is very symbolical when we look into her thought about life,

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