

UNIVERSIDAD DE GRANADA

**VIRGINIA WOOLF AND HER WORLD:
UNMASKING THE PRESENCE OF
CARNIVAL IN THE NOVELS OF
VIRGINIA WOOLF**



Isabel M^a Andrés Cuevas

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VIRGINIA WOOLF Isabel M^a.Andrés Cuevas – Granada 2006**



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Introduction

Introduction

As indicated by its title, this work's major aim is offering a detailed overview of Woolf's resort to carnival as a paradigm for literary creation. In this respect, as it is specified throughout the chapter on "*Theoretical Fundamentals*", particular attention is devoted to Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalization of literature. This term, which the critic coins in order to refer to the transposition of the tradition of a certain series of folklore manifestations, constitutes the notional justification whereby both the sensorial aspects of carnival, as well as the anthropological-philosophical dimension lying underneath, come to endorse literary creation. Simultaneously, some of the principal theoretical parameters that constitute the basis for this discussion are compiled in this chapter, which provides a concise explanation concerning the particular relevance of these notional foundations in relation to the present analysis. Accordingly, special attention is of course focused upon the very idea of carnival. Hence, taking Bakhtin's theory as the starting point for this study, insofar as the scholar carries out the most influential conceptualization of carnival as regards its transposition into literary works.

Along with Bakhtin's theory, the postulates of some other mainstream authors – whose work have served as a reference for the major studies on carnival as an artistic phenomenon – have been similarly incorporated. More specifically, whereas further treatises on carnival actually emerge as subsidiary to Bakhtin's work, a considerable number of relevant efforts for providing a detailed analysis of the scope of the grotesque as well as of its historical development – such as Kayser's taxonomical work, or G. Harpham's diachronic study have also been considered. At the same time, some of the most current typifications of the grotesque in connection with modern art become as well relevant to this detailed examination of Woolf's work.

On the one hand, specific information concerning Woolf's contemporary unanimist theories – as formulated by Jules Romains – will be provided, insofar as these postulates will be considered in conjugation with the carnivalistic conception of communal formations. Hence, through the resort to the direct source of Romains' writings, as well as Peter Norrish's account of this theory, a

consideration of the central aspects at the core of Unanimism will be brought to the fore.

On the other hand, an additional parameter central to this analysis is provided by the anthropological bases conforming to the primeval origins of carnival. Hence, this will be especially considered by attention to the postulates of Sir J. G. Frazer as one of the major exponents of the growing development of anthropology at the turn of the twentieth century, as well as the author of one of the most widely influential treatises on the anthropological foundations of some fundamental questions at the core of societal development. Simultaneously, particular relevance will acquire in this concern the postulates proposed by Frazer's disciple, the scholar Jane Harrison, insofar as she constitutes the direct source from whence Woolf inherits these philosophical and sociological bases.

Similarly, within the carnival paradigm a detailed outline of the grotesque as both an ideological and an aesthetic perspective is also provided. Hereby, through a diachronic study of the evolution of this parameter, is included, with an analysis of this aspect, as well as of its implicational value from ancient origins to the most recent accounts, such as F. Connelly's 2003 compilation on the Modern Grotesque.

In the chapter two, on *The Voyage Out*, "*Voyaging Outside Boundaries*", the carnival perspective has mainly been served a twofold purpose. Hence, on the one hand, it proved as a reliable paradigm to exhibit the ridiculous pretence of a society eminently construed upon the bases of falsity and appearances as an operating principle. On the other hand, in view of the transgressing iconoclast philosophy at the core of the carnivalistic approach, once unveiled the senselessness of an essentially hypocritical society, the carnival system of ideological principles and external manifestations provides the parameters to vindicate for the demolition of the oppressive pillars sustaining the edifice of Victorian society.

Accordingly, by means of the resort to some of the major parameters inherent to carnival, an unhumpered flow of sexual identity is favoured in detriment of the petrousness of societal conventionalisms. In this sense, the value of the voyage around which the novel revolves is proved as allegorical of the transition into the proposed life of unconstrained freedom.

Thus, on the premises of a selection of some of the central aspects underneath the anthropological conceptions of carnival, an interpretation of the significance of this paradigm within Woolf's novel will be provided. Hence, one of these elements will be constituted by the figure of the King of Fools, which will serve as the basis to infer a dual analysis chiming in with the pattern of debunkings and renewals inherent to carnival. Hence, within the particular context where the novel emerges, will prove an ultimately decisive value as regards the transgression of an essentially prescriptive society, lying on the bases of a patriarchal society.

Likewise, in tune with the ancient origins of carnival outlined in the first chapter of this study, a consideration to Woolf's retrieval of some of the matriarchal structures defined by Jane Harrison in connection with primitive carnivalesque rites will be pointed out as a basic instrument at the service of the downturn of the male agents of tyrannical oppression. At the same time, particular attention to the carnivalesque acts of swallowing, in tune with cannibalization, will be especially relevant to demonstrate Woolf's awareness of a perniciously dangerous society as founded upon the roots of normative categorization.

Starting from some of the premises central to the anthropological bases underlying carnival, a study of *The Voyage Out* is proposed by consideration of these parameters. In this sense, the particular implications of the voyage around which the novel revolves will be examined, insofar as the former will serve to introduce within the narrative a form of carnivalistic passage into a renovated existence subsequent to the abandonment of conventional norms and prejudices. In particular, the value of the journey will be examined as a way to enable the setting in motion of an entire universe of carnivalesque acts, which are mainly targeted towards the annihilation of the present structures as a means of buttressing forth the incoming of the expected renewal. With this purpose, this analysis examines the significance of the expiatory figure in its twofold dimension. Thus, on the one hand, this study will explore the role of carnivalesque scapegoat as an embodiment of the remnants of an invaded and decayed land. Likewise, the reach of this figure, on the other hand, will be examined in its potentiality to bring forth the regeneration that becomes essential for

communal development. This will simultaneously require attention to different unfoldings of the various dimensions of this carnivalesque personage, throughout a series of characters in the novel.

Within those carnivalesque acts, special emphasis will be placed on covert transvestisms throughout the novel. These, which conform to the dualities and ambiguities inherent to the carnival paradigm, will simultaneously be regarded as indicative of the existence of a socio-political edifice which impedes the unhampered evolution by its attempts to impose onesidedness and unidirectionality. Another major focus will be centred upon the relevance of the different acts of cannibalization and implicit devouring that recur throughout the novel. These, which conform to the carnival pattern of destruction/renewal implied by the motif of the journey, will similarly be considered according to their metaphorical involvement of a self-destructive society.

Accordingly, chiming in with carnival rites, a dual purpose will have to be discerned in relation to cannibalistic episodes. Hence, whereas, in its negative side, it will become symptomatic of the phagocytic instincts attesting for the corruption underlying the structures of a patriarchy-imbued system, it will also entail a complementarily positive dimension. Hereupon, acts of cannibalism in *The Voyage Out* will as well represent a means of enacting the removal of the fatherly artifices of patriarchal oppression.

Throughout the third chapter of this study, the presence of carnival in *Jacob's Room* will be analysed, particularly in connection with two dominant elements. Hence, in view of the outstanding presence in the novel of some of its characters, special attention will be required to the essential implications of such a phenomenon in the context of an eminently patriarchal society. At the same time, the evaluation of the implicational meanings derived from its inclusion will be considered within both the fictional context of the novel and the specific socio-political background that serves as a frame at the time of its publication, inasmuch as it will constitute a point of reference for the analysis of Woolf's later writings.

Simultaneously, the novel will be examined regarding the recurring presence of dismemberment as a constant at the heart of the narrative. Hereby, on the grounds of the

ambivalence underlying the carnivalesque imagery and the rendering of mutilated bodies and disjointed limbs, a similarly dual assessment is needed to be distilled from this exploration. Hence, particular attention will be devoted to the patriarchal axes on which a mole-based dictatorial system stands, insofar as these will determine the respective readings that are to be derived from the presence of dismemberment as a constructive principle of the novel.

In this sense, while the constant association of this phenomenon in the novel with male characters will become definitory of the intrinsic crippledness of the patriarchal epitomes of tyrannical dominance, a notably dissimilar intentionality will emerge as a result of the analysis of a female instance of fragmented corporeality in *Jacob's Room*. Accordingly, on the resort to some mainstream postulates on grotesque art, including the pivotal study of female grotesque carried out by Mary Russo, an essential connection between the positive side of grotesque imagery and the woman as a potential source of regenerative power.

For the interpretation of carnival in *Mrs. Dalloway*, a fundamental conjugation between this paradigm and some of the major postulates of Unanimism will be essential. Hereby, taking as a point of departure the considerable degree of juxtaposition between the nuclear aspects of communal bondings at the core of the carnivalistic approach, and some of the central postulates of the French theory of Unanimism, an analysis of *Mrs. Dalloway* on these premises is proposed throughout this chapter. In this sense, the introduction of the unanimist perspective will turn out crucial in order to enable the disentanglement of the carnival pattern in *Mrs. Dalloway*, thereby bringing to light a series of special emphasis will be placed on the different embodiments of the figure of the Carnival Fool throughout the novel, particularly as regards the value of such an incarnation as the site for the convergence of the different elements to be disposed of by society. In the specific context of 1925, when the novel was published, a special connection between this notion of collective evil and the patriarchal bases on which a despotic socio-political system rests will need to be established with the purpose of unveiling the actual reach and significance of this figure. At the same time, in view of the fundamental relationship between this figure and the

particular political background of a post-*bellum* fascist Britain which resists an essentially direct connection between these aspects and the specific identity of the particular embodiment of the Carnival King will be as well studied.

Simultaneously, this focus on the figure of the carnivalesque monarch directly refers to the analysis of the ancient anthropological bases underlying the primitive origins of carnival rites. With a view to this purpose, a resort to Woolf's most immediately accessible sources has been employed. Hence, derived from the exploration of the author's relationship with the ritualist scholar, as well as with her work, along with the postulates by Frazer, as the pivotal contemporary anthropologist, an analysis of Woolf's treatment of those primeval celebrating mythological systems of beliefs will be carried out. This will correspondingly determine the relevance of this carnivalistic epistemology and aesthetics within the whole narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway*.

An overview of some of the major elements encapsulated within the grotesque imagery inherent to the carnival vision constitutes the central aim of chapter five, "*The Swaying Pig and the Toothless Lady: The Presence of the Grotesque in To the Lighthouse*". This aim will require the employment of some of the most recent accounts of both the implicational and sensorial values of the grotesque, such as the highly influential study of Peter Stallybrass and Allon White which has been constituting a compulsory reference for most works on this field. Hereby, on the consideration of the quintessential ambivalence of the heart of the conceptual basis of the grotesque, a twofold view will be developed.

On the one hand, in view of the subversive politics against existing structures and beliefs involved by the grotesque – as essentially integrated within the carnival paradigm – its inclusion within the novel will bring to the fore a series of debunkings and downturns, specially associated with the patriarchal pillars of the socio-political system. Simultaneously, these will have an immediate incidence on the presence of the Carnival Fool, transposed, on this occasion, to the particularly carnivalesque context of the circus – a point which will be mainly supported by Stallybrass and White's taxonomy of modern carnival.

On the other hand, regarding the complementary value of the grotesque as a potential force prompting for the attainment of renewal, a study of this parameter as essentially connected with the female will be accomplished. Thus, supported by Ruskin's notion of the grotesque as a structure defiantly opposed to the normative linearity of canonical precepts in art, will be conceived as an evaluation of the degree of truth of such a dichotomy.

In chapter six, “*Across Orlando: Crossing the Boundaries of Convention in Woolf's Novel*” an analysis of *Orlando* is fundamentally proposed on the bases of its blatant debasement of the normative system of deeply-rooted traditions to which Victorian society remains impassively anchored. Accordingly, Orlando's transsexual, at the same time as trans-historical journey will be taken as a centripetal source from whence the subversive bulk underneath the conception of the novel emerges.

Thus, on the consideration of some of the medical and pseudo-scientific contemporary postulates on sexuality, along with the legal and political set of rules which interacted with the former for mutual support, the precise signification of carnival politics within this frame will be brought to the light. In this sense, by means of the resort to some of the major postulates by Sigmund Freud, as the most representative of these authors, will reveal the centrality of the grotesque perspective in order to apprehend the ideological-intentional essence of Woolf's novel. In this sense, attention will be focused upon the particular implications of the dualistic conception underneath the construction of the character of Orlando, whereupon his utter demolition of the engulfing system of values will be demonstrated as the antecedent to an existence of prosperity and renewal.

The next chapter, “*'A Little Figure with a Golden Teapot on his Head': The Role of Carnival Fools and Subjects in The Waves*”, offers an exploration of the relevance of the carnival perspective through the detailed study of each of the seven main characters constitutive of the trunk from whence the whole narrative develops. With a view to this aim, two focal aspects within the carnivalistic paradigm represent the core of this analysis, which of course will derive into additional

secondary considerations concerning carnival, as a general perspective, as well as the grotesque aesthetics which presides most of the carnivalesque manifestations.

Thereupon, particular emphasis will be placed upon the different embodiments throughout the narrative of the scapegoat. As it has been consistent throughout the different novels commented, this will bring to the fore diverging interpretations as a matter of the gender of the fictional incarnations of the expiatory figure.

In consonance with this, another relevant pillar of discussion will be represented by the notion of the abject, as conceptualized primarily by two authors. Hence, whereas the incorporation of Bakhtin's vision of this idea will provide a more purely carnivalistic location for the transcendence of such concept, its later reformulation by Kristeva will enable the introduction of a feminist perspective into the paradigm of carnival criticism in the novel.

This notion of the abject will simultaneously provide the basis for the dyadic interpretation of the inclusion of the expiatory victim within *The Waves*. In this sense, by means of an examination of the particular value allocated to the various embodiments of this figure will serve to infer the powerfully deconstructive intentionality beneath the creation of these personages.

On the one hand, special attention will also be provided for the significance of the conception underlying the treatment of communal formations within the novel. With this purpose, in opposition to some of the central critiques envisioning the novel as a hymn in praise of community formations, a careful analysis of this aspect will contribute to evaluate its essential divergence in relation to the novels studied within the parameters of unanimist postulates and the idea of collective gatherings distilled from carnival politics.

Chiming with this, the narrator's particular awareness of the necessity of annihilating a fascist patriarchal system sustained by tyrannical leaders will come to light. This, which will occur as a result of the successive decrowning acts which recurrently effect a downturning action upon the different characters in the novel, will become indissolubly linked to Woolf's interest in quixotic figures as precisely a model peculiarly suitable for her construction of the Carnival Fool, as it will

be pointed out.

A more ample analysis than in other cases has been derived from *The Years*, proportional to its massive richness and complexity as regards Woolf's resort to the grotesque as a fruitful source for the intentional implications underlying her novel. Bearing this in mind, chapter eight proposes a study of *The Years* as a particularly fertile ground for the deconstruction of Victorian society. Accordingly, special attention will be focused upon some of the mainstream reviews contemporary to the publication of the novel in order to illustrate the novel's apparent conformity with tradition which marked its critical reception.

As the title of the chapter indicates, special relevance is to be conceded for the various types of grotesque deformity and metamorphic hybridization that occur in the novel. At the same time, regarding the degree of connection between this novel and the nonfictional work published little after *The Years*, attention will be conveniently drawn to those specific interlinks at the times required by the analysis of carnival and the grotesque in *The Years*. This, in turn, will also serve to bring to the fore the issue of Fascism as a constant throughout the narrative, insofar as it constitutes as a malignant power of repression, and therefore, a simultaneous target of carnivalesque subversion and annihilation.

Likewise, in tune with this debunking of the oppressive structures of hegemonic authority, as well as of the hierarchicalized society on which the former stand, different forms of metamorphic caricaturization will arise from the analysis of *The Years*. On this occasion, the particular influence of the new emerging techniques for artistic creation – and most notably, of photography and painting – will represent a pivotal parameter for the study of Woolf's employment of the grotesque as inherent to some of the most modern *avant-gardé* tendencies – namely Cubism, Dadaism, and the Surrealist compositions of collage and photomontage. Bearing this in mind, an examination of Woolf's apprehension of these techniques as a means of structural incorporation of grotesque aesthetics into the novel will contribute to unveiling the particular implications of the aesthetic principles within the context of a fascist prewar society. Simultaneously, the relevance of the

growing development of technology in consonance with the advent of modernity will as well be considered insofar as it determines the entrance of a new form of grotesque characterization into *The Years*. Accordingly, a resort to the most recent theories on the modern grotesque will be required, particularly as concerns the new conceptualization of the grotesque in association with the mechanization and subsequent alienation of the individual in the context of the modern era.

Another parameter for the analysis of Woolf's introduction of a grotesque perspective will be represented by the exploration of those cross-literary allusions to other fictional occurrences of the grotesque, which will provide another basis for the interpretation of malformation and hybridity as instruments at the service of the transgression of conventional precepts.

As it has been signalled in previous chapters, a twofold reading of the presence of the Carnival Fool, as well as of the different instances of deformity and estrange forms of characterization, will need to be inferred. Hence, by means of the study of these interpretative axes in consonance with the dyadic nature of the grotesque, a concurrent duality will come to surface, whereupon gender will ultimately determine a sign of negative destruction or positive prospect of regeneration in the implicational meaning of the resort to grotesque aesthetics.

By comparison with *The Waves*, a major difference of focus will derive from the interpretation of *Between the Acts* throughout chapter ten of this study. Accordingly, through the analysis of communal bondings in Woolf's posthumously published novel, the particular significance of this issue within the context of the irrevocably fragmenting forces of fascism and oppressive patriarchy will be brought to the light. In this respect, the conjugation between the perspectives provided by unanimist postulates, on the one hand, and the philosophy distilled from the carnival paradigm, on the other hand, will become essential in order to provide an interpretive reading of Woolf's last novel.

Simultaneously, this study of communities will also bring to the fore the carnival figure of the expiatory personage for the analysis of which, a central focus of attention will need to be placed upon the ancient anthropological basis that constitute the origins of carnival. This research, which

develops considerably parallel to the examination of the carnivalistic perspective in *Mrs. Dalloway*, on the grounds of the fundamental parallels underlying their implicational value, requires a similarly detailed attention to the different embodiments of the scapegoat, in particular, as regards the victimizing action of hegemonic leaders.

Finally, a last section is devoted to the compilation of the conclusions inferred from this study which will ultimately confirm the reliability of the premises established for the proposed analysis of Woolf's fiction within a carnivalistic paradigm.

1. Theoretical Fundamentals.

1.1. Mikhail Bakhtin and the Theory of Carnival.

2.1. The Grotesque.

2.1.1. The Grotesque. Terminological Implications and Historical Evolution.

2.1.2. The Victorians and the Idea of the Grotesque.

2.1.3. The Notion of the Grotesque for John Ruskin.

2.1.4. The Modern Grotesque.

3.1. Modernity and the Issue of Crowds. The Unanimism of Jules Romains.

4.1. Anthropology and Modernism. The Origins of Carnival Celebrations..

1.1. Mikhail Bakhtin and the Theory of Carnival

The idea of carnival had attracted Bakhtin throughout his entire career as a literary critic. Aware of the anthropological and philosophical origins of the notion of carnival, Bakhtin had considered it as a most complex and fascinating issue at the core of culture and the history of civilizations. In fact, in the freedom and multiplicity proclaimed by carnival politics, Bakhtin had probably found a set of parameters that consistently chimed in with his linguistic philosophy, profoundly imbued with the problematics of dialogism and polyphony in literary language as opposed to the predominance of the one-sided monochromy of realism, as well as the enclosing binarism of post-structuralist theories. Indeed, his influential *The Dialogic Imagination*, along with numerous essays, attest for his wholehearted attempt to explain his concept of polyphony in association with dialogue as both comprising the conditions of openness and plurality of language as a projection of the ontological truth of the world itself. Furthermore, it was also such a reality that constituted an essential paradigm to mould Bakhtin's thought. Immersed into the conditions of a dictatorial socio-political system during the Stalinist Soviet Union of the 1950s and 1960s in which severe economic harshness was at stake, carnival provided for Bakhtin the adequate vehicle to vindicate a radical opposition against the existing structures. Hence, Sergei S. Averintsev has defined this situation as a landscape of extreme repressiveness wherein laughter “is always more or less 'impermissible' – not only because it is forbidden by state or ecclesiastical authorities, but because this is how people feel about it themselves” (1993: 15). By opposition, the politics of carnival proclaim a life of freedom and merriness where “laughter” – Bakhtin announces – “is a sign not of fear [...]” but it “is associated with [...] abundant food and drink” (cf. *ibid*: 17).

Accordingly, mainly throughout two of his works, Bakhtin devoted his discussion to expanding the profound implications of this carnivalistic approach to the world. He also tried to account for its evident incorporation into literature, on the grounds of its anthropological and intercultural dimension. Hence, it was in his PhD thesis *Rabelais and His World* that Bakhtin, attracted by the particularly transgressing nature of Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, most extensively dealt in critic with carnival issues. Indeed, Rabelais's medieval narrative, developing through a language full of obscenities and scatological descriptions, as well as of characters and episodes bluntly exhibiting grotesque attitudes and appearances, led Bakhtin to theorise about the incorporation of carnivalistic rituals and principles into certain literary works.

In fact, his baptism into carnival themes had already occurred in 1929, when Bakhtin, concerned with the polyphonic character of Dostoevsky's fiction, brought to light in *Problems of*

Dostoevsky's Poetics – the carnivalistic nature of some of the fictional works by the Russian author. According to Bakhtin, the application of the structural principles in his novels helps Dostoevsky to outreach any empirical or narrational barrier, hereby creating a world in which

(e)verything [...] lives on the very border of its opposite; love lives on the very border of hate, knows and understands it, and hate lives on the border of love and also understands it [...] Faith lives on the very border of atheism, sees itself there and understands it, atheism lives on the very border of faith and understands it, loftiness and nobility live on the border of degradation and vulgarity [...] love for life neighbours upon a thirst for self-destruction [...] Purity and chastity understand vice and sensuality [...] In Dostoevsky's world all people and all things must know one another and know about one another, must enter into contact, come together face to face and *begin* to *talk*¹ with one another. Everything must be reflected in everything else, all things must illuminate one another dialogically (1929: 176-7).

In the light of these features, Bakhtin set to summarize the principles of carnival, a phenomenon he insistently acknowledged as a cross-cultural conception “in the sense of a sum total of all diverse festivities of the carnival type [...], a [...] *syncretic pageantry* of a ritualistic sort” (1929: 122). In view of this complex system of ritual celebrations, Bakhtin observed the emergence of a particular language endowed with a powerful symbolic sensuousness. This language was the fundamental instrument for communication and interpersonal proximity among the participants of carnival, at the same time it renders the central keys to understand the carnival sense of the world. It was precisely the complexity of this language, which articulates beyond the constrictions of a verbal sign system, that Bakhtin found as the quintessence for its transposition into the similarly abstract universalism of literary language – a process Bakhtin acknowledged as “the carnivalization of literature”:

Carnival itself [...] is not, of course, a literary phenomenon [...] Carnival has worked out an entire language of symbolic concretely sensuous forms – from language and complex mass actions to individual carnivalistic gestures. This language, in a differentiated and even (as in any language) articulate way, gave expression to a unified (but complex) carnival sense of the world, permeating all its forms. This language cannot be translated in any full or adequate way into a verbal language, and much less into a language of abstract concepts, but it is amenable to a certain transposition into a language of artistic images that has something in common with its concretely sensuous nature; that is, it can be transposed into the language of literature. We are calling this transposition of carnival into the language of literature the carnivalization of literature (1929: 122).

As derived from this transference of carnival into literary works, Bakhtin distinguishes a series of individual aspects characterizing carnival politics. Accordingly, on the grounds of its origins, carnival enters the realm of the ritual celebrations accompanying the emergence of ancient drama, where no division of the audience into separate roles occurred. In this sense, like earlier

¹ All emphasis in the original.

Greek performances, “(c)arnival is a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators”, which accounts for its communal essence. As Bakhtin notes, “(i)n carnival everyone is an active participant”, all of whom truly “live a *carnivalistic life*”².

This absence of borderlines between actors and spectators is what Bakhtin has called a suspension of life itself, whereby neither physical nor conceptual barriers separate people, who, free from hierarchical restrictions as well as from the forms of terror and submission derived from it, enter into a “*free and familiar contact*” (1929: 123). Indeed, this category represents for Bakhtin the first and ineludible transformation which ordinary life, as well as the laws and restrictions that govern it, undergo through carnival. As he specifies it, “what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with [noncarnival life] – that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people.”

Consequently, “a *new mode of interrelationship*”³ between individuals, released from the oppression of hierarchical prohibitions, arises. This new form of interpersonal relationships or “familiar contact”, according to Bakhtin, is not exclusive of carnival life. Hence, although it is decisive within carnival, Bakhtin considers this type of proximity as in fact an essential element in “the special way mass actions are organized” – indeed, a principle not different from unanimist postulates and other mass theories from the earlier decades of the twentieth century.

In addition, this new form of interpersonal connection emerges in parallel to a special perspective, whereby the former life outside carnival turns out inappropriate and alienating. Indeed, after the suspension of hierarchical structures, eccentricity provides a new viewpoint whereby the sensuous reality that is inherent to carnival enables “the latent sides of human nature to reveal and express themselves”, thereby allowing for man's full realization. At the same time, in the midst of this new reality, wherein both personal relationships and the epistemological point of view have been transformed, a special form of language is to be expected in order to reflect the arising system. Founded on the principle of profanation, the language of the market-place, as Bakhtin has termed it, is full of carnivalistic blasphemies and scatological descriptions, in an attempt for debasing and bringing down to earth what was officially considered as sacred, as well as the enthroning of the power of the earth and body, previously dismissed as belonging to the lower stratum.

Bearing this in mind, once any sort of hierarchical barriers have been demolished through the debasement and profanation of the previously high and sanctified, a complex system of

² Emphasis as in the original.

³ Idem.

inversions is at work, thus confirming the utter abolishment of structural divisions. Indeed, as Bakhtin has described it, in carnival life becomes “drawn out of its *usual* rut” – a life he explicitly labels as “life turned inside out”, “the reverse side of the world” (“*monde à l'envers*”).

As a result of this process of inversions and debunkings, whereby a truly familiar contact has been enabled, Bakhtin mentions a fourth category emerging through the formation of “*carnivalistic mésalliances*.” Hence, while the “free and familiar attitude” of carnival spreads over everything under the carnival worldview, all that was “once self-enclosed, disunified, distanced from one another”, becomes integrated into a fusionated whole. As Bakhtin has put it, “(c)arnival brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid” (1929: 123).

This form of familiarization that occurs in the carnival public square constituted, for Bakhtin, the vehicle for the transmission of these features into literature, where its most immediate translation amounted to a dissolution of genre distance, as well as to “the transfer of all represented material to a zone of familiar contact” (1929: 129). Thus, along with a disintegration of the barrier between author and character that had predominated in so-called high genres, such as the epic and the tragedy, new organizations began to develop as the carnival sense of the world penetrated into them.

At the level of narration, considerable transformations were undergone by plot structures, where the most significant carnival acts were incorporated. Hence, the primary of these acts – Bakhtin observes – is the “*mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king*”⁴ (1984: 124). Indeed, sinking its roots into the Roman saturnalia and the European tradition of festivities derived from it, the dual act of throning and unthroning comprises the core ruling principles of carnival perspective. Closely associated with the banquet celebration was the election of short-lived kings and queens of the festival. The temporariness of these mock monarchies attested for the relative, non-lasting nature of life itself. At the same time, rejoicing in the abundance of food and drink was a tribute to that very earthiness and non-permanence of the body. This issue, although briefly pointed out in Bakhtin's study of Dostoevsky, acquires further relevance in his *Rabelais*, where Bakhtin dedicates a whole chapter to the image of the banquet in the French author. After analysing the role of this type of scenes in Rabelais's narrative, Bakhtin remarks the significance of these images, whereby a manifestation of the singularity of the grotesque body, and its openness to the future attests for the rotund celebration of its absolute triumph, insofar as this act of eating and drinking turns out to be an encounter of man with the world, which he tears up, and devours, and utterly overcomes. As Bakhtin expressed it:

⁴ All emphasis as in the original

El comer y el beber son una de las manifestaciones más importantes de la vida del cuerpo grotesco. Los rasgos particulares de este cuerpo son el ser abierto, estar inacabado y en interacción con el mundo.

En *el comer*⁵ estas particularidades se manifiestan del modo más tangible y concreto: el cuerpo se evade de sus límites; traga, engulle, desgarrar el mundo, lo hace entrar en sí, se enriquece y crece a sus expensas. *El encuentro del hombre con el mundo* que se opera en la boca abierta que tritura, desgarrar y masca es uno de los temas más antiguos y notables del pensamiento humano. El hombre degusta el mundo, siente el gusto del mundo, lo introduce en su cuerpo, lo hace una parte de sí mismo.

[...] *Este encuentro con el mundo en medio de la absorción de alimentos era alegre y triunfante. El hombre vencía al mundo, lo engullía en vez de ser engullido por él: la frontera entre el hombre y el mundo se anulaba en un sentido que le era favorable* (1979: 252-3).

Furthermore, a fundamental implication of this election of a mock king is linked to a system of debasing and dowering of hierarchies, particularly insofar as each crowning is dovetailed with a subsequent decrowning. Bakhtin defines this act as encapsulating “the very core of the carnival sense of the world” through “*the pathos of shifts and changes, of death and renewal*” (1984: 124). This continual succession of annihilations and shifts as essential for the process of constant renewal in fact attests for what Bakhtin has termed as the “joyful relativity” of carnival life. Indeed, carnival becomes the most evident expression of the inevitability of time, and the non-permanence of life itself.

In his observation of this ritual, Bakhtin looks back at European traditions since the Middle Ages, when different forms of festivals of fools were celebrated – including their subsequent modalities, in which the king could be replaced by a mock priest, bishop, or pope. Certainly, among the chief carnivalistic acts, Bakhtin notes the celebration of a form of parody particularly aimed at mocking sacred texts and rituals through debasing ridiculizations. These acts – which he identifies as “*parodia sacra*” or “*paschal laughter*” (*risus paschalis*) – provided a carnivalistic counterpart for many of the official religious celebrations, which include mock masses along with ass festivals, among its major manifestations.

Furthermore, as Tatiana Bubnova has argued in his revision of Bakhtin’s carnival, a further dimension is implied through these type of parodies. By constructing an inverted version of those Christian symbols and rites, carnival expressed its radical opposition to Christianity and its teleology based on an apocalyptic end of the passing of time, followed by the fear of Doomsday. Against this, carnival, with its eradication of fear and prohibitions, asserts its foundation on the time of folklore, where time brings about regeneration and life within the context of freedom and the overcoming of terror. In contrast with Christianity, which presents its central figure as an ever

⁵ All emphasis as in the original

serious and dogmatic god, carnival promotes laughter and rejoicing as quintessential principles of life. Furthermore, while Christianity and the Catholic religion condemn the actual, material reality of man by repressing the life of the body along with its most corporeal instincts, carnival liberates humanity from such an oppression, celebrating bodily excesses and desires (Bubnova, 2000: 138-45).

Through these features, the festivity became a blunt affirmation of the patent temporariness and relativity of any structure, power or hierarchy, and came to be governed by absolute foolery in a reign fated to constant change. Certainly, as Bakhtin has noted:

Crowning already contains the idea of immanent decrowning: it is ambivalent from the start. And he who is crowned is the antipode of a real king, a slave or a jester, this act, as it were, opens and sanctifies the inside-out world of carnival. In the ritual of crowning all aspects of the actual ceremony – the symbols of authority that are handed over to the newly crowned king and the clothing in which he is dressed – all become ambivalent and acquire a veneer of joyful relativity; they become almost stage props [...]; their symbolic meaning becomes two-leveled. From the very beginning, a decrowning glimmers through the crowning (1929: 124-5).

At the same time, this inverted act of crowning, in which the king is ripped off his regal vestments and deprived of his crown, ridiculed and beaten, becomes the most genuine celebration of the opposition to the “single-labeled, absolute, heavy, and monolithically serious” official power through the clear assertion of ambivalence and duality as ontological principles within carnival life. According to Bakhtin, all these meanings are conveyed through the element of laughter – actually, as Bakhtin acknowledges, the quintessence of a carnivalistic approach of the world. Indeed, while, for Bakhtin, the crowning/decrowning act represents a symbolical nucleus of the carnival machinery, it is under the principle of laughter that the whole system operates. In his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin signalled this centrality of laughter, retrieving its connection with the most ancient forms of ritual laughter. Hence, as he points out “(r)itual laughter was always directed toward something higher: the sun (the highest god), other gods, the highest earthly authority”.

As in its ritual origins, “carnivalistic life is likewise directed toward something higher” (1929: 126-7). In his *Rabelais*, Bakhtin emphasizes the power of carnival laughter to overview the world through the attainment of a new particular perspective that enables its participants to revise old beliefs and conceptions and debunk whatever may represent a source of oppression for the individual. Moreover, it is precisely through laughter that new meanings and truths that had until then remained hidden, are revealed:

La risa posee un profundo valor de concepción del mundo, es una de las formas fundamentales a través de las cuales se expresa el mundo, la historia y el hombre; es un punto de vista particular y universal sobre el mundo, que

percibe a éste en forma diferente, pero no menos importante (tal vez más) que el punto de vista serio: sólo la risa, en efecto, puede captar ciertos aspectos excepcionales del mundo (1965: 65).

At the same time as laughter bluntly opposes those structures of power through the annihilation and inversion of their symbols and instruments, laughter also represents the victory of the popular masses over the prohibitions and fear infused over them by the serious, central authorities. Laughter entails the triumph of man over fear and official seriousness:

En la cultura clásica, la *seriedad*⁶ es oficial y autoritaria, y se asocia a la violencia, a las prohibiciones y a las restricciones. *Esta seriedad infunde el miedo y la intimidación*, reinantes en la Edad Media. La risa, por el contrario, implica la superación del miedo. No impone ninguna prohibición. El lenguaje de la risa no es nunca empleado por la violencia ni la autoridad.

El hombre medieval percibía con agudeza la *victoria sobre el miedo* a través de la risa [...] Al vencer este temor, la risa aclaraba la conciencia del hombre y le revelaba un nuevo mundo (1965: 85-6).

In association with that new perspective, Bakhtin highlights the validation of foolery as the carnivalistic new angle from whence official life can be overlooked and transgressed. In this sense, foolery provides a form of truth which, beyond the monadism imposed by central authorities, dramatically overreaches established limitations by offering an entrance into a reality liberated from repressive judgements (1984: 235). As Bakhtin himself has expressed it:

La tontería es el reverso de la sabiduría, el reverso de la verdad. Es el reverso y lo bajo de la verdad oficial dominante; se manifiesta ante todo en una incomprensión de las leyes y convenciones del mundo oficial y en su inobservancia. *La tontería es la sabiduría licenciosa de la fiesta, liberada de todas las reglas y coacciones del mundo oficial y también de sus preocupaciones y de su seriedad* [...] [L]a tontería [es] considerada como una de las formas de la *verdad no oficial*, como un punto de vista particular sobre el mundo, libre de todos los intereses privados egoístas, de las reglas y juicios “de este mundo” (1965: 234-5).

The connection between foolery and the figure of the carnival king is patently revealing of this reverse side of official truth. Certainly, the mock monarch of the festivity is often identified as a real buffoon, who rather than honoured, is scorned, insulted, and beaten by his people. Moreover, as Bakhtin has noted, this episode constitutes a most authentic expression of ambivalence and ambiguity insofar as it entails the simultaneous presence of two carnival kings – the debunked, old monarch, whom Bakhtin describes as showing the clown's red face, representative of all that is removed and despised, and the young one, symbolical of renewal and the prospect of regeneration and change.

Volviendo al quisquilloso de la jeta roja, apaleado y satisfecho “como un rey o dos”, ¿no es este en el fondo un rey de carnaval? [...] mientras todos piensan

⁶ All emphasis as in the original

que el quisquilloso (el rey viejo) ha sido molido a palos, éste brinca vivito y coleando (rey nuevo) (ibid: 180).

Indeed, as Bakhtin insistently remarks, far from constituting exclusively an instrument of derision and ridiculization, carnival laughter entails deeper implications, insofar as it encapsulates the deep ambivalence that is inherent to carnival celebrations. Hence, while it evidently mocks and debases any form of superiority, it simultaneously buttresses regeneration, insofar as it contains both poles of crisis and change. Bakhtin explains this fact by reference to ancient ritual forms of laughter and their connection with reproduction and rebirth after death.

All forms of ritual laughter were linked with death and rebirth, with the reproductive act, with symbols of the reproductive force. Ritual laughter was a reaction to *crises*⁷ in the life of the sun [...], crises in the life of a deity, in the life of the world and of man [...] In it, ridicule was fused with rejoicing.

[...] Carnivalistic laughter likewise is directed toward something higher [...] Laughter embraces both poles of change, [...] with *crisis* itself. Combined in the act of carnival laughter are death and rebirth, negation (a smirk) and affirmation (rejoicing laughter) (1929: 127).

The process of regeneration effected by laughter is achieved by the negation of imposed patterns and restrictions, as well as by asserting the body's earthliness and corporeality. Accordingly, during carnival, a blunt opposition against classical conceptions of the higher stratum is accomplished through the enhancement and validation of its counterpart, the most patently material and low, purely representative of the earth as a powerfully regenerating force, as well as of the inexhaustible potential people.

Under the carnival perspective, as Bakhtin has signalled, this material and corporeal principle becomes the center of the new vision of the world (1984: 364). On the basis of these organizing parameters, Bakhtin observes the emergence of grotesque realism as a representational aesthetic axis of carnival. Indeed, within the pattern of the grotesque, the major constitutive principles of carnival are encapsulated. Hence, the grotesque body, with hyperbole, exaggeration, and excess as its defining features, becomes the most radical opposition against completion, definition, and closure as governing patterns. In this sense, whereas the classical conception of the body was linked to the idea of achievement and perfection, the grotesque body exhibits the purest essence of indefiniteness and incompleteness in its most exaggerated expression:

En la base de las imágenes grotescas encontramos una *concepción particular del todo corporal y de sus límites*⁸. Las fronteras entre el cuerpo y el mundo, y entre los diferentes cuerpos, están trazados de manera muy diferente a la de las imágenes clásicas y naturalistas (1984: 284).

⁷ Emphasis as in the original

⁸ All emphasis as in the original

Indeed, one of the major implications of the grotesque body rests in the assertion of its openness to the world and the future. Moreover, through this unfinished quality, in fact, the grotesque body aims to manifest its condition of permanent becoming, in stark opposition to the closure and completion status of the classical body. As Bakhtin points out:

(E)l cuerpo grotesco es un cuerpo en movimiento. No está nunca listo ni acabado: está siempre en estado de construcción, de creación y él mismo construye otro cuerpo; además, este cuerpo absorbe el mundo y es absorbido por éste (1965: 285).

Certainly, in contrast with the classical conception, the grotesque body broadly overflows any type of limitations, either on the single body itself or on its frontier with the rest of the world. Accordingly, while occasionally different parts of the body – particularly the human face – may turn out disproportionately large with respect to the rest, we may also find an assimilation of certain parts or elements from other animals or objects that marks the grotesque feature. Bearing this in mind, Bakhtin underlines the role of the presentation of protruding eyes or noses, along with hyperbolically gaping mouths, suggestive of an act of devouring.

Indeed, as Clarke and Holquist have pointed out, the notion of the grotesque body in Bakhtin “incorporates what [Bakhtin’s] primary values: incompleteness, becoming, ambiguity, indefinability, non-canonicalism [...]” (in Gardiner, 1992: 47). Consequently, the principle of duality applies as well to the grotesque body. Hence, whereas in the traditional laugh, the body is perfectly limited and defined within a single corporeal form, in which the operating force is exclusively monadic and one-sided, the grotesque body manifests an open multidimensionality. Hereby, the classical body – according to the canon that, inspired on the classical period emerges during the Renaissance – becomes reunited and combined in the unlimited, all-encompassing grotesque body:

El cuerpo del nuevo canon es *un solo cuerpo*⁹; no conserva ninguna traza de dualidad; él se basta a sí mismo [...]; todo lo que le ocurre no le concierne sino a él, cuerpo individual y cerrado. Por consiguiente, todos los acontecimientos que le afectan tienen un sentido único. La muerte no es nada más que la muerte, no coincide jamás con el nacimiento; la vejez está separada de la adolescencia [...] Todos los actos y acontecimientos no tienen sentido sino en el plano de la vida individual: están encerrados en los límites del nacimiento y la muerte individual del mismo cuerpo, que señalan el principio y el fin absolutos y no pueden nunca reunirse.

De un modo opuesto, la muerte en el cuerpo grotesco no pone fin a nada esencial, pues no concierne al cuerpo procreador, sino que al contrario, *lo renueva en las generaciones futuras*. Los acontecimientos que lo afectan se desarrollan siempre en los límites de los dos cuerpos, por así decir, en su punto de intersección: uno libera su muerte, otro su nacimiento, siendo todo

⁹ All emphasis as in the original

fundido (en el caso extremo) en una imagen bicorporal (1965: 289-90).

Whereas one of the targets against which the carnivalistic system of inversions and debasements amounts to monadism, as linked to the imposition of a one-sided, monolithic view of the world, another limitation to be overcome by the grotesque body is represented by the closed unitarism of the classical body. Accordingly, dismembered parts are frequently deployed in their blunt exhibition of a disjointed existence independently from the body. Hence, in opposition to the new canon, in which the dominating principle of individualization impedes any form of hyperbole or transgression of its perfectly finite boundaries, the grotesque body delights in the exhibition of its unlimited possibilities by offering the free unboundedness of its parts.

[...] [L]a hiperbolización está totalmente excluida del nuevo canon, la imagen del cuerpo individual le quita toda posibilidad [...]. Es ciertamente imposible separar ciertos órganos del todo corporal o considerar una vida autónoma para ellos.

La obra de Rabelais representa el coronamiento de la concepción grotesca del cuerpo que le legaron la cultura cómica popular, el realismo grotesco y el lenguaje familiar [...] (E)l libro entero está atravesado por el poderoso oleaje del elemento grotesco: cuerpos despedazados, órganos separados del cuerpo [...], etc (1965: 290).

In any case, the presentation of the grotesque body constitutes the affirmation of the inexhaustible and everchanging body of the people. In this sense, this body becomes a testimony of the raise of a popular consciousness of unity and the necessity for cohesion against the oppressive centrality of official powers. Hence, for Bakhtin, at the core of the carnival sense of the world there lies the notion of communal identity and the collective body of the people as an essential means towards regeneration. Additionally, it is precisely through the unlimited potential for transformation and renewal of the grotesque body, constantly undergoing a process of becoming, that renovation and immortality are enabled.

No es solamente el cuerpo biológico el que se repite en las nuevas generaciones, sino el *cuerpo histórico y progresivo de la humanidad*¹⁰, que constituye el centro de este sistema.

[...] [A] partir de la concepción grotesca del cuerpo, nació y fue tomando forma un sentimiento histórico nuevo, concreto y realista, que no es en modo alguno la idea abstracta de los tiempos futuros, sino la sensación viva que tiene cada ser humano de formar parte del pueblo inmortal [...] (1965: 331).

This is so insofar as a particular type of crowd takes place in the carnival square, whereby a dissolution of the individual as such occurs in favour of the formation of a collective fusionated whole, endowed with its own consciousness. Yet, rather than constituting an individual form of awareness, this consciousness belongs, in fact, to the community as a cohesioned crowd – or, as

¹⁰ All emphasis as in the original

Bakhtin calls it, as a popular whole.

La muchedumbre en regocijo que llena la plaza pública no es una muchedumbre ordinaria. Es un *todo popular*, organizado a su manera, a la manera popular, fuera y frente a todas las formas existentes de estructura coercitiva social, económica y política, en cierta medida abolida por la duración de la fiesta.

Esta organización es, ante todo, profundamente concreta y sensible. Hasta el apretujamiento, el *contacto físico de los cuerpos*, está dotado de cierto sentido. El individuo se siente parte indisoluble de la colectividad, miembro del gran cuerpo popular. En este Todo, el cuerpo individual cesa, hasta cierto punto, de ser él mismo: se puede, por así decirlo, *cambiar mutuamente de cuerpo, renovarse* (por medio de los disfraces y máscaras). Al mismo tiempo, *el pueblo experimenta su unidad y su comunidad concretas, sensibles, materiales y corporales*[...].

Sobre la plaza pública del carnaval, el cuerpo del pueblo siente, antes que nada, su *unidad en el tiempo*, su *duración ininterrumpida dentro de éste*, su *inmortalidad histórica relativa*. Por consiguiente, lo que siente el pueblo no es la imagen estática de su unidad [...], *sino la unidad y la continuidad de su devenir y su crecimiento*.

[...] *Con todas estas imágenes, escenas, obscenidades e imprecaciones afirmativas, el carnaval representa el drama de la inmortalidad e indestructibilidad del pueblo*. En este universo, la sensación de la inmortalidad del pueblo se asocia a la de *relatividad del poder existente y de la verdad dominante*¹¹ (1965: 229-230).

Nevertheless, even more important than the description of carnival festivities in Bakhtin's discussion is the special process whereby the core of carnival imagery, along with the connotational substratum this entails, is transferred onto the literary ground. Probably, one of the most immediate vehicles for the transmission of these meanings was provided by the particular carnival speech that is developed in the public square. Hence, while "an enormous fund of unrestrained carnivalistic gesticulations", encompassing the system of symbols typical of a language of "abuse and ridicule", permeated the everyday speech of European peoples since the Middle Ages, literature also underwent the invasion of this particular system. Consequently, as well as the more obvious penetration of the linguistic forms of carnival, a special language – beyond verbal constraints – was similarly introduced into literary works, where a profound transformation of high genres was accomplished. It was during the Renaissance – the time when the most patent carnivalesque works, such as Cervantes' *Don Quixote* or Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* were published – that the core process of carnivalization of literature took place. As Bakhtin has noted it:

There occurred a deep and almost total carnivalization of all artistic literature. The carnival sense of the world, with its categories, its carnival laughter, its symbol-system of carnival acts of crowning/decrowning, of shifts and disguises, carnival ambivalence and all the overtones of the unrestrained

¹¹ All emphasis as in the original

carnival world – familiar, cynically frank, eccentric, eulogistic-abusive and so on – penetrated deeply into almost all genres of artistic literature. On the basis of this carnival sense of the world, the complex forms of the Renaissance worldview, there came into being. Even antiquity, as assimilated by the humanists of the epoch, was to a certain extent refracted through the prism of the carnival sense of the world (1929: 130).

Accordingly, new genre structures and plot organizations emerge as this carnivalization occurs. One of the most evident incorporations – it has already been foretold – amounted to the pattern of the dual act of crowning/decrowning of the carnival king, whereby many of its associated rituals rapidly pervaded literary creations. Narrative works especially from the Renaissance onwards, as well as poetic compositions and dramas, became imbued with carnivalistic broodless acts of implicit violence, along with shiftings of clothing or positions in life, the presence of licensed fools, or different accounts of utopian abundance.

Likewise, also connected with these carnivalesque rituals was the introduction of *mésalliances* or “decrowning doubles”. Closely dovetailed with the carnivalistic element of parody, these doubles – either characters or structural counterparts, as in the case of satyr drama – aimed to emphasize the laughing aspect of their serious official referent, thus composing “an entire system of crooked mirrors, elongating, diminishing, distorting in various directions and to various degrees” (1929: 127). At the level of the actants, these paroding doubles, which in principle may seem to be merely conceived as anti-heroical versions of the protagonist himself, fulfil a more complex function. As Bakhtin points out, these characters provide the site for the death and renewal of the hero to be accomplished, thus completing the carnivalistic cycle. In Bakhtin’s words, “(i)n each of them (that is, in each of the doubles) the hero dies (that is, is negated) in order to be renewed (that is, in order to be purified and to rise above himself)” (1929: 128).

Nonetheless, while the Renaissance represented the summit for the carnivalization of literature, from the seventeenth century onwards this process began to decline with the decadence of communal performance, which was sharply reduced in public life. The “*festive court masquerade*¹² culture” – as Bakhtin terms it – that had been gradually developed throughout the Renaissance contributed to the expansion of a series of carnivalistic forms and symbols, later evolved into a broader line of festivities and entertainments no longer restricted, which Bakhtin called “the *masquerade line* of development”. Even though this lacked a considerable bulk of its original folk traditions, it still “preserved in itself a bit of the license and some faint reflections.”

Hence, while many carnival forms lost their folk base and became absorbed by the masquerade line, some other ancient traditions were preserved and have endured until the present

¹² All emphasis as in the original

day – renew themselves. Among these, Bakhtin mentions the case of certain forms of “*farcical* comic antics of the public square,” as well as some modern theatrical performances, or the circus, where the survival of the red-faced clown as a licensed fool – as was anticipated – along with many of the acts of modern spectacles, clearly sink their roots in carnivalistic rituals.

It is precisely in the light of this decline of popular forms of carnival in favour of a smoothed, less aggressive chamber version – formerly addressed to the court – that the carnivalization of literature from the seventeenth century onwards is to be understood. Accordingly, while a decline and reduction of carnivalistic forms applies to culture in its broader sense, a similar evolution is noticeable in literature, where laughter becomes likewise diminished. Hence, in the Renaissance, still “certain ‘gradations’ of volume do [...] exist” – whereby different intensities of sound condition, for instance, an important distinction between Rabelais – the representative of the loudest form of laughter – from Cervantes, who applies a reduction, by comparison with the French author. Nevertheless, it is in the carnivalized literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that a considerable muffling down of laughter is effected. Even though still audible, laughter is reduced to lower levels, such as humor, ambivalence, or irony, whereby it retains its carnivalistic overtones. For Bakhtin, hence, this concept of reduced laughter is central to the transference of carnival into literature works. As he explains it:

When the images of carnival and carnivalistic laughter are transposed into literature, they are transformed to a greater or lesser degree in keeping with specific artistic and literature tasks. But regardless of the degree or nature of the transformation, ambivalence, and laughter remain in the carnivalized images. Under certain conditions and in certain genres, however, laughter can be reduced. It continues to determine the structure of the image, but it itself is muffled down to the minimum: we see, as it were, the track left by laughter in the structure of represented reality, but the laughter itself we do not hear (1929: 164).

Paradoxically, although Bakhtin did not deal with twentieth-century authors in his works on literary criticism – with the only exception of Thomas Mann – his theories have been considered as an authentic exposition of a theory of Modernism. In this sense, as Linda Hutcheon has observed, it is “not [...] his particular insight into a particular author’s work. Instead it is the general suggestiveness and even the incompleteness of Bakhtin’s theories that have attracted critical attention” on the grounds of their degree of connection with Modernist poetics (1983: 83). In this regard, it is necessary to precise that Bakhtin does not explicitly offer a theory of Modernism as such. Nevertheless, as Wlad Godzich remarks, he does offer “a theory of modernity” in which a rethinking of “the place and function of alterity” becomes central (1991: 5-6).

Bakhtin vindicated dialogism and polyphony in literature as the recognition of a multiplicity

of narrative voices and focalizing perspectives, against the hegemony of monologism and restricting authorities. By so doing, he proclaimed the advent of a literary poetics much more in tune with Modernist aspirations than did the enclosing unitarism of social realism. Moreover, through his postulates, the Russian critic provided Modernist authors with the tools for the development of literary creations capable of reflecting the dynamic fluidity of life, as intrinsically opposed to any form of absolute categorization or attempts for boundarism. Dovetailed with this purpose of eradicating centralization and monadism as operating values in literary practice, Bakhtin strived for the debunking of a poetic language, estranged from natural everyday language. It is precisely in the light of these concerns that the critic envisioned the novel as the genre that most fittingly adequates his finality. Certainly, as Stacy Burton argues, “Bakhtin celebrates narrative [...] because – and to the degree that – it is prosaic rather than poetic: characters acting in a world of conflicting voices represent the complex discursive situation of human beings” (1988: 510).

In tune with this view, even though Bakhtin admits the survival of carnivalistic forms through different literary manifestations, it is particularly the novel the genre through which the most effective subversive pole of carnival is filtered. Gardiner also observes how, on its entry into the novelistic, these carnivalistic forms become “syncretically fused with elements of ‘high’ or literature culture before [these] could operate as a socially or culturally efficacious force to promote the ideal of dialogism”.

In this sense, deepening in his analysis of this particular process of the carnivalization of the novel, Gardiner concludes on a series of features whereby the novel turns out, for Bakhtin, the fundamental vehicle for the transposition of the carnivalesque into literary forms. Hence, first of all, it favours an unfinished, “‘active understanding’ of the text” – as Gardiner puts it – in the most purely Ruskinian sense of promoting an agential role on the part of the reader, at the same time as the dividing borderline between author and reader becomes blurred. This is so inasmuch as the novel “deconstructs the authorial pretence to omniscience by making this author an equal (and not a privileged) participant in dialogue”.

Secondly, the novel provides the most fertile ground for the flourishing of Bakhtin’s polyphony and dialogism, insofar as “(i)t juxtaposes different historically-significant sociolects”, which contributes to awakening our awareness of “the plethora of social languages and ideological point of view that surround us”. Hereby, this incorporation of a multiplicity of points of view into the structural logic of reality results in a challenge to the legitimacy of unitarism as a representational principle, at the same time as in a relativization of the claims to absolute truth.

Thirdly, at the level of the narrative, the novel incorporates humour, irony, and parody into

the text, thus eliminating monadism and dogmatic seriousness. Associated with this decentralization of what Bakhtin considered as the one-sided pathos of official life (1929: 132), the novel allows for the rupture of the absolute distance of traditional epic time. This genre insists upon that challenge to conventional forms from received tradition by means of its resort to a frank and more familiar contact with the world. Thus, once this form of familiarness becomes effective, the novel can more accurately reflect the true, multiple fluidity of existence. This occurs insofar as that newly inaugurated closeness in the novelistic forms enables characters to be tested as ideologues within the context of a fictionalized social situation, whereby a more accurately *real* approach to the actual side of existence can be provided – which Gardiner labels as a Habermasian “ideal speech situation” (1992: 175).

Moreover, in its refusal to submit itself to the hegemony of an epic-imbued literary past, the novel chimes in more intensely with the utopian overtone of carnival politics. At the same time, at the level of its problematics, it is also folk culture – the generating source of carnival – that constitutes the ultimate center from whence the novel is supplied. In this sense, Bakhtin envisions the novelistic form as intrinsically more apt than any other genre for accomplishing self-parodization, inasmuch as its evolution entails the free incorporation of and play with, not only its own formal elements, but even those belonging to other genres, less susceptible of dialogization.

In conclusion, the carnival sense had provided throughout its historical evolution a prosperous source whereby to accomplish the debunkment of the oppressiveness and restriction of dogmatism and old traditions. This had been possible through a system of inversions and desacralizations as simultaneously operating principles, as well as necessary pre-conditions for the incoming of renewal. Once the most openly carnivalesque forms of celebration begin to fade in favour of refinement and the retrieval of classical orderliness, the essence of carnival commenced its survival through literature and the arts, where a similar pattern of downturnings, ambivalence, and rupture with the official pervaded its different manifestations. Within the literary, as Bakhtin points out, it was the novel, on the grounds of its more democratical organization and possibility of dialogical arrangement, that has more accurately attested for the permanence of carnival to our days.

2.1. The Grotesque.

2.1.1. The Grotesque. Terminological Implications and Historical Evolution.

2.1.2. The Victorians and the Idea of the Grotesque.

2.1.3. The Notion of the Grotesque for John Ruskin.

2.1.4. The Modern Grotesque.

2.1.1. The Grotesque. Terminological Implications and Historical Evolution.

Like the implicit process status that is entailed by the very notion of the grotesque, a developing nature lies at the essence of the term, which accounts for the necessity of looking back to the earlier origins of this concept in order to provide a definition as accurate as possible of the grotesque. Accordingly, a brief history of the term, as well as of its accumulated meanings, will follow.

The etymological origin of the word sinks its roots in the Italian language, which witnesses the birth of the adjective “grottesco/a” as derived from the noun “grotta” (“cave”). The new term, coined during the Renaissance period, was aimed at designating a certain ornamental style which came to light during late fifteenth century excavations. Hence, “grotesque” was first applied to describe the frescoes decorating Nero’s Domus Aurea, discovered as a result of the archaeological findings around 1480, which revealed the ruins of a construction that struck both artists and scholars due to its enigmatic structure in the form of a labyrinth of passageways, rooms, supporting pillars, in the midst of an amalgamated composite of elements and fragments resisting any attempt for comprehension. The intricate and sumptuous structure of the villa – which the emperor had designed as a tangible testimony of his self-assumed divine status – multiplied its confusion after the great fire in 104 AD, which reduced it to a muddle of irresolvable complexity.

While the disinterment of this puzzled structure caused a considerable impact on scholars, particular interest was raised by its fresco paintings. Indeed, created by Fabullus, one of the few known Roman artists, these works represent the earliest example of grotesque art, insofar as it attests for a style which, springing in Rome around 100 BC, consisted of “graceful fantasies, symmetrical anatomical impossibilities, small beasts, human heads, and delicate, indeterminate vegetables, all presented as ornament with a fainty mythological character imparted by representations of fauns, nymphs, satyrs, and centaurs” (Harpham, 1982: 26).

Nevertheless, attractive as it turned out for Renaissance artists – one of whose major exponents, Raphael, even copied the style for the decor of the Loggias palace – the excesses of this primitive form of grotesque had not passed uncondemned by medieval censors. They envisioned these ornamental excesses and distortions as potential dangers threatening to collapse not only reason, but even the core of religious faith, by provoking an insidious wandering of the soul on being caught by the “sins of the eye” (ibid: 35, n. 42). Yet, concomitantly with official disapproval, these “grottesches” underwent a huge expansion, largely due to the rise of printing and engraving. Henceforth, since the late fifteenth century, books of ornamental prints were produced and

distributed throughout Europe, thus advertising and popularizing a new style for which an entire vocabulary of grotesque ornamentation was provided.

Very different connotations, though, were associated with gargoyles. Hence, if the interest in these grotesque sculptures – a monstrous hybrid between an eagle and a lion counted on the conformity of political-religious authorities, it was in fact on the grounds that they satisfied the superstitious belief in their power to frighten demons, thereby preventing them from entering churches and cathedrals. Nevertheless, at the same time, at a popular level the further connotations of gargoyles did not go unnoticed for the popular masses, and in particular, for medieval artists, whose monstrous creatures equaled in size and position the sculptures of saints on religious façades. As Harpham has noted, “(t)he doubleness of the gargoyles puts us in mind of the doubleness of the cathedral, which although it honours God, was built by mortals” (ibid: 37).

Excavating into the origins of the particular design of grotesque forms, Harpham alludes to the special symbolical system of representation that emerges within mythologically-based civilizations. These were largely concerned with processes such as the metamorphic transformations of their deities, or the celebration of ritual sacrifices of communal expiatory victims. Indeed, perpetual metamorphoses and transitional states are at the centre of mythopoetic thought, which Lévy-Strauss considered as operating under the principle of a cosmic continuum. Hereby, all realms of being, either visible or invisible, past or present, are mutually interdependent and continuous with each other (1966: 5). Accordingly, as Harpham has noted, “(t)he distinctive elements of *grotesche*¹³, then, [...] seem to have originated in primitive or mythological cultures that had no concept of meaningless design [...], its antecedents were pure magic” (1982: 50). Insofar as “grotesche” is a synonym of formlessness and becoming, its condition has been interpreted, in a broader sense, as contiguous to a state of pre-formation. Accordingly, Julia Kristeva has connected this status with the semiotic phase of language, previous to the symbolic stage, on the grounds that the former entails the non-finished, transitional condition inherent to the conception of the grotesque. Furthermore, on establishing such a correspondence, Kristeva also attributes such a semiotic phase of language – or ur-language – to the pre-Oedipal condition of the child, when, before its state as a perfectly defined unitary being, it remains in the formational, unaccomplished process of her dyadic identity with the mother. Similarly, other authors, including Mercia Eliade or Sigmund Freud, have located in the unconscious state of early childhood the site for the mental recreation of a separate world or alternative reality, mainly consisting of material retrieved from the unconscious lobe of the human brain. This observation, in fact, situates the imaginary world of the child as a source for the production of grotesque compositions – an example of which, as Harpham

¹³ All emphasis as in the original

points out – is significantly represented by Lewis Carroll’s fantasy world (1982: 68).

If Ruskin’s postulates in two of his landmark works on art aesthetics, *Stones of Venice* and *Modern Painters*, had represented the most serious attempt in the nineteenth century towards a problematization of the grotesque, in the twentieth century, apart from different seminal studies on the issue, two highly influential works establish the bases for the interpretation of the grotesque throughout literary history, as well as for the understanding of its contemporary significance. Hence, among the former group, Harpham’s work *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* constitutes a diachronic exploration of both the denotational and the connotational meanings acquired by the notion of the grotesque in its historical evolution. In his volume, Harpham devotes as well some chapters to demonstrate, by means of the analysis of different literary works, including Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* or Poe’s *The Masque of the Red Death*, the extent of the penetration of the grotesque in fiction from the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, the major exponents of this purpose towards conceptualization, reference works *par excellence* for any analysis of the grotesque either in literature or in art, were produced by Mikhail Bakhtin and Wolfgang Kayser. The former, whose liminal description of the grotesque, in connection with the carnivalesque in Dostoevsky’s work, marked indeed a turning point in literary interpretation through his problematization of the notion of the “carnivalization of literature”. As we have seen in the first section of this chapter, through a return to folk traditions, frequently of a ritual-mythological origin, Bakhtin explains the presence of certain anarchic patterns and popular imprints that conform the stylistic structure and narratological arrangements in numerous literary works. Furthermore, as a result of his observation of the decline in these folk traditions from the seventeenth century onward, concurrently with a decrease of their literary presence, Bakhtin conceptualizes his idea of “reduced laughter” – which complements his theory of the carnivalization – whereby fictional works after the Renaissance can be interpreted through the optics of carnivalistic patterns, yet considering the diminishing effect provoked by the new socio-political circumstances.

Within this frame, which Bakhtin would expand in 1965 with the publication of his *Rabelais*, the grotesque becomes a vehicle for the expression of subversive meanings at a twofold level. Hence, while at the level of representation, grotesque aesthetics debunks any conventional, monolithically-oriented view of the world by rejoicing in the exhibition of a multiple-sided reality, where opposite ontological poles become inclusive rather than exclusive, its achievements reach, in fact, much further. Thus, the grotesque for Bakhtin entails as well a conceptual dimension, insofar as its transgressing patterns of representation follow a teleological purpose of promoting a

regeneration of the system of beliefs and, in general terms, of the entire surrounding structures. At the same time, the potential of the human being and of the popular masses is vindicated through this renewalist attempt. Accordingly, the grotesque represents, for Bakhtin, not only the determined expression of people's victory over the terror and repression instored upon them by tyrannical authorities, but also the most palpable testimony of the possibility of renewal and transformation:

[...] (A) partir de la concepción grotesca del cuerpo, nació y fue tomando forma un sentimiento histórico nuevo, concreto y realista, que no es en modo alguno la idea abstracta de los tiempos futuros, sino la sensación viva que tiene cada ser humano de formar parte del pueblo inmortal, creador de la historia (1965: 331).

The other bedrock in the problematization of the grotesque is represented by the publication in 1957 of Wolfgang Kayser's *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*. Chronologically located in between Bakhtin's works, the exploration of the grotesque carried out by Kayser constitutes as well a comprehensive outline of the origins and evolution of the grotesque mode in literature and art, as well as of its expansion over Europe. While triumphant overtone defines, in broad terms, Bakhtin's grotesque, Kayser prioritizes the element of fearfulness in his description of the grotesque paradigm. For this, Kayser aids his argument through Benvenuto Cellini's desire for replacing the term "grotesque" with "monstrosity," insofar as Cellini "considered this trait as the dominant one" (Kayser, 1981: 182). The German scholar underlines any aspects of animalization and hybridity in grotesque forms on the grounds that, ultimately, their terribleness becomes enhanced inasmuch as they have a correspondence in the natural world. In the context of the technological revolution of the twentieth century, Kayser also draws attention upon dehumanization as a new additional dimension in the modern grotesque – an aspect further developed by later treatises, particularly McElroy's study, as will be discussed.

Throughout his outline of grotesque art and literature, Kayser concludes its concern with the presentation of an estranged world, including the fantasy and defamiliarization involved by the fairy tale. In this sense, a fundamental specification is introduced into the grotesque theory which, as attested by McElroy some decades later, would entail a considerable repercussion in modern grotesque fiction. While Kayser envisions deformity as an essential component in the grotesque, it is precisely the author of that creation that enables such an interpretation:

The grotesque is the estranged world [...] Yet its world is not estranged, that is to say, the elements in it which are familiar and natural to us do not suddenly turn out to be strange and ominous. It is our world which has to be transformed [...] In literature the grotesque appears in a scene or an animated tableau. Its representations in the plastic arts, too, do not refer to a state of repose but to an action, a "pregnant moment" (Ensor), or at least [...] a situation that is filled with ominous tension (1981: 184).

A radical difference in this respect, as has been anticipated, separates Kayser's notion of the grotesque from the Bakhtinian concept. Hence, while the author must create a context such that grotesque meanings may be elicited, the situation of the human being within this world does not result from a victorious affirmation of life through the escape from the terribleness of the external world, as in Bakhtin's carnivalistic universe. On the contrary, in Kayser's grotesque setting, the individual becomes immersed precisely within the most fearful and terrifying side of life due to their own inability to orientate themselves. In fact, Kayser's interpretation is not imbued with a moralistic load. Accordingly, in tune with the estrangement characterizing the inherent absurdity governing it as "endanger[ing] the principles of the moral order of the world."

However, little concession does Kayser allow for the element of laughter, so central in Bakhtin's scheme. In his taxonomy of the grotesque with its oneiric worlds and the radically "satiric" grotesque with its play of masks (1981: 186), Kayser specifically associates this laughter with the latter. Nevertheless, rather than the expression of triumph over fear – as Bakhtin had manifested – Kayser's laughter becomes the very expression of terror, ultimately acquiring a satanic tincture: "Laughter originates on the comic and caricatural fringe of the grotesque. Filled with bitterness, it takes on characteristics of the mocking, cynical, and ultimately satanic laughter while turning into the grotesque" (1981: 187).

Kayser defines the grotesque as "a play with the absurd" (1981: 187), within this notion of the evil agency of demonic powers entailed by the very concept of the grotesque. Nevertheless, a glimmer of hope is still perceived through Kayser's teleological apprehension of this art as "effect[ing] a secret liberation," even "(i)n spite of all the helplessness and horror inspired by the dark forces". Hence, even when considering the grotesque as presided over by the demonic forces lurking behind men within this world, to a certain extent, Kayser implies that the satanization entailed by his vision of the grotesque retains, in fact, a purpose of exorcization of those "demonic aspects of the world," which in the former's attempt for invoking and subdue these forces.

As it pertains to its extended presence throughout history, numerous strains have characterized the evolution of the concept of the grotesque. Hence, while first conceived to describe the intricate, unfamiliar design of Nero's palace on their disinterment in the fifteenth century, the term has accumulated a series of both denotational and connotational meanings according to the varying diachronical circumstances. Frequently condemned by the voices of authority, who associated it with the pervasiveness of sensorial pleasures, particularly in its most ornamental version, the grotesque soon became indelibly marked by classical canons as symptomatic of the savage barbarism of the popular masses, for whom it contrarily turned out as the most sincere

vehicle for the expression of collective fearlessness and triumph over dogmatic repression. Defying classical patterns advocating for the determinate rejection of grotesque aesthetics, Ruskin enhances its liberating effect from dictatorial structures entailed by the creations of medieval artists. Simultaneously, his work also establishes the basis for twentieth-century problematizations on the issue, insofar as Ruskin rescues from the entangled theory of the grotesque two of the chief principles defining its aesthetics. Indeed, prioritizing either the ludicrous or the fearful aspects, twentieth-century attempts for establishing a notional schematization of the grotesque have centred around the interrelation of these two elements as essential components within the grotesque paradigm – as it is demonstrated by the studies of W. Kayser or M. Bakhtin. Particular attention requires the treatment of the grotesque among the Victorians, whose dogmatic observation of moral order and classical canons of beauty and cleanliness decisively conditioned the apprehension of an aesthetic paradigm which threatened to violate Victorian purity.

2.1.2. The Victorians and the Idea of the Grotesque

As it is known, the Victorian period was indissolubly linked to ideas of cleanliness, order, and in sum, any principle leading to the maintenance of a strict division of existence into neatly recognizable categories. Bearing this in mind, a discussion about not only the resort, but indeed the fascination, that Victorians felt towards the grotesque may seem, at least, contradictory with the dominating ideas of the period. Neither is it completely true that the presence of the grotesque during this period was exclusively aimed at embodying a radical counterpart of Victorian principles, as a form of reuniting into a single scapegoatal body all the evils which constituted the main target of Victorian fears. Hence, while this is essentially the purpose that impelled the appearance of the grotesque in numerous artistic manifestations of the period, it is also during these decades that Ruskin – whose theories will be alluded to throughout this work – wrote his *Stones of Venice*, acknowledging the existence of a “noble” form of grotesque by virtue of its function as the vehicle for the release and realization of the artist’s freedom of creation and thought.

In general terms, for Victorian minds, profoundly concerned with the self-imposed necessity of earnestness and clear-cut definitions, the grotesque constituted an appropriate category to represent the unacceptable condition of fragmentation and collapse in which their social and cultural panorama was submerged with the advent of modernity. In this sense, the series of transformations and reversals provoked by industrialization as a force impelling a new dynamics of socio-political life, found their most accurate expression through the inherently destabilizing and contradictory nature of grotesque aesthetics. Certainly, Victorian grotesque became thus a reliable metaphor for the “perversity” that the mechanization along with the sudden upheaval of the metropolis entailed, as forces effecting the destabilization of the apparently unitary integration and perfect balance of the social panorama.

Indeed, the use of the grotesque as a symptom of instability and social chaos during the Victorian period will be frequently linked to the city, viewed by many authors as the site where modern vice and corruption germ and develop. It was through authors such as Doyle, whose stories were first published in the widely spread *Strand* magazine, that these ideas reached considerable popularity. In particular, through his famous Sherlock Holmes, Doyle voiced the period’s conviction that “the grotesque often deepens into the criminal” (1917: 1-2). In tune with this view, modern science entailed as well a powerful threat against the orderly surface of Victorian institutions. Within this perspective, the emergence of the grotesque during the earlier decades of the nineteenth century came to confirm the necessity for sanctifying Victorian authority and ideal orderliness and legitimacy against the gross physicality implanted by new natural sciences. Indeed,

the growing interest in natural history to which Gibbon, among others, had considerably contributed, was beginning to introduce abnormal growths and structures, such as fossils, as commonly accepted facts of everyday existence. Particular controversy originated as a result of Darwin's Evolutionist theories, whereby scientific knowledge became populated by a whole crowd of aberrant bodily configurations and unexpected transformations, which Victorian minds soon perceived as the grossest forms of profanation against the sacred logics of natural classification and codification.

If, since the Middle Ages, grotesque forms had been dismissed by the higher layers of socio-political life, insofar as the formers were associated with barbarism and the popular masses, a similar attitude was found in the nineteenth century. Authors such as Arnold, Lewes, or Bagehot contributed to an equation of the grotesque as a sign of the ruination of authentic culture by a sentimental, democratic popular realism. Underneath this rejection these authors assumed that these 'savage' masses, lacking the capacity to make proper judgements, were obliged to resort to a fantastic, delusional art – the diseased product of their feeble, hallucinatory minds.

For these critics, as for many other intellectuals of the period, the attraction to deformity and grossness involved by the resort to grotesque aesthetics represented a latent danger against art and life themselves, as the impossibility of contorted forms and aberrant misconceptions were in fact a way of suppressing the natural development of reality. Accordingly, while the illogical delight of the authors of the grotesque in deformity had become radically unacceptable for Victorian critics, even more intolerable was the fact that, for the latter, the grotesque was not exclusively a deformed, but also a deforming aesthetic category, insofar as this crooked misrepresentation of reality was presented as the verisimilar rendering of truth. This was precisely the highest potential danger that Lewes had found in grotesque narrative, whose disfiguring mixture of fantasy and reality entangles the reader within the perverted optics of a narration which, according to Lewes, amounted to the clearest manifestation of "animal intelligence" (1872: 148).

In fact, as it has been suggested, Victorian intellectuals came to identify this distorting style with the diseased middle class, which they envisioned as similarly half-formed and aberrant. Considering the truncated end – as these thinkers perceived it – of the middle class's expectations to become comparable to the upper classes, those strata embodied the unfinished grossness of the grotesque on the grounds of their surrendering of culture for entertainment, their sensational and sentimentalized measure for aesthetics and artistic taste. In sum, middle classes, like the grotesque, stood for the contemporary realization of the undesirable fusion of things that should remain separate. As Bagehot claimed, it is "singularly characteristic of this age that the poems which rise to

the surface should be examples of ornate art and grotesque art, not of pure art. We live in the realm of the half-educated” (1974: 79).

It is precisely this intolerable mingling that attests for the deforming nature of the grotesque, whereby the absence of logic that accompanies art within grotesque parameters actually weakens the possibility of engendering authentic forms of knowledge and truth. Indeed, for Victorian mentalities, this aesthetic conception had a correlative in the social background. Frequently, these intellectuals viewed the grotesque as allegorical of the cultural, ethical and political failure which had derived in the mass-produced and mass-oriented literature and art. In any case, the truth is that the grotesque's association with a satirizing purpose for mockery and ridicule remained in the minds of many Victorian critics and intellectuals. Indeed, the publication of Thomas Wright's *A History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art* in 1865 contributed to expand a sense of the grotesque as synonymous of caricature and of what Wright understood as the “manifestation of the human instinct for mirth and satire” ([Trodd, Barlow et al.] 1981: 7).

Certainly, the emergence of new developments or ideas that might represent a danger of erosion for the assumedly solid edifice of Victorian values, as well as for the upper-class status, was frequently condemned to the derisive optics of grotesque patterns – in fact, a destiny to which Darwin's “morally” defiant theories were doomed. Hence, as G. Beer has pointed out, the “ludicrous” idea that one animal might turn into another led Darwin's critics to satirize passages on the basis of the grotesqueness of these evolutive metamorphoses entailed within the rigidly structured epistemological system of contemporary minds (Beer, 1983: 105). At the same time, his accounts of the descent of man entailed to Victorian eyes an aberrant distortion of the orderly Western ideal of beauty.

Nevertheless, while this resort to grotesque modes was viewed as symptomatic of the morbid, uncanny nature of the middle classes, fevering with the anxiety of social ascent, on a closer gaze, it was not so much feebleness of mind as the desire for articulating an entire language of subversion and unacknowledged vitality that underlied the work of authors such as Dickens. Through his grotesques, Dickens championed the demolition of the decayed structures of Victorian society by exposing the blunt grossness of the characters and institutions on which it rested, at the same time as he gave voice to the dignity and frankness of the working class. As Ruskin himself pointed out, Dickens inaugurated a new means of envisioning the working man. Thus, in his *Stones of Venice*, Ruskin emphasizes the crucial shift in literature prompted by a “group of authors, headed by Charles Dickens”:

The classical and Renaissance manufactures of modern times having silenced

the independent language of the operative, his humour and satire pass away in the word-wit which has of late become the special study of the group of authors, headed by Charles Dickens; all this power was formerly thrown into noble art, and became permanently expressed in the sculptures of the cathedral (*Works XI*: 173, n. 6).

Hence, at the same time as upper-class intellectuals diagnosed a psychic condition for the working classes, who expressed their irrational savagery through intolerable deformities and mutilations, grotesque narratives brought to surface the crippledness and aberrant nature of these judges, as well as of the system they represented. Thereby, even though heralded by the subversive voice of authors like Dickens, it will not be until the advent of modernity and the profound challenge to old traditions it entailed, that a new, more favourable destiny may await the grotesque.

2.1.3. The Notion of the Grotesque for John Ruskin

As early as 1853, the publication of John Ruskin's monumental work *The Stones of Venice* already represented a groundbreaking attempt to compile an extensive history of nonclassical art. In particular, it was his recognition that interpreting the artisan tradition of medieval imagery required parameters radically different from those conventionally constructed for the fine arts. Hereby, as F. Connelly has argued, "in constructing an alternate theoretical framework for the interpretation of these artisan traditions, Ruskin gives a central role to the grotesque knowing full well that it runs counter to the values and hierarchies established for the fine arts". Indeed, like the Gothic art Ruskin analyses in *The Stones of Venice*, the grotesque entailed, from the Enlightenment onward, the connotational mark of primitiveness and barbarism, particularly in the context – by the mid-nineteenth century – of an absolute hegemony of Neoclassical principles as the anathema of a pure style, defintory of the acceptably tolerable aesthetic order.

Nevertheless, the project underlying the publication of *The Stones of Venice* was much more complex. Indeed, inasmuch as he deals with Gothic style, his work was not exclusively aimed at reviving the aesthetic principles of Gothic. In fact, in tune with his analysis of the grotesque as a fundamental paradigm within Gothic architecture, Ruskin strived for enhancing the virtues of a conventionally regarded as primitive society, in which individual workers could express themselves and produce genuine works of art which would allow them to rejoice in the authenticity of their labour. In this sense, through *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin sharply criticized the limitations and hidden corruption of a society whose power was limited to the manneristic and rule-bounded reproduction of reality.

Against this uncreative and repressive form of artistic production, Ruskin found in the grotesque sculptures of Gothic artists a fruitful source for the release and free flow of artistic expression. Accordingly, in his chapter "*The Nature of Gothic*", Ruskin observed – as Connelly has noted – that "the ornamentation of medieval art, especially its use of the grotesque, had been misconstrued and its centrality to the structure and meaning obscured by a classical-imbued Western fine arts tradition" (2003: 158). Nevertheless, in his apprehension of the grotesque, Ruskin established a taxonomy, whereby two types of grotesque were to be distinguished on the grounds of significant difference between them.

While Bakhtin envisioned the grotesque as invariably a positive form of popular expression, insofar as it constituted the determined testimony of the individual's self-validation and victory over the repressive attempts from central authorities, the concept of the grotesque in Ruskin becomes an

instrument for measuring the connection between art and ethics within the particular context of nineteenth century Victorian culture. Accordingly, as a function of this relationship, a kind of polarity becomes inherent to the judgement of the grotesque in Ruskin's view. In any case, as Kayser would do one century later, Ruskin conceives the grotesque on the basis of two fundamental components. Hereby, a certain content of fear, infused by the frequent ugliness of grotesque imagery, as well as the terribleness of the kind of deformities and impossible amalgamations in these images, combines with a ludicrous aspect. This is introduced in a twofold sense, insofar as it is both provided by the sense of playfulness implied by the free representation of unusual compositions, as the same time as the humour and jokefulness such creations often entail. As Ruskin puts it:

[I]t seems to me that the grotesque is, in almost all cases, composed of two elements, one ludicrous, the other fearful; that, as one or the other of these elements prevails, the grotesque falls into two branches, sportive grotesque, and terrible grotesque; but that we cannot legitimately consider it under these two aspects, because there are hardly any examples which do not in some degree combine both elements; there are few grotesques so utterly playful as to be overcast with no shade of fearfulness, and few so fearful as absolutely to exclude all ideas of jest (*Works III: 23*).

Certainly, this is revealed through his terminological choice, whereby, in *Modern Painters*, Ruskin defines his idea of what he calls as a "noble" grotesque:

A fine grotesque is the expression, in a moment, by a series of symbols thrown together in bold and fearless connection, of truths which it would have taken a long time to express in any verbal way, and of which the connection is left for the beholder to work out for himself; the gaps, left or overleaped by the haste of the imagination forming the grotesque character (*Works V: 132*).

While Ruskin connects this noble type with the work of Gothic artisans in their boldness for the release of creative imagination, the counterpart to this type is found in the so-called "ignoble" grotesque, produced with the sole idea of fealty and thoughtless creation. For Ruskin, then, the grandiosity of the grotesque lies mostly on its potential to express – as in Bakhtin's conception – subversive meanings against the imposed, conventional norms. Of course, insofar as the production of a noble grotesque must respond to the conscious affirmation of freedom and opposition against prescriptive patterns of restrictive value, this finality requires the intervention of "reason" and "self-government". Thereby, when this rational aid fails, the ignoble type of grotesque comes into being: "The grotesque which comes to all men in a disturbed dream is the intelligible example of [...] the most ignoble [type]. The imagination, in this instance, being entirely deprived of all aid from reason, and incapable of self-government" (*Works XI: 178*).

In his typification of the grotesque, while the former, noble kind of grotesque is associated

with the free creations of Gothic artisans, Ruskin links the ignoble grotesque to the hypocrisy of classical workmen, for whom artistic freedom is subordinated to the demands of the strict rules regulating creative patterns. This is exemplified by his analysis of Lombard and classical griffins, where he compares the conceptual moulds that impel each of the sculptors. He concludes on the honest authenticity of the Gothic workman, who creates with his free imagination, as opposed to the falsity of the classical artist, constrained by a repressive set of norms:

The difference is that the Lombard workman did really see a griffin in his imagination, and carved it from the life, meaning to declare to all ages that he had verily seen with his immortal eyes such a griffin as that; but the classical workman never saw a griffin at all, nor anything else, but put the whole thing together by line and rule [...] (s)o that, taking truth first, the honest imagination gains everything; it has griffinism, and grace, and usefulness, all at once: but the false composer, caring for nothing but himself and his rules, loses everything, – griffinism, grace, and all (*Works V*: 141, 146-7).

Hence, while two basic elements enter the composition of any grotesque work, Ruskin acknowledges, at the same time, the necessary conjugation of two principles in order to admit a grotesque creation as the product of an honest, “noble” design. Accordingly, while playfulness is a constitutive piece of grotesque works, the difference between terrible grotesque and fine grotesque will depend on the labour of reason and the intellect. In this sense, Ruskin implies, while freedom is essential when producing a grotesque work of art, insofar as it enables the “choice in play,” the action of reason is required in order to provide a direction for such playfulness, thereby allowing for “a healthy manner of work”.

It is a much more serious question than may be at first supposed; for a healthy manner of play is necessary in order to a healthy manner of work: and be the choice of our own recreation is, in most cases, left to ourselves, while the nature of our work is generally fixed by necessity or authority, it may be well doubted whether more distressful consequence may not have resulted from mistaken choice in play than from mistaken direction in labour (*Works XI*: 151).

In his establishment of reason as a fundamental principle, balanced with the requirement for playfulness in grotesque forms, Ruskin did not intend to offer a constraint to freedom for the artists of the grotesque. Indeed, on specifying that reason is essential in the production of grotesque art, Ruskin is, in fact, invoking the principle of usefulness through the conveyance of a purposefully target-aimed grotesque design. In this respect, by means of his vehement defence of the nobility of artistic creation through an expressive, meaningful mode of representation, Ruskin to some extent anticipates the modern concept of the grotesque – though not exclusive of this period – whereby intentional meanings of boundarilessness and transgression underlie the use of grotesque forms.

Nevertheless, beyond his emphasis on the combination of rational intellect and the free flow

of creative imagination, or what Lucy Hartley has defined as “ ‘usefulness’ combined with rudeness of surface” (1999: 90), Ruskin’s grotesque lends further relevance to a more complex aspect. Thus, by means of his definition of the grotesque as a structure in which gaps acquire a symbolical value insofar as any interpretation, or effort for completion is left for the viewer, Ruskin inaugurated a new dimension of aesthetic perception, whereby the focus of attention is displaced from the product of the creation onto the beholder of such a product. It is precisely the spectator, through their active interaction with the grotesque work of art, who needs to decide on the continuity and closure of the perceptual sequence of distortions, amalgamations, and free associations to which he/she is exposed, thereby assuming an agentive participation in the final statement of the grotesque creation.

If we have seen how Ruskin’s conjugation of creative freedom and the search for pragmatic expression foregrounded modern apprehensions of the grotesque, no less significant in this concern is his definition of a new perceptual schema. Indeed, in his validation of fragmentation for both representational tools and interpretative frames, as well as in the focalization of the receivers of the art work, Ruskin had laid the structures for the construction of Modernism.

Certainly, Ruskin’s patterns of aesthetic creation and reception would be welcomed by Modernist authors, who found in these compositional parameters a model of resistance to definition and artistic absolutism, as well as an axis for the decentralization of the author and the imposition of a one-sided point of view. In this sense, McLuhan has insisted on Ruskin’s coincidence with Modern poetics on the grounds of his democratic reinterpretation of art, which gives priority to the viewer’s perspective, in detriment of the authoritarianism of the author’s singular interpretation. As McLuhan describes it, it is precisely this formulation in Ruskin’s theorization of art that accomplishes that “shift from exterior to interior landscape” so decisive for Modernist aesthetics (1951: 173).

Similarly, also Peter Nicholls has acknowledged this connection between Ruskin’s conceptualization of the grotesque and the roots of Modernism. Nicholls concedes that this relationship was not explicitly admitted by Modernist authors, for whom, as in the case of Wyndham Lewis or Ezra Pound, “Ruskin’s work may have seemed to lie beyond the purview of Modernism, muffled by its historical remoteness, unappealing in its strenuous moralism, romantic, even unhinged, in its desire to turn back modernity’s clock” through Ruskin’s revivalist emphasis on Gothic art. However, a considerable imprint on these authors becomes by far evident. As Nicholls explains: “[s]omehow, [...] Ruskin’s work left its impress on modernism, not just as a body of ideas, but as a formal imperative so deeply laid as to need a new generation to reinvent it” (2001: 175).

In conclusion, in his analysis of Gothic style, Ruskin retrieves a notion of the grotesque formerly dismissed as primitive and meaningless precisely with a view authenticating its representational methods as, not only a perfectly valid form of creation. Furthermore, liberated from the oppression of artistic impositions and norms, may turn – under the pragmatic – endowing action of intellectual structures of the reason – into a power – fully effective means for the expression of subversive signifieds. At the same time, this reconceptualization of the grotesque set the basis on which Modernist principles, along with their purposes for the destabilization of hegemonic forms of creation and interpretation, were to be edified.

2.1.4. The Modern Grotesque

As F. Connelly has noted, the introduction of the grotesque into the mainstream of modern expression is marked by the Romantic period, when the writings of authors such as Friedrich Schlegel or Victor Hugo cast a new light on grotesque aesthetics. Schlegel “held a” view of tragicomedy as essentially connected with the grotesque, insofar as – according to Kayser – both share a common development and origin in the evolution of drama – which inaugurated a new concept of the grotesque as a mixture of genres. In the same period, Victor Hugo’s “*Preface*” to his edition of *Cromwell* (1827) contributed to spread the notion that it was on the context, and its handling by the author, rather than on its purest constituent forms, that our perception of the grotesque relied. In tune with this view, Hugo liberated the grotesque from its reclusion within the confines of limited precincts to incorporate it within the borders of our closest reality: “The grotesque [...] is everywhere; on the one hand it creates what is deformed and horrible, on the other what is comic and farcical” (in Kayser, 1981: 57).

Thus brought into modernity, the grotesque has reached such disparate fields as psychoanalysis, photography, mass media, or science fiction, among others. In fact, this multifariousness of grotesque manifestations confirms Hugo’s observation on the unrestrainable potential of the grotesque, whose multiple possibilities and representations by far outdo the inherent limitations of the monadic singularity of classical beauty. Consequently, as noted by Connelly, the different complementary definitions of the grotesque as transgression of boundaries through representations ranging from the monstrous to the ridiculous, coexist in the modern period with the most aberrant forms of distortion, mutilation, or impossible combinations, as well as with the radical dissolution of bodies, concepts, and categories. Indeed, the development of new technologies, much in consonance with mass production, concurrently addressed to a mass audience, inaugurates in the modern era a new flourishing of grotesque art. Hence, if in his treatise on the grotesque, Kayser had underlined the importance of graphic arts for the conveyance of its implications, much more emphatically, on dealing with the modern grotesque, Connelly highlights the predominance of visual art forms in order to carry through grotesque meanings.

In this sense, particular relevance is acquired by photography and the art of collage, where the most aberrant forms of contortion, mutilation, or unexpected hybridization are not only enabled, but even provided with a growing degree of verisimilitude. Indeed, these techniques gave a definitive preponderance to a metamorphic type of grotesque (Connelly, 2003: 3) in which the task of completing the gaps and disunities of traditional forms of the grotesque, was mostly already done for the viewer. This suggested a metamorphosis in the process of becoming which chimed in with

Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque body as "a body in the act of becoming [...] never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body" (Bakhtin, 1965: 317 [Connelly, 2003: 4]).

In tune with this metamorphic type, closely associated with visual arts, specially significant are certain avant-garde forms, such as Surrealism or Cubism, featuring the transgression of definitive boundaries, as well as the freest merging of elements and realities. Surrealist artists found in the values of the grotesque paradigm a substantially prosperous source of images and conceptions that enabled them to channel most of their artistic and pragmatic ends. Even though it would be troublesome to establish a close parallel between both styles: Surrealist and the grotesque, considering that each of them responds to different parameters, and to a certain extent, as Kirsten A. Hoving has remarked, Surrealism deviates from the grotesque perspective, the truth is that a significant series of shared aspects link both styles. Let us bear it in mind, for instance, the interest of Surrealist artists in all types of animalizations and metamorphoses, including aberrant robotizations and mechanizations of human beings, the frequent isolation of anatomic fragments, the treatment of vacuum spaces, or the resort to incongruous associations. Accordingly, in his *Manifestos of Surrealism*, André Breton highlighted "(f)ear, the attraction of the unusual, chance, the taste for things extravagant" as central elements within Surrealist aesthetics. Moreover, discussing the features of the poetry of Surrealism, Breton quotes Pierre Reverdy's description of the ambivalence and duality characterizing Surrealist images:

La imagen es una creación pura del espíritu.

La imagen no puede nacer de una comparación, sino del acercamiento de dos realidades más o menos lejanas.

Cuanto más lejanas y justas sean las concomitancias de las dos realidades objeto de aproximación, más fuerte será la imagen, más fuerza y más realidad poética tendrá [Breton, 1976: 38].

This interest of avant-garde tendencies in grotesque forms, along with the particular context in which this occurs, has motivated a new rise of the grotesque, which is "at the heart of contemporary debates, and integral to the arts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (Connelly 2003: 6). Whereas different strands characterize the core conception of the grotesque, Connelly has identified a significant concern in the twentieth century with the exploration of the deformity and the monstrous. Jeffrey J. Cohen – as quoted by Connelly – attributes this fact to the central implications of the monstrous body, arguing that it "quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy, giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read [...]". Cohen explains this fact by returning to the etymological origins of the word "monstrum", which he defines as "that which

reveals” (2003: 15, n.36).

This revelation, in fact, arises in tune with the profound desire for transgressing boundaries and impositions on both art and life, as well as for bringing to the surface whatever had been previously marginalized and condemned to a subsidiary role. Furthermore, it is precisely this interest in the monstrous and informe that provides the bridge between literature and visual arts, endowed with a special proclivity for conveying grotesque meanings.

Accordingly, McElroy points out this fascination with the monstrous as the genuine source for both artistic and literary manifestations of the grotesque (1989: 1). Whereas Connelly distinguished three different orientations of the notion of the grotesque, the former gives priority to the existence of two major trends in the incorporation of the grotesque into modern artistic discourse. This dualism, simultaneously, corresponds to the two basic components Ruskin had identified in grotesque forms:

- One major strand is represented by a tendency towards the consideration of playfulness and the inversion of established values as the central element of the grotesque. Notwithstanding this, the two authors he groups within this trend focalize the issue of play according to very different parameters. Hence, while Kayser acknowledges in the grotesque a play with the absurd, often deriving into a kind of demonic laughter, Bakhtin locates the grotesque as one of the principles central to carnival politics, whereby triumphant laughter, as well as all the type of subversions and debunkments involved by the grotesque, are put at the service of the defusion of fear and repression.
- The other tendency would, for McElroy, be represented by John Ruskin, on the basis of his belief in the individual’s fear of self and of the human condition. Moreover, this notion, which was central in the context of entre-guerres, had gained additional relevance through Freud’s definition of the “uncanny” (Unheimlich), whereby the psychologist brings to the fore the existence of a primitive residue in the human mind which still operates to live a reality beyond the repressions established under rationalist structures.

Combining their visions, McElroy underlines the relevance of both the ludicrous and the fearsome in the notion of the modern grotesque. Bearing this in mind, McElroy emphasizes the significance of this balance in our modern sophisticated society, in which

those attitudes antipathetic to civilisation, though by no means banished from

it, are liberated in artistic play, just as the various forms of the grotesque are all the absolute antithesis of the harmony order, dignity, and serenity that, since the time of classical Greece, have constituted for the West the ideal (or idealised) concept of beauty. The grotesque is an aberration that induces fascination, and that fine flicker of perverse glee identifies it in experience, separating it from the merely ugly or simply ludicrous. The grotesque lures even as it repels, fascinates us with our irrational dreads, and refuses to let us altogether dismiss the game even after we have played it (1989: 16).

It is precisely in tune with this combination of fear and play that modern literature, as many other contemporary disciplines, has demonstrated a particular affiliation with deformity and the monstrous. Indeed, in the panorama of this modern civilization announcing the collapse of both reason and human identity, the rendering of monstrous births and severe deformities unsettle the spectator beyond rational explanation, thereby resurrecting primitive fears about human selfhood. Hence, as McElroy points out, “(e)ven in cases in which the deformity is the result of injury or disease rather than a birth defect, the impression can be grotesque when the degree of mutilation seems to alter human identity or to suggest grotesque violation of the body’s physical integrity”, thus bringing to the fore the concept of the “uncanny”.

Furthermore, in this discussion of grotesque art, Ruskin had underlined the centrality of the viewer’s role for the conveyance of grotesque meanings. One century later, Kayser goes further by specifying the three-fold nature in the notion of the grotesque, which actually refers simultaneously to the art work itself, as well as to the attitude of the artist and the perception accomplished by the beholder of the grotesque work of art.

That the word “grotesque” applies to three different realms – the creative process, the work of art itself, and its reception – is significant and appropriate as an indication that it has the makings of a basic aesthetic category. This threefold aspect is characteristic of the work of art in general which, in direct contrast to all other forms of production, is literally “created”. Its unique structure enables the work of art to preserve its identity however much of its “cause” it may have absorbed. It has the strength to rise above this “occasion”. And finally, in contradistinction to other and different kinds of use, the work of art is “received”. It can only be experienced in the act of reception, regardless of any modifications arising from it (1981: 180).

Both definitions, even though arising in different contexts, point to a similar conclusion – which McElroy rescues in his exploration of the modern grotesque. According to these three authors, the essence of the grotesque does not lie so much in the forms themselves – or the topics, in literature – but rather on the artist’s production of a context which propitiates the inference of grotesque meanings. Hereby, what the artist of the grotesque presents is not a mimetic reproduction of the ludicrous of the world or of its terribleness, but, on the contrary, a depiction of what we fear it may turn out to be. It is in this light that monstrosity and malformation enter the heart of grotesque representation, not as mere resources integrating the imagery of grotesque aesthetics, but

as both formal and conceptual stimuli aiming to provoke a strong impact on the beholder by “direct[ing] our attention to the undignified, perilous, even gross physicality of existence and [...] emphasis[ing] it by exaggeration, distortion, or unexpected combination” (1989: 11).

Bearing this in mind, McElroy establishes a typification of the different forms of corporeal degradation or metamorphosis which grotesque art incorporates in order to accomplish such purpose. Hence, as well as mentioning some other exceptional cases, McElroy constructs his taxonomy around five major occurrences:

- A. The depiction of real or imaginary animals which combine aversive appearance with real or imaginable dangers (dinosaurs, other reptiles, large insects);
- B. The combination of disparate animal parts to produce chimeras and mythical beasts, sometimes jovial, but more often ominous (griffins, gargoyles, dragons);
- C. The combination of human and animal features and traits to produce a hybrid man-beast (totem masks and figures, anthrotheriomorphic gods, the kinds of demons most often depicted by Bosch);
- D. The depiction of humans so deformed as to be astonishingly ugly and suggest an aberration of nature (gnomes, extreme hydrocephalics, persons with very distorted faces or bodies; in a light vein, some clowns);
- E. The depiction of humans in some state so bizarre, macabre, or gross that human dignity is obliterated and even identity is threatened (decomposed corpses, skeletons; cannibalism, some behavior of the insane).

To these examples we may add other less typical but still encountered in the art of the grotesque: animalistic or humanoid plants, the combination of mechanical devices with animal forms [...]; combinations of machines and humans [...]; or gruesome machines that take on life of their own [...]

Of course, considering the relevance of a context susceptible of eliciting grotesque meanings, these deformities are presented in grotesque fiction of the twentieth century – McElroy signals – in the midst of a meaningless and defamiliarized universe, in which often human actions lack any significance beyond the personal sphere. Concurrently, the physical world surrounding the individual becomes alien and hostile, directing its energies to overwhelming him/her, thus impeding them to attain their real identity. In this atmosphere, the human being is surrounded with violence and brutalization as the direct consequence of the meaninglessness and unreliability of the values ruling over that world. Moreover, in this setting, a process of dehumanization seems inevitable on the grounds of the existence of estranging institutions, including science, technology, and the very socio-economic organization (McElroy, 1989: 17).

Within this context of hostility and alienation, the utility of the grotesque in modern literature is oriented towards two major directions: satire and exposure. Invoking its most traditional sense, the grotesque can be merely laid at the service of radical satirization. In these cases, a caricature of sensorial reality can be performed as a heightening device whereby to depict the distance between the self and their surroundings. Thus, through the incorporation of the carnivalistic principle of exaggeration, this alienated situation of the modern individual acquires abnormally large dimensions, which, consequently, is not free from a projection onto the physical level. At this stage, McElroy's taxonomy comes to the fore with its grotesque transformations by means of the various occurrences of hybridization, metamorphic forms of reification and undignified animalization, or bizarre mutilations – just to mention a sample of the inexhaustible possibilities of grotesque deformations.

Yet, together with this tendency to satirization – and intimately associated with it – modern fiction of the grotesque has demonstrated an increasing interest in the function of the grotesque as exposure. In tune with the humanistic predominance over modern thought, powerfully influenced by the secularizing imperative of an astounding growth of technological society, one of the principal functions of the grotesque amounts to the unmasking of modern individual in the lowest reality of their corruptedness and stupidity. In this respect, thus, an important difference from Bakhtin's grotesque is to be underlined. Whereas in the carnivalesque universe provided by medieval and Renaissance representations, the main source of terror is constituted by the fear instored on popular masses by despotic authorities, the modern grotesque places special emphasis on the idea of evil and terribleness as directly proceeding from the greed and vices of the individual. Simultaneously, the modern grotesque retains the radical opposition against tyranny and centralization within the core of its philosophy and teleological aims. In view of this, the external realm, either natural or supernatural – which represented the main source of evil for medieval men and women – entirely loses its radiating power. Indeed, chiming in with the dominant conceptions of a mechanized world in the midst of a technological revolution, it is not the haunting threat of invisible presences that terrifies individuals, but they themselves that represent the chief menace in the whirling advance of modern civilization.

Nevertheless, it is important to remark that, in spite of its exposure of human vices and corruption as the simultaneous genesis of terror, the modern grotesque is far from attempting to effect any kind of moral judgement. On the contrary, while it acts as a distorting mirror whereby to expose men and women to their own corrupted reality, often concealed underneath their social mask, this grotesque broadly refuses any form of preceptal conclusion or moralistic evaluation. This, as in Ruskin's grotesque, is left as a gap for the beholder to decide over its suitable form of

completion.

At the same time, the recognition of the “movement inward” from its previously external focus parallels to a certain extent Ruskinian observation of the internal shift, whereby the critic had emphasised the centrality of the subject, though at the perceptual stage. As McElroy explains it:

[I]n the modern Western world, deeply aware of the rift between the external, objective world and the internal, subjective interpretation of it, the source of the grotesque has moved inward and is found in the fears, guilts, fantasies, and aberrations of individual psychic life. The modern grotesque is internal, not infernal, and *its originator is recognised as neither god nor devil but man himself*¹⁴ (1989: 21).

While still the two constitutive elements of the grotesque identified by Ruskin – playfulness and fear – continue to be present in the modern grotesque, a lower emphasis as far as the former is concerned becomes noticeable. Indeed, although it remains, particularly at the level of the freedom of creation, a significant loss of its humorous strand occurs in the most purely Bakhtinian notion of *reduced laughter*¹⁵. In this sense, at it most, it sometimes preserves what McElroy has described as “a laughing through clenched teeth, a sense of [...] grim joke”. In tune with this, the scholar has pointed out the predominance of the component of fear that arises as a consequence of the awareness of one's situation of alienation among one's equals, as well as of the realization of the gratuitous malice inherent to them – of which no one is an exception (1989: 25). In such a world, the traditional terror towards monstrous creatures, along with the lurking menace of vengeful, ghostly presences and demonic forces has been replaced by the terrifying tangible perversity of human egotism. In this context, the fiction of the modern grotesque aims to effect an assault upon the reader and the bulk of ideals and structures that conform their surroundings. Hereby, by a resort to the violence that is inherent to carnival acts, the author of this grotesque points their attack towards the waste immobility of contemporary men and women in their blindness to apprehend the sordid truth underlying their greeds and corruptedness. In sum, as an old expiatory victim, the reader is thrown onto the arena of a grotesque reality, whose renewal and transformation essentially depends on him or her.

¹⁴ Emphasis added

¹⁵ Emphasis as in the original

3.1. Modernity and the Issue of Crowds. The Unanimism of Jules Romains.

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At the turn of the century, there was a development of a particularly mass-oriented evolution of the socio-political panorama, and of the economic structures of modern civilizations, derived from the growing advance of technology and the profound transformations resulting from the advent of modernity. This provoked the reaction of numerous thinkers and philosophers, who began to search for possible explanations for both the nature of collective formations, and for their likely consequences for the individual. Indeed, as Tönnies has noted, a new phenomenon in the first two decades of the twentieth century “swept across politics” with the emergence of the masses. These formations, mainly consisting of groups formerly marginalized within the political system, such as women and the working class, suddenly burst out vast and of seemingly unstoppable action movements. Hence, in England, the suffrage and Labour movements, which had become militant before World War I, achieved a notable success in the Reform Bill of 1918. At the same time, an increasing interest arose among politicians, who became particularly concerned with how to address these masses, coinciding with the immeasurable potential these had demonstrated to possess after most workers’ and women’s parties throughout Europe had supported national war efforts, which certainly attested for their power to overthrow the entire system. Hereby, political leaders understood that this same potential could, under the right influences, be turned into powerful supports for that same system. In the light of this, as Tönnies has stated, “(a) whole subgenre of sociological-political treatises purporting to analyze the mass mind emerged all over Europe, particularly in England, where books on the subject by William McDougall, Georges Sorel [...], and Sigmund Freud were published” (1995: 1).

Certainly, the transformation of the economic system resulting from the dramatic growth of industrialization and the incessant spread of new technologies contributed to the formation of a mass population in urban nuclei. Simultaneously, a rhetoric of cultural unity, encouraged by Fascist leaders as a form of control and dominance over these integrated masses, thereby unified into an easily malleable monolithic block, began to develop parallelly to the new demographic distribution. Hence, in the light of this reality of crowd formations, a substantial bulk of competing theories entered the cultural and ideological panorama, co-existing throughout the earlier decades of the twentieth century.

This task of rethinking and conceptualizing the emerging phenomenon led many intellectuals to envision the massification of society as a fearful symptom of the collapse of civilization. One of the most influential theories in this respect was provided by Oswald Spengler, who associated this change in socioeconomic life with the apocalyptic dissolution of human

essence. According to Spengler, the advent of collective society stood for an announcement of the irreversible fall of culture and human values, as derived from the invasion of shapeless, amalgamated crowds into urban spaces. Moreover, for the German thinker, these collectivities ultimately entail a demonic nature which appropriates the individual's freedom by fatally absorbing their own will and self-control. As Spengler himself explains it:

(e)l último hombre de la gran urbe *no quiere*¹⁶ ya vivir, se aparta de la vida, no como individuo, pero sí como tipo, como masa [...] Pero ni la miseria, ni la fuerza, ni la clara percepción de la locura que lleva consigo este desarrollo son capaces de contener la fuerza atractiva de esos centros demoníacos (1976: 125, 127).

Other authors concerned with the power and the psychology of the masses were Gabriel de Tarde, Gustave Le Bon and Scipio Sighele, who accused Le Bon of stealing the theses he developed in *La Folla Delinquente* (1891) and *La Copia Criminale* (1892). The latter authors are fitting representatives of the negative conceptualization of the crowd spreading at the end of the 19th century. In particular, the work of the French political theorist Gustave Le Bon set the terms for most analyses of the mass mind in the early twentieth century. Hence, through his influential study in *The Crowd. A Study of the Popular Mind* as early as 1896, Le Bon acknowledged the popular masses power to debunk the hegemonic leadership of aristocracy and the ruling class.

To-day it is the traditions which used to obtain in politics, and the individual tendencies and rivalries of rulers which do not count; while, on the contrary, the voice of the masses has become preponderant. It is this voice that dictates their conduct to kings, whose endeavour is to take note of its utterances. The destinies of nations are elaborated at present in the heart of the masses, and no longer in the councils of princes (1896: 15).

Accordingly, the Leftist social psychologist enhances this potential for crowd formations to destroy a capitalist system in the midst of what he came to term as the "Era of Crowds". In addition, Le Bon's work represented an effort for rendering an account for the specific psychological features of crowds, remarkably different – as observed by the author – from the individual mind. In Le Bon's words:

While all our ancient beliefs are tottering and disappearing, while the old pillars of society are giving way one by one, the power of the crowd is the only force that nothing menaces, and of which the prestige is continually on the increase. The age we are about to enter will in truth be the ERA OF CROWDS¹⁷ (1896: 14).

Two decades later, the publication of Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* provided a more solid psychological insight into the particular processes activated in the mind on

¹⁶ Emphasis as in the original.

¹⁷ Capitalization as in the original.

the entry of the individual into a group. Through a series of postulates – some of which directly borrowed from McDougall – Freud explains the emergence of mass formations, including political parties, sports clubs, as well as other specific group creations, such as those resulting from the contemplation of collective spectacles, as closely dovetailed with the arising of a common, unique group's mind/consciousness. Alluding to one of the conditions proposed by McDougall for the emergence of such a particular form of consciousness, Freud details the specific requirements, as these authors envision it, “for raising collective mental life to a higher level”. As Freud explains:

The first and fundamental condition is that there should be some degree of continuity of existence in the group. This may be either material or formal: the former, if the same individuals persist in the group for some time; and the latter, if there is developed within the group a system of fixed positions which are occupied by a succession of individuals.

The second condition is that in the individual member of the group some definite idea should be formed of the nature, composition, function and capacities of the group, so that from this he may develop an emotional relation to the group as a whole.

The third is that the group should be brought into interaction (perhaps in the form of rivalry) with other groups similar to it but differing from it in many respects.

The fourth is that the group should possess traditions, customs and habits, and especially such as determine the relations of its members to one another.

The fifth is that the group should have a definite structure, expressed in the specialisation and differentiation of the functions of its constituents.

According to McDougall, if these conditions are fulfilled, the psychological disadvantages of the group formation are removed. The collective lowering of intellectual ability is avoided by withdrawing the performance of intellectual tasks from the group and reserving them for individual members of it (Freud, 1921: 30-1).

Concurrently with these theories, the earlier decades of the twentieth century also witnessed the expansion and evolution of the Unanimist movement. The term, first used by the French poet Jules Romains in a review called *Le Penseur* in 1904, aimed to denote “the portrayal of literature of collective movements and feelings” (Norrish, 1958: 3). Like Freud and other contemporary intellectuals, Romains shared the belief in the particular transformation of the individual through his participation in a collective experience. This, the French author maintained, derived in the formation of a community endowed with its own consciousness as a group. As Peter Norrish exposes it in his study of the unanimism of Jules Romains, the central idea of the unanimist movement sustained that:

when a number of men meet, however chance that meeting may be, provided they remain together, they tend to become – as Romains himself put it in a

lecture in 1925¹⁸ – “ 'something other than a certain number of men' to become part of an individuality greater than their own, the individuality of the group” (1958: 4).

Not differently from Freud or Mc Dougall's theses, Romaine affirmed that this collective individual/soul/mind/personality “may reveal itself in the most ordinary circumstances, as in the case of a family gathering or a number of people working together in an office”. Likewise, on the basis of the formation of that particular collective type of awareness or mental reality, Unanimism came close to Freud's notion of group “consciousness”, or even Le Bon's metaphor of the “living body”.

Nevertheless, while Le Bon's postulates focused on the power of the masses as an instrument of socio-political action against hegemonic forces, Romaine would develop a theory of groups more predominantly in tune with his labelling of this specific phenomenon. Hereby, inasmuch as the term “Unanimism” derives from *anime*, the French word for “soul”, a more intimate overtone pervades the poet's notion, according to which, on the grounds that groups are concerned with actual people, a particularly dignifying quality characterizes them. In this sense, in Romaine's formulation of the Unanimist theory, a process of humanization of the concept of “crowd” – more liable to be interpreted as a synonym of “herd” – is involved. As Romaine himself stated in “*A Propos de l'Unanimisme*”,

(i)t should be understood that we are concerned with lives which are real, objective, autonomous, lives which are not simply for our intelligence or our imagination an ingenious or thrilling way of arranging the facts. Groups exist outside us. And they do not exist only in the form of crowds” (1908: 394).

Thereby – the poet implies – “(g)roups of people [...] have a soul distinct from, and usually superior to, individual souls” (1958: 5).

Against the apocalyptic visions of Spengler, for Romaine, these instances of the superior quality of human nature occur especially in association with modern life. Thus, the particular circumstances of modernity, including collective forms of entertainment, such as the theatre or the music hall, as well as a procession or a neighbourhood, contribute to the arising of unanimes, favouring that kind of psychological bond. This is the central idea of “*Le Square Parmentier*”, where, on occasion of a theatrical performance, the emergence of a unanime takes place among the audience, as soon as the special effects of music and the collective background noises begin to create a particular form of togetherness (1911: 67-71).

¹⁸ *Petite Introduction à l'Unanimisme*, given to different European universities over England, Sweden, Finland and Holland, and later published in 1933 as the last chapter of a series of essays under the title *Problèmes Européens* (1958:4, n.2).

Moreover, not only do entertainments and communal celebrations propitiate this birth of unanimes. Indeed, as it is fitting with the features of modern society, even the crowding of modern streets or the events around the workplace that bring a group of people together in the performance of a common task enable this fusion of individuals into an integrated whole. Hence, in *La Vie Unanime*, “his first mature exposition of unanimism” (Norrish, 1958: 5), Romaine already included these situations as facilitating the birth of unanimes. By far the most influential of his works (ibid: 3), *La Vie Unanime* represents Romaine’s wholehearted attempt for providing the description of an ideal form of society, in which the optimum mode of life amounts to the permanence within the collectivity. On the contrary, estrangement from it results in an unbearable terror for the escapist, who, like the poet in “*Moi en Révolte*”, one of the sections of the latter volume, soon discovers the failure of his temporary flight away from society and modern life, at the same time as his absolute necessity of returning to his community. Hence, conceived as the ideal social structure, synonymous of humanity and continuity, these unanimes became for Romaine the clearest manifestation of the individual’s triumph over terror and alienation by rejoicing a utopian form of life among their equal fellow beings. Furthermore, the existence of these group formations becomes ultimately identified within this paradigm with moral worthiness, whereby isolation from these communities runs parallel to an artificial negation of human nature, and therefore, contiguous to vice and corruptedness.

While the Unanimist movement mainly constituted a psychological theory, probably linked to what Tratner defines as a subgenre of group mind theory (1995: 1), throughout its evolution it came to acquire further implications, yet without of course abandoning its psychological basis. Insofar as Unanimism proclaimed the arising of a collective consciousness, understood as a form of “un certain *continu*¹⁹ psychique” (Romaine, 1925: 231), an extension of his theory led the poet to conceive it as a kind of universal consciousness, prompting a type of continuation of life after death, in tune with his notion of the universal mind as a vast psychic continuum. This idea, which began to take form after the publication of his novel *Mort de Quelqu’un* in 1908 was in fact the hallmark for the reformulation of the Unanimist theory as a special type of practical doctrine, whereby Romaine started to conceive Unanimism as the birth of a new religion.

Accordingly, the author developed a fanatical enthusiasm for the somewhat religious connotations of this communal living. In this sense, the Unanimist paradigm provided Romaine with the bases for the construction of a “modern idea of divinity” (1925: 233-4). In fact, the real pattern underlying this conception ultimately amounted to a question of terminology and the particular posing of the conceptual fundamentals of Unanimism than to a properly religious scheme,

¹⁹ Emphasis as in the original.

in the strict sense of the term. In any case, Romains' doctrine is primarily a humanistic approach to existence, founded on a new formulation of anthropocentric views, wherein religious feelings become replaced by social feelings.

Moreover, to a considerable degree, Unanimism opposed Christianity insofar as the latter rejected the reality inherent to humankind through its vision of life on earth as the opposite pole of a duality in which the ideal and purest form of existence was conceived as separated from men. On the contrary, Unanimism postulates, much more compatible with modern life, announced a religion in which the actual gods were men themselves, who, brought into authentic life and feeling, displaced the old Christian religion to come to adore themselves and the particular unanime or collective consciousness raised among them. In this sense, those "human group-gods", in fact "purely social beings to be produced by the new industrial age" (Norrish, 1958: 13), turn out as the only possibility of worship in that new society. By establishing thus the bases for this emerging religion, Romains proclaimed the displacement of conventional religions by the advent of a reign of human beings, where they rise as the real center of existence. Indeed, in his poem "*L'Eglise*" – which he had included within *La Vie Unanime* – a congregation of people practising their worship eventually turn down their cult to begin worshipping the god they have become – the unanime (1908: 74-81).

Inasmuch as this occurs, Unanimism certainly became for Romains the inauguration of a new form of existence, in which previous notions and forms of religion were debunked in favour of the authenticity of the communal kind of being promoted by Unanimism. Furthermore, through the reorganization of society impelled by Unanimist premises, whereby men and women were invited "to throw down the barrier with which they separate their minds and souls from those of others, and to share their [...] life with others as deeply as they can" (1958: 22), a new world could blossom forth, once rejuvenated and renewed by Unanimist theories.

4.1. Anthropology and Modernism. The Origins of Carnival Celebrations.

4.1. Anthropology and Modernism. The Origins of Carnival Celebrations.

As it has been pointed out in the analysis of the etymological roots of the grotesque, carnival, as the converging paradigm within which the aesthetic and notional implications of the grotesque become consolidated, is not unbound from some of the mythological-ritual celebrations that took place among ancient civilizations, nor from the later versions that arose on their evolution and expansion all over Europe. Furthermore, analysing the presence of carnivalistic elements in literature – or, as Bakhtin calls it, “the carnivalization of literature” – he points in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* to the Saturnalia celebrated by ancient Greeks and Romans as the direct antecedent of carnival:

Festivities of the carnival type occupied an enormous place in the life of the broadest masses of the people in ancient times – in Greek and even more in Roman life, where the central [...] festival of the carnival type was the saturnalia. These festivals had no less (and perhaps even more) significance in medieval Europe and during the Renaissance, where they were in part a direct living continuation of Roman Saturnalia (1929: 129).

In his discussion, Bakhtin refers to the works of James Frazer insofar as these provide a detailed outline of this type of celebrations. The anthropologist had also noted in his monumental work *The Golden Bough* “the resemblance between the Saturnalia of ancient and the Carnival of modern Italy” (1913: 312). Such connection is only possible on the basis of the permanence throughout time of a particular ideological system underlying carnival festivities, rooted in a magical-mythological conception of the individual and the universe. Actually, both authors are concerned with analysing and providing an account for the implications of certain ritualist practices which, spinning around the principle of transgression of the rule, aim to promote the fertility and renovation of peoples. Hereby, the old system is debunked and done away with, thus allowing for the reign of the young and renewed. Yet, Bakhtin goes beyond the etymological analysis of rituals carried out by Frazer and displaces his focus of interest onto the connection between these ancient folk sources and forms of drama, on the one hand, and the genre of the novel, on the other.

Therefore, according to Bakhtin, the particular symbolic system which develops in carnival constitutes a form of language which enables its transference onto other artistic manifestations, among which literature is not an exception. As he puts it:

Carnival itself [...] is not, of course, a literary phenomenon [...] Carnival has worked out an entire language of symbolic concretely sensuous forms – from language and complex mass actions to individual carnivalistic gestures. This language, in a differentiated and even (as in any language) articulate way, gave expression to a unified (but complex) carnival sense of the world,

permeating all its forms. This language cannot be translated in any full or adequate way into a verbal language, and much less into a language of abstract concepts, but it is amenable to a certain transposition into a language of artistic images that has something in common with its concretely sensuous nature; that is, it can be transposed into the language of literature. We are calling this transposition of carnival into the language of literature the carnivalization of literature (1929: 122).

At the same time, the birth and evolution of the Modernist movement corresponds with the development of a growing interest in anthropology and ancient myths. In 1844, as MacClancy has noted, a form of anthropology emerged in Britain with the foundation of the Ethnological Society of London, born as a belated consequence of the anti-slavery movement. Its later institution as the Anthropological Institute fostered even more vehemently the debates and meetings on “popular” topics. For its members, who upheld humanitarian, liberal, and utilitarian ideas, anthropology represented a via towards the formation of a better society.

Along with this popular society, anthropological theories extended through mainstream authors, whose work reached a widespread influence. Thus, in 1859, the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* caused a great wave of opinion and controversy which contributed to promote one of the leading debates in its day. On the other hand, Edward B. Tylor was also one of the most praised authors of his time, with his emphasis on cultural aspects as the main agents of evolutionary development. Yet, it was his successor, Sir James G. Frazer, who, through his monumental work *The Golden Bough*, published between 1890-1915, effected an astonishing turn upon the course of anthropological studies. So much it is so that in the 1910s, over 35,000 copies were printed of each of the twelve volumes that constitute the third edition of his *Golden Bough*.

Indeed, as MacClancy remarks (2003: 78), by the twenties, the influence of Frazer's theories had reached such dimensions that his works had even become of compulsory reading for anyone aiming at an education or at obtaining a critical attitude to life. MacClancy quotes the opinion of R. R. Marrett, an Oxford anthropologist who complained of the popularity Frazer had provided for the subject:

To show that Anthropology is becoming popular is, perhaps, superfluous. The fact is almost painfully borne in upon anyone who has allowed his anthropological leanings to become known to the world. Every headmaster would nowadays have you down to lecture to his boys. A provincial town will muster in hundreds to hear you discourse on totems and taboos. At the most old-fashioned of our Universities the youth of the nation delight with comparing the habits of primitive man with their own. In short, Anthropology is the latest form of evening entertainment (Marrett, 1910: 299, cf. MacClancy, 2003: 78).

Certainly, Frazer had soon become an authentic authority within the whole intellectual panorama of the earlier decades of the twentieth century, as attested by the growing interest that

arose among his contemporaries. Educated at Cambridge, where he was mainly based, Frazer owed much of his formation in ancient religions to the anthropologist E. B. Tylor, whose *Primitive Culture* had encouraged the scholar to embark into the research of the origins and evolution of ancient civilizations. In particular, Frazer was attracted to the beliefs and implications underlying the emergence of religions, which he analysed through a substantial production. Nevertheless, it was probably his monumental work *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, first published in two volumes in 1890, and later edited from 1911 to 1915 in twelve volumes, that turned his postulates into a key reference for subsequent studies and debates. So much so that, before the appearance of his second edition by 1910, 13,000 copies of this work had already been sold. Throughout his twelve volumes, Frazer attempted to render an account of the nature of ancient religions, as well as of the numerous points of intersection that exist, among them, and with modern religions. Within a cultural-anthropological perspective, Frazer developed a conception of these primitive religions as essentially fertility cults that centred around the worship of deities as providers of the crops. This conditioned all the rituals and forms of praise originated within the religion, ultimately conceived to ensure the fertility of the land and the production of food, which simultaneously determined these practices's focus on the solar phenomena, as well as on the processes of reproduction and renewal.

Hence, in the sixth of these volumes, *The Scapegoat*, Frazer deals with the nature and significance of the expiatory victim as part of these ideological systems. Thus, according to the anthropologist, this notion frequently became embodied by an appointed member of the community, the king, whose function within the ritual basically amounted to becoming the carrier of collective pains and evils. Consequently, this function ended at the same time as the king himself was also ridiculed and destroyed. In that mockery invariably inflicted on him, the king was consistently associated with some kind of foolery or derangement which provided a form of justification to the harassment he was the object of. Indeed, Frazer points to the origins of this character – the immediate predecessor of the Carnival King – highlighting his grotesqueness:

We have seen that in Italy, Spain, and France, that is, in the countries where the influence of Rome has been deepest and most lasting, a conspicuous feature of the Carnival is a burlesque figure personifying the festive season, which after a short career of glory and dissipation is publicly shot, burnt, or otherwise destroyed, to the feigned grief of genuine delight of the populace. If the view here suggested of the Carnival is correct, this grotesque personage is no other than a direct successor of the old King of the Saturnalia, the master of the revels, the real man who personated Saturn and, when the revels were over, suffered a real death in his assumed character (1913: 312).

In his outline of the different modalities this ancient rite generated afterwards, Frazer highlights the Roman custom of electing and crowning a soldier as a mock king who was later

harassed and who ended up killing himself as an offer to Saturn, the god he represented:

Thirty days before the festival [the soldiers] chose by lot from among themselves a young and handsome man, who was then clothed [...] to resemble Saturn. Thus arrayed and attended by a multitude of soldiers he went about in public with full license to indulge his passions and to taste up every pleasure [...] But if his reign was merry, it was short and ended tragically, for when the thirty days were up and the festival of Saturn had come, he cut his own throat [...] (1913: 309).

Additionally, in his description of this mock King of the Saturnalia, Frazer notes the evidently parodical overtones this figure entailed with respect to the official monarch since its primitive conception: “The person on whom the lot fell enjoyed the title of king, and issued commands of a playful and ludicrous nature to his temporary subjects” (ibid: 308). Indeed, the scholar admits this twofold connotation of the scapegoat. In this sense, while a process of regeneration was ensured through the disposal of the old, thus guaranteeing the inroads and infertility of old age had been removed from the community, a further implication of this figure, as the symbolical carrier of collective evils, amounted to his function as the target of the mockery and derision of his kins. Thereby, the despise towards the old was completed, at the same time as a welcoming of the young was thus buttressed.

In tune with this dual function, Frazer calls attention to the existence, during the Middle Ages, of a so-called 'Abbot of Unreason' (1913: 312) who occasionally replaced this mock king with a view to debase religious authority. Hereby, as a variation of the Festival of Fools, the anthropologist emphasizes the celebration in France of mock masses which, even though allegedly commemorating the biblical episode of Mary's Flight to Egypt, were yet centred upon the figure of an ass, which was introduced into the church and positioned by the altar. Afterwards, the priest initiated the ceremony, which significantly consisted of mixed scraps from different services, while the intervals between the acts of the mass were spent on drinking. The ceremony ended with the merry mingling of the attendants, who joined the animal in a festive dance, to continue by marching in a procession towards a great theatre opposite the church, where bawdy parodies were performed.

Amongst the buffooneries of the Festival of Fools one of the most remarkable was the introduction of an ass into the church, where various pranks were played with the animal [...] and on [its] entering the sacred edifice [...] a parody of the mass was performed [...] A young girl with a child in her arms rode on the back of the ass in imitation of the flight into Egypt. Escorted by the clergy and the people she was led in triumph from the cathedral to the parish church of St. Stephen. There she and her ass were introduced into the chancel and stationed on the left side of the altar; and a long mass was performed which consisted of scraps borrowed indiscriminately from the services of many church festivals throughout the year. In the intervals the singers quenched their thirst: the congregation imitated their example; and the ass was fed and watered. The services over, the animal was brought from the

chancel into the nave, where the whole congregation, clergy and laity mixed up together, danced round the animal and brayed like asses. Finally, after vespers and compline, the merry procession, led by the precentor and preceded by a huge lantern, defiled through the streets to wind up the day with indecent farces in a great theatre erected opposite the church (1913: 335-6).

Furthermore, according to the anthropologist, this debasing purpose justifies the choice of a 'dying-god' as a scapegoat among ancient societies. Frazer explains this duality:

The divine character of the animal or man is forgotten, and he comes to be regarded merely as an ordinary victim [...] He was killed, not originally to take away sin, but to save the divine life from the degeneracy of old age; but since he had to be killed at any rate, people may have thought that they might as well see the opportunity to lay upon him the burden of their sufferings and sins, in order that he may bear it away with him [...] (1913: 227).

Indeed, insofar as Frazer dealt with the process of debunking old traditions, along with the nature of the bases on which most of them rest, the role of sexuality, or the value of ancient history, his work acquired a further dimension for his contemporaries, who found in Frazer's theories an astonishing degree of updated validity. Thus, the attraction it had on Modernist artists and writers soon filled their works with elements of primitivism, along with figures such as the king, the scapegoat, the priest, or the magician, often involved in actions connected with initiation, sacrifice, or incarnation. Simultaneously, an important source for the expansion of Frazer's postulates was constituted by the works and debates of the "ritualist school", of which Jane Harrison represented a central leader. Indeed, according to Harry Payne:

As early as 1890, at first apparently innocent of the virtually simultaneous developments in the thought of James [G. Frazer²⁰] and W. Robertson Smith, she had begun to formulate the ideas on the primacy of ritual over myth (Payne, 1978: 188, cf. Phillips, 1991: 46).

Though educated at Cambridge, as had been Frazer, Jane Harrison had a very different experience from that of her predecessor. Hence, in a time in which female students were only granted a certificate at University – instead of the corresponding degree received by men – the scholar yet acquired an extensive formation on Greek art and archaeology that would turn her into an authentic center of the so-called Ritualist School. The group, integrated by a series of Cambridge scholars, including Gilbert Murray, Francis Cornford, or A. B. Cook, among others, certainly relied on a powerful influence from Jane Harrison, whose collaboration, as Ackerman has noted, provided them with "a deep knowledge of Greek art and archaeology, and later of contemporary work on religion, psychology, sociology and philosophy"(1972: 211-2).

Also like Frazer, Harrison conceived rituals as ultimately endowed with a teleological

²⁰ Addition as in the original.

function of ensuring the provision of food and the guarantee of fertility for the lands. Certainly, she underlined the mediating character of rites: “Ritual, [...] was a [...] copy or imitation of life, but – and this is the important point, – always with a practical end” (1913: 135). This, of course, explained her particular concern with the cyclical pattern of destruction and renewal underlying the origins and conception of ritual practices. Hence, on the basis of her study of rites and myths in ancient societies, the focus of her *Ancient Art and Ritual*, the scholar provided an overview of the notional and practical implications of these celebrations up to the early twentieth century, after their expansion throughout Europe. Thus, under very similar premises to Frazer’s, Harrison also accounts for the rites of expulsion of collective evils and their renovating function integrated within ancient civilizations. She also agrees with the anthropologist on the relevance within these primitive cultures, of the figure of a dying-god, whose prototype she situates in Osiris. Accordingly, Harrison details the Egyptian custom of the yearly removal and destruction of the Tammuz effigy, a sort of puppet made up by the community in order to accomplish a scapegoatal objective. In this case – which the scholar identifies as the Babylonian equivalent of the Egyptian rites of Osiris – a form of unfolding or implicit duality is involved in the tradition, whereby not only is the god-like figure buried, but even Ishtar, his goddess, undergoes a similar temporary death through her trip into the same lifeless place. As Harrison explains it:

Tammuz in Babylon was the young love of Ishtar. Each year he died and passed below the earth to the place of dust and death, “the land from which there is no returning, the house of darkness, where dust lies on door and bolt.” And the goddess went after him, and while she was below, life ceased in the earth, no flower blossomed and no child of animal or man was born” (1913: 19).

If in her description of the ritual, Harrison emphasizes the twofold implications of the rite, wherein a process of destruction, dovetailed with a literal descent to the lowest and most earthly layer of reality of the very deity, necessarily precedes regeneration and the refertilization of life and the land. A similar intentionality underlies the Greek modality of the ritual, where a more patently carnivalesque kind of performance characterizes the celebration. Indeed, as in Frazer’s account, this symbolical form of the god becomes the target of all types of battering and harassment through a rite known as “Carrying Out the Death”:

The king presided and made a distribution in public of grain and pulse to all, both citizens and strangers. And the child-image of *Charila*²¹ is brought in. When they had all received their share, the king struck the image with his sandal, the leader of the Thyiades lifted the image and took it away to a precipitous place, and there tied a rope round the neck of the image and buried it.

[...] The image is beaten, insulted, let down into some cleft or cave. It is

²¹ Emphasis as in the original.

clearly a “Carrying out the Death” [...] (1913: 80)

Developing her chronological outline, Harrison notes the convergence of all those connotations in the present ritual of the Spring Feast of Ascension celebrated in Transylvania, in which a puppet symbolizing Death is thrown out of a window. During the Feast, the girls of the village dress up the rough puppet, which must also be carrying a threshed-out sheaf of corn tied into its head and body. Afterwards, the figure is dressed up in girls' clothes and “put [...] at an open window that all the people when they go to vespers may see it” (1913: 69). It is then, once vespers are over, that the puppet is carried at the same time as a hymn is tuned just before the flinging of the Death, which is finally thrown into a river. Moreover, the continuation of the rite becomes of particular significance, whereby: “one of the girls is dressed in the Death's discarded clothes, and the procession again winds through the village. The same hymn is sung. Thus it is clear that the girl is a sort of resuscitated Death” (1913: 70).

Similarly, chiming in with those fertility practices, as well as with the centrality of a certain form of binary polarity within these societies Harrison accounted for the importance of the rites of initiation, whereby the individual accomplished their passage from a life restricted to a closer circle of kinship into a new life within the entire community. Through these rituals, a dual nature was acknowledged for human life, insofar as these initiations celebrated the symbolical death of people's life in isolation to a renewed life as part of the more ample communal circle of their fellow men. Accordingly, the scholar insists upon the dual role of human nature, which ancient cultures viewed as a sign of the prospect of renovation, attested by those allegorical passages from one life into another: “This “initiation” is of tremendous importance [...] These rites are very various, but they all point one moral, that the former things are passed away and that the new-born man has entered on a new life” (1913: 106).

Among those rites, Harrison highlights the relevance of Greek Dithyrambs, which she defines as “the song of the second new birth”, from whence the Dithyrambs, whom she identifies as “He of the double door” by virtue of the etymological origin of the word, “is the twice-born” (1913: 103-4). The scholar describes such practices thus:

With the savage, to be twice born is the rule, not the exception. By his first birth, he comes into the world, by his second, he is born into his tribe. At his first birth he belongs to his mother [...]; at his second he becomes a full-fledged man and passes into the society of the warriors of his tribe (1913: 104).

In connection with Harrison's outline of ancient rituals, another fundamental issue at the core of her analysis is represented by her discussion on the origins of ancient drama. Hereby, insofar as those were rituals of passage, the anthropologist envisioned them as concrete

actualizations of the abstract belief in a mythological organization of the world, whereby, on the basis of those ideological structures, rituals were created as subordinated to the demands of those beliefs. At a certain stage of their development, these rituals evolve into artistic performances. These, which preserved the representational, mimetic aspect of ritual, were yet devoid of the former's pragmatic dimension, whereby drama becomes, not a means, but rather "an end in itself". Indeed, in her chapter "*From Ritual to Art*", Harrison establishes this essential differentiation between rite and drama:

The distinction between art and ritual, which has so long haunted and puzzled us, now comes out quite clearly, and also in part the relation of each to actual life. Ritual, we saw, was a re-representation or a pre-representation, a re-doing or pre-doing, a copy or imitation of life, but, – and this is the important point, – always with a practical end. Art is also a representation of life and the emotions of life, but cut loose from immediate action. Action maybe and often is represented, but it is not that it may lead on to a practical further end. The end of art is in itself. Its value is not mediate but *immediate*. Thus ritual makes, as it were, a bridge between real life and art, a bridge over which in primitive times it would seem man must pass. In his actual life he hunts and fishes and ploughs and sows, being utterly *intent* on the practical end of gaining his food; in the *dromenon*²² of the Spring Festival, though his acts are unpractical, being mere singing and dancing and mimicry his intent is practical, to induce the return of his food-supply. In the drama the representation may remain for a time the same, but the intent is altered: man has come out from action, he is separate from the dancers, and has become a spectator. The drama is an end in itself (1913: 135-6).

Accounting for the features of ancient drama, Harrison emphasizes the democratic character of these early performances, in which – as the scholar notes – "(t)here is no division between actors and spectators". On the contrary, she remarks, in this type of spectacles, "all are actors, all are doing the thing done, dancing the dance danced". As she describes this primitive theatre:

The *theatre* to the Greeks was simply 'the place of seeing, the place where the spectators sat [...]'.²³ But the kernel and centre of the whole was the *orchestra*, the circular *dancing-place*²⁴ of the chorus; and, as the orchestra was the kernel and centre of the theatre, so the chorus, the land of dancing and singing men [...] was the centre and kernel and starting-point of the drama (1913: 123).

Indeed, this form of boundarilessness between participants becomes for Harrison the actual essence of both ritual and early drama, whereby a kind of collective communion, on the basis of the arising of a shared common emotion, is enabled: "(i)t is in the common act, the common or collective emotion, that ritual starts. This must never be forgotten" (1913: 126).

It is precisely this vindication for a decentralized form of artistic creation – derived from a concurrent transformation of the socio-political structures – as well as the emphasis on a more open

²² Emphasis as in the original

²³ Quotation marks in the original.

²⁴ Emphasis as in the original.

and desacralized treatment of life and institutions that caused a particular impact on Modernist artists, insofar as all this chimed in with the core of their anti-hegemonic purposes.

Indeed, [Phillips] T. S. Eliot, who had read some of the works of the scholar, professed great admiration for the ritualist, and referred to her as “of this archaeology of the fact [...] one of our most proficient exponents” (P. Gray, 1982: 141). Actually, he agreed with Harrison on the centrality of religion in human life, as well as on the necessity for the artists to identify themselves with a group after transmuting or surpassing their personal identity. Another of the reasons that, according to Phillips, attracted Modernists such as Lawrence or Faulkner to these accounts of twentieth-century anthropology was the “frank sexuality” of its narrations. In this sense, Harrison had contributed to a popularization and desacralization of gods, at the same time as she was aware of the central role of sexuality in human existence. This bringing down to earth of gods also enabled their incorporation into literary works. Particularly, Harrison shared with the Modernists and other authors writing at the time the spiritual quest that impelled them to the revival of ancient dying-gods. Among these authors, by way of illustration, E. M. Forster was attracted to the image of Adonis and Krishna, whereas Lawrence mainly resorted to the figures of Isis or Quetzalcoatl, and Hemingway adopted the deities Attis and Cybele.

Furthermore, through her ideas on ancient civilizations, Harrison certainly provided a solid bridge between anthropology and most of the concerns of her contemporaries, thereby partaking of some of the major ideas at the heart of Modernist debate. Accordingly, in her account of ancient art, she acknowledged the necessity of an escape from rationality and centralism to the fluid reality of the human being by means of a shift to emotion and closeness. Indeed, through her focus on the primacy of feeling in art, as derived from ritual, Harrison had set the bases for an understanding of the central relevance of collective emotion as a first purpose in the production of art, thus agreeing with other contemporary theories centred on the ideal of a thoroughly integrated life. Such is the case of the French Unanimism of Jules Romains, or Durkheim’s sense of spatial continuity, whereby “(w)e are all of us members of one another” (Harrison, 1915: 48). It was through this form of communal performances, Harrison believed, that this state of ideal union could be achieved. Moreover, in these acts, the whole paraphernalia of masks and disguises becomes essential for the attainment of a dissolution of separate forms of individual consciousness, which become blurred and fusionated into a collective emotion:

They [the dancers] sink their own personality and by the wearing of masks and disguises, by dancing to a common rhythm, above all by the common excitement, they become emotionally one, a true congregation, not a collection of individuals. The emotion they feel collectively, the thing that is more than any individual emotion, they externalize, project; it is the raw-

material of god-head” (1962: 45-6).

At the same time, this insistence on fluidity and continuation represented a destabilization of the idea of the uniqueness of truth and perspective(s), which chimed in with contemporary vindications for the recognition of the multiplicity of reality, as well as of the structure of existence on a plurality of sides and viewpoints. Indeed, Harrison’s ideas on art shared the Modernist conception of both authors and readers, not as autonomous individuals, but rather as creations made up from the cross-current dialogism of different cultures and voices.

Likewise, through her works, Jane Harrison justified the return to mythology of contemporary artists beyond the mere purpose of a search for structural or thematic patterns, but in fact as a quest for a new “religion without a theology” (1962: xiii). This new religion would bring individuals together in the worship, not to a god, but to the group itself, which actually turns into the only deity for its members. Furthermore, in order to arouse this collective emotion that should reunite the formerly separate beings, the scholar recommends a combination – central to Modernist art – between the ancient and the modern and most immediate to both authors and audience. In this attempt, she considered, insofar as “the art that utters and expresses our emotion towards modern life cannot be so simple”, art needs to account for the real chaotic nature of existence (1913: 232).

2. Voyaging Outside Boundaries: Carnival as a Principle of
Transgression in *The Voyage Out*

2. Voyaging Outside Boundaries: Carnival as a Principle of Transgression in *The Voyage Out*.

What I wanted to do was to give the feeling of a vast tumult of life, as various and disorderly as possible, which should be cut short by death, and go on again – and the whole was to have a sort of pattern [...] Do you think it is impossible to get this sort of effect in a novel [...]? (Woolf, 1956: 57, 28th February 1916).

At a first glance, Woolf's title for her first novel – which would succeed, though, an earlier version published in 1912 as *Melymbrosia* – seems to provide a contiguous reference to the journey that takes Rachel Vinrace, a 24-year-old girl, out on a boat trip to South America and from whence she will later set off for an expedition to a native camp. There are *bildungsroman* qualities implied in young Rachel's initiatory voyage from an existence of seclusion onto the experience of real life – thereby comprising her psychological and emotional development, as hurried by the harshness of her interaction with the other characters. Many critics have thus pointed to the metaphorical sense of Rachel's voyage outside her individual boundaries to enter her social coming out. Avrom Fleishman signals the connotational implications of a title which invites to an understanding of the novel as a process of transition and evolution from an original condition towards a transformed state. According to the critic, “[Rachel's] death is not to be seen nearly as the entry of the absurd which cuts off the steady development of the heroine but as the last and highest stage of that development itself” (1977: 5).

In this sense, A. McLaurin remarks the importance of the psychological dimension of the journey, in tune with a reflection of the profound contempt both of the narrator and the protagonist towards the socio-cultural European panorama:

“(t)he main theme of *The Voyage Out* is traditional enough: the journey of a young girl from a sheltered childhood to adult awareness. It is a psychological voyage, into dreams and the 'subconscious', but also an exploration of the world outside European culture, stimulated by a dissatisfaction with” the present situation (1973: 29).

Similarly, J. Hafley conceives a twofold development of the journey. According to the scholar, the voyage actually consists of a bi-directional process, both in an outward and inward sense. Thereby, the real voyage *out*, for the critic, is represented by the trip that is to take Rachel and the rest of the characters from London to South America. On the other hand, the narration also includes a voyage *in*, consisting in the expedition from Santa Marina to the native village of the bank on the Amazon. Concurrently with these spatial movements, Hafley has observed the coincidence of a form of psychological voyage experienced by Rachel at each of these phases. Hence, while the former “serves at once to set the stage and to suggest Rachel's voyage to an

suggest Rachel's voyage to an understanding of life and experience", the second – which takes place "shortly after Rachel and Terence fall in love – coincides with Rachel's voyage to an understanding of herself" (1954: 15).

In any case, it seems clear that the choice of the title was aimed at implying a meaning much beyond the purely physical aspect of the journey, to involve a more complex dimension of replacement and transition. Nevertheless, whereas all these authors pointed to the transformation in Rachel's inner reality, following the *bildungsroman* tradition, the truth is that a desire for transcending literary conventions – even though a radical breakthrough from those existing forms may not be accomplished – underlies the composition of *The Voyage Out*.

In this sense, Hafley has noted Woolf's separation from the Edwardian tradition, profoundly concerned with factual events and clearcut definitions (1954: 10). Certainly, in "*Mrs. Bennet and Mrs. Brown*" Virginia Woolf herself had satirized the narrowness of Edwardian literature, on the grounds of the absolute incapacity of authors such as Galsworthy, Wells and Bennet, whom Woolf defined as the major exponents of this school, to render verisimilar constructions of their characters:

Now it seems to me that to go to these men and ask them to teach you how to write a novel – how to create characters that are real – is precisely like going to a bootmaker and asking him to teach you how to make a watch (1950: 99).

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to affirm that there is a complete separation in *The Voyage Out* from some of the central issues common to Edwardian literature. Hence, like the authors from this period, Woolf portrays a world where heroism has been debunked from the arena of modern life. Yet, while Batchelor points in particular to the impossible upraising of male heroes in the midst of a "modern world [...] inhospitable to heroism" (1982: 23), Woolf anticipates a reality from whence any outstanding figures of leadership are left out of the scene. Thus, beyond the generalized interpretation of the title as metaphoric for the passage of Rachel from a state of infant naivety to a more experienced stage after her entrance into social life, *The Voyage Out* is in fact the "coming out" of a number of characters, whose real identities unfold throughout the narrative.

Thereby, Woolf's first novel takes an essential step towards the patently overt transgression of sexual roles promulgated in her later *Orlando* through the representation of official heterosexuality as the grossly hypocritical antics of contemporary society. As Woolf would claim in her introduction to *The Pargiters* – the first draft for her following novel – she felt herself profoundly endeavoured to "overcome the conventions" and "make use" of the "very queer knowledge" she possessed "about womens bodies for instance – their passions – and so on" (1977: xxxviii-xxxix). Accordingly, even though often by means of covertly implied suggestions

considering the demands of censorship, *The Voyage Out* promulgates the transgression of sexual boundaries through a non-restrictive atmosphere of cross-dressing and homoerotic bondings. Analysing the particularly free promotion of such unrestraint in *Melymbrosia*, the earlier version published three years before *The Voyage Out*, Patricia J. Smith concludes on the latter's enactment of a homosexual “utopia” (1997: 136).

Probably the most obvious instance of homoerotic desire is represented by the pedantic St. John Hirst. A friend of Terence Hewet – the man Rachel becomes engaged to – Hirst would seem to provide an antithetical counterpart to his more socially successful friend. Hence, although not deployed as particularly handsome or brilliant in other respects, Hewet appears more dignified than his companion, whom Rachel envisions as grotesquely disagreeable: “'(u)gly in body, repulsive in mind' [...] She looked at his big head, a disproportionate part of which was occupied by the forehead, and at the direct, severe eyes” (226). Indeed, throughout the narration, Hirst is rendered as scatologically unpleasant:

Greatly to their surprise he raised himself, looked at his watch, and remarked that, as it was now half an hour since luncheon, the gastric juices had had sufficient time to secrete; he was trying a system, he explained, which involved short spells of exercise interspaced by longer intervals of rest (361).

His disgusting remarks remain throughout the narration – “'I wonder if this is what they call an ingrowing toe-nail?' said Hirst, examining the big toe of his left foot” (118).

The narrator's construction of this anti-heroic position becomes patent through Hirst's confession to Hewet, whereby St. John's identity as a kind of fool figure or malcontent is revealed. “'I envy you – some things', said Hirst. 'One: your capacity for not thinking; two: people like you better than they like me. Women like you, I suppose' ” (118). Indeed, portrayed as a creaking rheumatic, he possesses as well the physical features that point him as a mock-version of a heroic type:

A shade of depression crossed his face. 'I've never weighed more than ten stone in my life', he said, 'which is ridiculous, considering my height, and I've actually gone down in weight since we came here. I dare say that accounts for the rheumatism'. Again he jerked his wrist back sharply, so that Helen might hear the grinding of the chalk stones. She could not help smiling.

'It's not laughing matter for me, I assure you', he protested. 'My mother's a chronic invalid, and I'm always expecting to be told that I've got heart disease myself. Rheumatism always goes to the heart in the end.' (229).

Moreover, even the narrative voice reinforces such a ridiculous presentation, completing Hirst's

caricature by the exposure of the character in his nakedness:

When naked of all but his shirt, and bent over the basin, Mr. Hirst no longer impressed one with the majesty of his intellect, but with the pathos of his young yet ugly body, for he stooped, and he was so thin that there were dark lines between the different bones of his neck and shoulders (117).

From the very beginning of his initial presentation in the narration, St. John's feelings towards Terence, beyond pure friendship or admiration, are hinted. Hence, in his vision of society as composed of circles, Hirst's rotundity in answering suggests not only the lack of females in his own circle, but even his plain refusal to admitting them into it. Indeed, it is Hewet – Hirst insists – the only one he accepts within his own restricted area.

'You could draw circles round the whole lot of [people at the hotel], and they'd never stray outside'.

('You can kill a hen by doing that'), Hewet murmured [...]

'There are no female hens in your circle?' asked Hewet.

'Not the ghost of one,' said Hirst (118-9).

Moreover, while Terence soon engages Rachel and demonstrates her his affection, Hirst declares “I don't really like young women...”, at the same time as he appears to adopt a jealous position on advising his friend to be careful (166). On the one hand, without possessing the features of an ideal beauty, Hewet reveals much more pleasing to the eyes of Rachel.

She turned her back on the sea and regarded Hewet with friendly if critical eyes. He was good-looking in the sense that he had always had a sufficiency of beef to eat and fresh air to breath. His head was big; the eyes were also large; though generally vague they could be forcible; and the lips were sensitive. One might account him a man of considerable passion and fitful energy [...]. The breadth of his forehead showed capacity for thought (248-9).

From the moment they are introduced, Hewet begins to manifest a certain dependence on her presence:

Directly Hewet lost sight of her, he felt the old discomfort return, even more strongly than before. Their talk had been interrupted in the middle, just as he was beginning to say the things he wanted to say. After all, what had they been able to say? He ran his mind over the things they'd said, the random, unnecessary things which had eddied round and round and used up all the time, and drawn them so close together and flung them so far apart, and left him in the end unsatisfied, ignorant still of what she felt and of what she was like. What was the use of talking, talking, and merely talking? (253-4).

On first impressions, thus, the character of Hewet seems to represent a positive, heterosexual counterpart to his antagonistic Hirst. In this sense, B. A. Schlack considers Terence as an “excellent foil” for the homosexual Hirst (1979: 13). From a similar view, Caramagno also leaves Terence's heterosexuality unquestioned, describing him as the “would-be modernist, dreamer, and moody lover who yearns for a profound, benevolent fusion with the world and with a woman” (1992: 158). Nevertheless, a deeper analysis in fact reveals a very different intention on the part of the narrator.

Hence, from the very first moment Rachel knows Hewet's Christian name, she soon associates it with “the cry of an owl” – a reference that entails considerable reminiscences of 'Tereus', the male torturer in the myth of Philomela. In the story, which Woolf probably learnt through Ovid's *Metamorphoses* – as B. A. Schlack suggests (1979: 117) – Philomela is raped by King Tereus, who brutally cuts her tongue to prevent her from denouncing him, violating her a second time. In order to escape from the brutal Tereus, Philomela turns into a nightingale and tunes a song as a vindication of her gained freedom. Of course, this allusion represents a reinforcing strategy to expose the inadequacy of conventional relationships, invariably based upon heterosexual images in the panorama of Victorian society – thereby portraying Rachel as the appointed victim of male dominance.

Yet, even more directly, through Rachel's remark, the narrator subtly alludes to Tiresias, the old man whom Minerva – symbolized by an owl – blinded on discovering him violating the privacy of her naked body. It is precisely Tiresias – the visionary creature who reunited both sexes in one single body – the figure Woolf makes us associate with the allegedly masculine youth who is to marry the novel's heroine. Indeed, Terence, who had paradoxically “been [...] instinctively adopting the feminine point of view while talking to Rachel” (241), expresses his rejection against defining categorizations, which he symbolically counterpoises with his desire for “be[ing] allowed to see [things]: one doesn't want *to be things*; one wants merely *to be allowed to see them*”²⁵ (249).

Furthermore, if Tiresias, the hermaphrodite creature, was often described as possessing female breasts hanging upon its body, not accidentally, Hirst, Terence's male companion, suggests a similar feature when he suddenly spurts out “ 'What I abhor most of all [...] is the female breast' ”, at a point in the narrative when St. John recriminates Terence his newly displaced attention onto Rachel. Certainly, throughout the novel, a series of covertly implied hints render Hewet's ambiguity. Whereas – as Lisa Rado has observed – the motif of androgyny and sexual ambiguity was developed by Woolf throughout her whole literary career (2000: 138-9), a very different perspective is adopted by the use of the Tiresias scheme. While, as it has been noted in other

²⁵ Emphasis added.

chapters, the presentation of cross-dressing identities had represented for Woolf a powerful means of defying the restrictiveness of imposed boundaries, the choice of the mythological figure entails a different sign. Hence, even though it certainly promulgates a form of transgression of the monadic point of view, the character of the old hermaphrodite creature cannot be unlinked from the connotations of waste and sterility embodied by the blind visionary – a fact indeed enabling the narrator to carry out the decrowning of the novel's allegedly male hero. Certainly, the most outstanding male figure of the novel – coupled with the female heroine – appears as a hesitating weakling incapable of assuming his actual identity. As Hirst reproaches him:

"I wonder if it's really nice to be as vague as you are?" asked Hirst, looking at him. "It's the lack of continuity – that's what's so odd about you," he went on. "At the age of twenty-seven, which is nearly thirty, you seem to have drawn no conclusions. A party of old women excites you still as though you were three (118).

At a moment of remorse, Terence attempts to warn Rachel about his real identity, informing her of his having great faults, for which he “ought never have asked [her] to marry [him]”. Among these faults, Terence remarks his “never [having] been in love with other women, despite having had some” (327). Tormented by his contradictory feelings, Terence realizes his utter lack of attraction to women, whom “(h)e always found [...] interesting to talk to, and surely these were good reasons why he should wish to go on talking to [Rachel]”. Certainly, the young woman is no exception:

But was not in love with her. Did love begin in that way, with the wish to go on talking? No. It always began in his case with definite physical sensations, and these were now absent, he did not even find her physically attractive (207).

Desirous of escaping from a reality he is not willing to admit, Terence symbolically plunges onto the dark: “[...] he longed for the empty darkness [...] There seemed to be at once a little stability in all this incoherence”. Thus drawn into the shadow – from which he gains confidence to observe Rachel (20) – Terence is brought out by Evelyn, whose conversation together turns out particularly revealing. She was a wholehearted feminist militant, with a tendency to promiscuity, including some lesbian relationships so Evelyn's worldly condition provides her with a sharp ability to notice Hewet's ambiguous sexuality: “'You're just the person I wanted to talk to' [...] I think you understand better than most people' [...] can one be in love with two people at once, or can't one?” (211-13).

Evelyn's testimony serves the narrator as one of the crucial vehicles to bring light on Terence's Tiresian condition. Hence, while she launches a significant suspicion – “'(p)erhaps you're the same as your friend' – she looked at him suspiciously: 'perhaps you don't like me?' ” (214), she

comes to confirm Hewet's duality – “(y)ou look as if you'd got a nice sister, somehow” (212). Nevertheless, Evelyn's realization had occurred much earlier in the novel, at the very moment of Hirst's introduction of his friend. Indeed, through the cryptic joke that takes place between Evelyn and Hirst, with whom she is riding as the group is on their trip to Monte Rosa, crucial revelations come to the surface:

'My name's Evelyn. What's yours?'

'St. John', he said.

'I like that', said Evelyn. 'And what's your friend's name?'

'His initials being Rachel.S.T., we call him Monk', said Hirst.

'Oh, you're all too clever' she said (142-3).

Though unidentified in *The Voyage Out*, Hirst's so-called “Monk” friend had been originally recognized in *Melymbrosia* as Terence. He was Hirst's closer partner throughout the narration, and had even proposed Hirst to share cabin with him (159), and indeed Terence is later addressed by the same nickname when Hirst launches his friend a sharply ironical remark. Hence, mocking the overwhelming cowardice that characterizes Hewet, Hirst ridicules Terence's absurd pretence of heterosexuality and his imminent intention of marriage.

'Did you congratulate the young couple?' [...]

'No, we didn't congratulate them', said Hewet. 'They seemed very happy'.

'Well', said Hirst, pursing up his lips, 'so long as we needn't marry neither of them - '

'We were very much moved', said Hewet.

'I thought you'd be,' said Hirst. 'Which was it, Monk? The thought of the immoral passions, or the thought of new-born males to keep the Roman Catholics out? I assure you', he said to Helen, 'he's capable of being moved by either' (158).

Furthermore, Hewet's pseudonym entails further connotations. Thus transformed into a monk, his homoerotic relationship with Hirst – whose first name is St. John – soon becomes evident for Evelyn, who states – “Oh, you're all too clever” (143) when she becomes aware of the cryptic reference of the nickname. In fact, both the saint and the monk turn out – in Woolf's desire for effecting the demolition of constraining traditional values – become actors of one of the blasphemous parodies that recur throughout her narrative. Such derisive performances – or, as Bakhtin has called them, *parodias sacras* (1984: 127) – certainly emerge as a desire for bringing

down the sacred and officially high. Accordingly, it is precisely in the midst of an Exodus-like expedition towards ascension, on the backs of donkeys, with St. John marshalling the animals “(b)y means of a few words of caustic Latin”, that the Monk is introduced. Nevertheless, it is the realization of Terence's further dimension that certainly magnifies the utterly irreverent tone of this episode, whereby Terence comes to embody an actual Christian saint.

Hence, Woolf's choice of “Euphrosyne” as the name of the boat with which the action starts suggests a not at all accidental decision. Indeed, at the same time as the Greek term for “mirth, joy”, its coincidence with the name of one of the Three Graces stamps on this allusion an imprint of allegorical reliability. Accordingly, at the same time as this reference announces the carnivalistic promise of renewal and joy, further connotations of this term set the bases for the ultimate intention underlying Woolf's novel.

Thus, “Euphrosyne” was also the title of a privately printed anthology of juvenilia by some of the Bloomsbury members, including Leonard Woolf, Clive Bell, or Lytton Strachey, about which Woolf herself also wrote a mock-review ridiculing the pedantic pretensions of these male dons (Q. Bell, 1979: 316). Therefore, anticipating a technique the narrator would also employ in her last work – *Between the Acts* – where her resurrection of the figure of St. Swithin, as embodied by the homonym Lucy, serves to debunk traditional values and one-sidedness, Woolf partly re-enacts here the legend of St. Euphrosyne with similarly subversive purposes. As the story goes, St. Euphrosyne was the only daughter of Paphnutius, a rich man of Alexandria, who desired to marry her to a wealthy youth. Yet, opting instead for a life of celibacy and asceticism and seeing no other means of keeping her vow, Euphrosyne decided to cross-dress as a man so that she gained admittance into a monastery of men, where she lived for thirty eight years after. The abbot, impressed by the rapid strides toward a perfect ascetic life made by the new monk – and unaware of her real identity – committed her to Paphnutius, who, appealing for comfort in his sorrow, received it from his own daughter, whom he failed to recognize (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05606c.htm>).

Likewise, if the ship's name provided an allegorical frame for the homosexual reality on board, a similar function accomplishes the spontaneous song tuned by Ridley little before Rachel's death. Anticipatory of the night's events – “(t)he friend who blinds the eyes of men, that night he had his will” – the song reverberates in both “the minds of Terence and St. John all the morning as a half comprehended refrain”. Paradoxically, while they only half-consciously perceive it, the song – a fragment from Kingsley's “The Ballad of Jane Shore” – describes the “wrestling up and down” of the heroes, who finally, “(l)ike stags full spent, among the bent / they dropped awhile to rest”.

Even though by means of oblique allusions, Ridley's song places Terence and John among

“the bent” – a fact which emphasizes the curiously trivial thoughts that arise between Rachel and Terence in loneliness. Indeed, only implicitly trivial thoughts occur right after Terence, remorseful for attempting to marry Rachel despite his sexual preferences, decides to confess her the truth. Nevertheless, feeling incapable of undressing his condition, Terence changes the topic towards a catalogue of superfluous matters.

Now he would attempt again to tell her his faults, and why he loved her; and she would describe what she had felt at this time or at that time, and together they would interpret her feeling. So beautiful was the sound of their voices that by degrees they scarcely listened to the words they framed. Long silences came between their words, which were no longer silences of struggle and confusion but refreshing silences, in which trivial thoughts moved easily. They began to speak naturally of ordinary things, of the flowers and the trees, how they grew there so red, like garden flowers at home, and there bent and crooked like the arm of a twisted old man (326-7).

In the midst of this atmosphere, in which Terence's remark “I'm a man, not a woman” has brought about “the overpowering sense of unreality”, and where the “body of his was unreal; the whole world was unreal” (329), the image of “the flowers and the trees [...] growing bent and crooked” becomes paradoxically symbolical. Certainly, the “garden flowers” turning “bent and crooked” constitute a grotesque allegorical deformation of the situation of respectable marriages. They metaphorically represent the evolution of traditional Victorian images based on a farcical pretension of respectability and righteousness – a reality Terence foresees as tragically inexorable. Precisely by virtue of his homosexual condition, Terence pictures the future evolution of his possible marriage to Rachel – a wedlock significantly condemned to turn “bent”. Indeed, while paradoxically occupied in writing a novel called “Silence”, it is precisely his own resort to such a masking of truth and “crooked” living of his real sexuality in compliance with conventional models of behaviour that will prompt forth Terence's decrowning. Accordingly, immediately after his hypocritical display of sincerity in front of Rachel, when “(l)ong silences [...] between their words” (329) have arisen, Terence becomes the target of global mockery, in which the very elements of nature surrounding him partake. Hence, no sooner has he confirmed “ '(t)his is happiness' ” than “(v)oces crying behind them” are heard in the background, while Terence experiences the anguishing realization of his name repeated with a giggle-like quality “in short, dissevered syllables” – by “the crack of a dry branch or the laughter of a bird”, at the same time as “(t)he grasses and breezes sound [...] and murmure all round them” (330).

On the other hand, if through Mr. Ambrose's song, Hewet and Hirst were surrounded by the bent, another symbolically “bent” character is Mr. Pepper. While from the very beginning he appears as a patently grotesque character, his implicit connection with that bent quality – as in the

case of Terence / Tiresias – points to homosexuality, which adds to his waste condition. Indeed, satirically portrayed as a “little man who was bent as some trees are by a gale on one side of them” (9), Pepper's ridiculousness becomes evident. Likewise, a new hint about Pepper's obscure sexual personality is subtly insinuated through Woolf's description of his absurdly methodical habit of scheduling authors by month – “he devoted January to Petronius, February to Catullus” (22). Additionally, these authors happen to constitute, as B. A. Schlack observes, “outstanding examples of classical obscenity” (1979: 10).

A testimony of the inertness and absolute paralysis of a patriarchy-rooted society, Pepper becomes one of the grotesquely distorted figures representing the class of educated males so absorbed by their own “vanity, egotism, megalomania” that they are incapable of taking further action than that of “ascending [...] pulpits, preaching, money-making, administering justice” (Woolf 1996: 199, 126). Indeed, profoundly concerned with the evils and harm emerging from a tyrannical male-oriented system, the narrator especially emphasizes the grotesqueness entailed by the priggish and misogynistic character, whose very name explicitly remarks his ridiculous pettiness. As Mrs. Dalloway – already appearing in this novel – expresses it in a letter:

Oh, I'd forgotten there's a dreadful little thing called Pepper. He's just like his name. He's indescribably insignificant, and rather queer in his temper, poor dear. It's like sitting down to dinner with an ill-conditioned fox-terrier, only one can't comb him out, and sprinkle him with powder, as one would one's dog. It's a pity, sometimes, one can't treat people like dogs! (50)

Moreover, sharing the same unreal inertness of the gargoyle-characters in *The Years*, Pepper turns into the grotesquely ambivalent image of a corpse lodged within a superficially living body:

A glance into the next room revealed little more than a nose, prominent above the sheets. Growing accustomed to the darkness, for the windows were open and showed grey squares with splinters of starlight, one could distinguish a lean form, terribly like the body of a dead person, the body indeed of William Pepper, asleep too (115).

In tune with this dual identity dead/alive, while the acid scholar despises an acquaintance of his, a so-called Jenkinson of Cats, for his collecting fossils, he turns into a risible “fossilized fish” Rachel grasps and eventually drops at her will.

'It's odd that everyone should be an old friend of Mr. Pepper's', Rachel started [...] 'He's like this', said Rachel, lighting on a fossilized fish in a basin, and displaying it [...] 'His heart's a piece of old shoe leather', Rachel declared, dropping the fish”. (14-5)

Thus transformed into an utterly inert “insignificant thing”, another form of reification comes to reinforce his artificial immobility, at the same time as it brings about the scapegoat dimension of fool figures. Hereby, the image of Mr. Pepper “crinkl[ing] his cheeks as though they had been cut in wood” certainly parallels the similarly quality Woolf would employ in the character of Rev. Streatfield as an “irrelevant [wooden] forked stake” in *Between the Acts* (171). Likewise, if Streatfield had also experienced the derision of airplanes debasing his attempts for authority, or the cows mocking him – on this occasion, it will also be nature the agent of Pepper's dethroning. Hence, no sooner has the scholar raised himself as the announcer of the ship's setting sail than “(t)he chuckling and hissing of water” become plainly audible (11). This episode retains significant parallels with a rather similar scene in *Three Guineas*, in which one of these self-encumbered lecturers becomes immediately dethroned by the very elements of nature, while a certain association between the scholar and some “stale fish” comes to the surface:

We are in a lecture room, rank with the fumes of the stale print, listening to a gentleman who is forced to lecture or to write every Wednesday, every Sunday, about Milton or about Keats, while the lilac shakes its branches in the garden free, and the gulls, swirling and swooping, suggest with wild laughter that such stale fish might with advantage be tossed to them (1996: 218).

The implied suggestion of homosexuality in Pepper becomes general to most males in the novel. In this sense, the recurrent allusion to male interest in the work of the ancient Greeks serves as a cryptic metaphor prompting their plunge into an Edenic, homoerotic world serving as an escape from defining sexual labels. Accordingly, Ridley Ambrose remains completely absorbed into his editing of Pindar's poems, an occupation which leads him to keep “some thousand miles distant from the nearest human being, who in this household was inevitably a woman”, while “he worked his way further and further into the heart of the poet” (191). Indeed, desirous for the cross-dressing panorama offered by the ancient Greek world, Ridley's recommendation for Mrs. Thornbury to read *The Symposium* when she exclaims, “You men! Where would you be if it weren't for women!” (224) becomes decisively illuminating of his homoerotic desires, in tune with Plato's work. Certainly, dated from 385 B.C., *The Symposium* stands – as L. Sage remarks (1992: 443n) – as one of his most explicitly homosexual *Dialogues*.

It is precisely the hypocrisy of these pretendedly-masculine males, who paradoxically happen to be the actual artifices of social labels and defining forms of categorization, that will irremediably force their own decrowning. Hence, both Mr. Ambrose and Mr. Thornbury become associated with different forms of debased, worn-out figures of male power and dominion which become mere caricatures of those original referents. Accordingly, the earliest allusion to Ridley in

the novel presents him as a ridiculous character laughed at by a group of children, whereas his attempts for attack turn out to be “grotesque merely”. Not accidentally, the vexatious name hurled by the children as an insult evokes – as B. A. Schlack (1979: 8) has noted – the tyrannical villain who systematically murdered his wives:

The Embankment juts out in angles here and there, like pulpits; instead of preachers, however, small boys occupy them, dangling string, dropping pebbles, or launching wads of paper for a cruise. With their sharp eye for eccentricity, they were inclined to think Mr. Ambrose awful; but the quickest-witted cried ‘Bluebeard!’ as he passed. In case they should proceed to tease his wife, Mr. Ambrose flourished his stick at them, upon which they decided that he was grotesque merely, and four instead of one cried ‘Bluebeard!’ in chorus (4).

A further step in Ridley's decrowning symbolically occurs in the midst of a similarly grotesque panorama. Symptomatic of an outmoded, prescription-enclosed society, the Victorian zeal for moulding truths to an unrealistic idealization results in the senseless concealment of vital experiences, as in the case of the “bold lovers, sheltered behind one cloak [...] seem[ing] sordid, past their passion”. Allegorical of this utopian construct of society, founded upon the rigid establishment of strictly discrete compartments, also “the red, yellow, and blue flowers, whose heads were pressed together [which] would not blaze epitomize the artificiality of conventional categories and divisions” which Ridley incongruously militates for: “[Mr. Ambrose] walking with a quick rhythmic stride, jerking his free hand occasionally, was either a Viking or a stricken Nelson” (6).

Like Mr. Ambrose, the “stricken” combatant solely clamoured for mockery and disrespect, and Pepper, who genuinely experiences the derisive intervention of his surroundings, Mr. Thornbury's rendering is no more dignified. Hence, Thornbury's connection with a heroic image turns him into merely a “weather-beaten” figure of seemingly an old worn-out warrior, on whose face only some ridiculous traces of red paint still remain as the signs of his former splendour (124).

Whereas the agents of patriarchal dictatorship reveal their obvious grotesqueness and condition of powerlessness, it is women who rise as the potential promoters of renewal and change. Hereby, in opposition to the function of cross-dressing as a means of unmasking the feeble reality of all pretentious males, female transvestism becomes associated with the inexhaustible power of women as generators of life and regeneration. Hence, in contrast to the male element in the novel – decrowned and humiliated to a ridiculous portrait of derisive impotence – females appear as the actual sites of reforming energy and authority, frequently crossing the boundaries imposed upon gender roles and identity in defiance to patriarchal impositions. In this sense, throughout the

narrative, different instances of female transvestism endow women with the position of leadership males no longer enjoy. Significantly, the earliest image of Evelyn, the liberal, deploys her as a resolute lady “leading royalist troops into action”, at the same time as she determinedly commands Hirst to ride with her. This would be covertly symptomatic, if we are to understand this reference as one of the cryptic messages in Woolf's novel, of the sexual liberation that begins to develop during the earlier decades of the twentieth century, as will be discussed. Furthermore, dreaming of being one of Garibaldi's combatants, she expresses a wish which implies overcoming gender borders:

(o)h, if [...] instead of a picnic party, this was a party of patriots, and she, red-shirted like the rest, had lain among grim men, flat on the turf, aiming her gun at the white turrets beneath them, screening her eyes to pierce through the smoke! (144).

Similarly, Evelyn manifests her inconformity with gender patterns precisely in front of Mr. Perrott – her aspirant lover:

'If I were you', said Evelyn [...] 'I'd raise a troop and conquer some great territory and make it splendid. You'd want women for that. I'd love to start life from the very beginning [...]' (151).

Remarkably, in her renovating desire to conquer a land so as to start a new socio-political organization afresh, in which both men and women would collaborate, it is not violence that determines the battleship – there were no guns to be aimed at bodies – but “another kind of warfare” (145). As it has become evident, this type of fight undoubtedly amounted for Woolf to the radical demolition of the solid hierarchies and divisions built by patriarchal dominance. Indeed, when she writes in 1931 “I admit fighting to the death for votes, wages, peace” (*Letters IV*: 333), she is actually – as J. Berman notes – writing of “her commitment to the Women's Co-operative Movement agenda of international pacifism and to the Fabian socialist approach to economic equality” (in Pawlowski, 2001: 109).

Considering that one of the chief instruments of patriarchal tyranny had consisted in the clear-cut definition of sexual roles, a challenge to the fixity of imposed categories certainly represented a fundamental step for destabilizing and eroding constraining patterns. Indeed, a growing tendency after the World War I, often connected with the disempowerment and ‘feminization’ of a large portion of male population, who had become severely impaired, either physically, psychically, or both (Bourke 1989: 199-200) impelled a good number of women to start on a new, less constraining feminine role – they began to wear male clothes and uniforms. Indeed, Woolf was not alien to this practice. She who lived the close example of her cross-dressing lover, Vita-Sackville West, notably an instance of liberating multiplicity and the flowing of an unrestricted

existence to which Woolf would not remain impassive. As Vita expressed her experience: “I hold the conviction that as centuries go on [...] the sexes [will] become more nearly merged on account of their increasing resemblances”. Moreover, she also defended her belief that “cases of dual personality do exist, in which the feminine and the masculine elements alternately preponderate”. Like her close friend, Woolf shared this fluidity of being which, rather than strictly labelled and univocal, possessed a multiple and illimitable self-reality (1989: 330).

In this sense, also Mrs. Thornbury transvestites as a young pilot – a sight in which, purposefully, any war weapons have been replaced by the unusual picture of the lady holding a sandwich. Nevertheless, as soon as males enter this imagined warfare, violence overleaps the lady's depiction, whereby she becomes “covered with little creatures” – symbolically the “polished bodies” spreading “between the stones of the ruin” (148):

At Hewet's suggestion it was decided to adopt the methods of modern warfare against an invading army. The table-cloth represented the invaded country, and round it they built barricades of baskets, set up the wine bottles in a rampart, made fortifications of bread and dug fosses of salt. When an ant got through it was exposed to a fire of bread-crumbs, until Susan pronounced that that was cruel [...] (149).

Furthermore, in tune with the debunking of traditional gender typologies through this form of cross-dressing, the notion of the flying female/androgynous entails further meanings within the schema of carnival politics. The image of “the high-flying female body in space” became during the earlier decades of the twentieth century – as M. Russo has signalled – “a thrilling and icon of elopement, an instance of the gendered sublime, of progress, of modernity, and freedom” (1993: 29) both in Europe and the United States. While obviously transgressive from a social point of view, for Russo this representation of aeriality situates the body within the discourse of the female grotesque, standing as a clear disruption of spatial confinements.

In consonance with the disempowerment of males, female characters in *The Voyage Out* – chiming in with carnival theory, which locates the source of regenerative power in the woman – arise as the potential sites of vitality and renewal: “For the time, her own body was the source of all the life in the world, which tried to burst forth here – there – and was repressed now by Mr. Bax, now by Evelyn, now by the imposition of ponderous stupidity, the weight of the entire world” (300). Certainly, Rachel evokes Bakhtin's notion of the female body as connected with the reproductive material principle of the womb. As R. Ginsburg has noted, “(t)he true meaning of the *material bodily principle* that dominates the grotesque as expressed in carnival laughter is the *material bodily principle*²⁶” (1993: 173).

²⁶ Emphasis as in the original.

Indeed, Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque body as submitted to a perpetual process of becoming and regeneration would find a representative example in the Kertch terracotta figurines of senile, though pregnant hags, he describes in his *Rabelais*: "(e)ntre las célebres figuras de terracota de Kertch, [...] se destacan ancianas embarazadas cuya vejez y embarazo son grotescamente subrayados. Recordemos, además, que esas ancianas [...] ríen" (1984b: 29).

Closely dovetailed with this conception of the feminine, Bakhtin emphasized the ceaseless regenerative power of the Earth, thus retrieving an essential connection with the maternal body, deriving from an anthropological basis which looks back at ancient mythological beliefs: "(e)n el realismo grotesco, [...] la tierra es el principio de absorción (la tumba y el vientre), y a la vez de nacimiento y resurrección, el seno materno (1984b: 30).

Significantly, in the opening scene of the Embankment, Woolf retrieves the same old, decaying "sodden hags" that partake in the grotesque atmosphere wherein Ridley's decrowning takes place (6).

Hence, for Bakhtin, the grotesque body of carnival imagery is an ever-pregnant body, containing both poles of life and death – a senile pregnant hag, as he identified it – on the verge of dying, yet laughing at the life that is to come. In this sense, Bakhtin's emphasis on the maternal womb is indissolubly linked to the lower stratum, which he envisions as the zone where reproduction and a new birth take place in an ever-conceiving and renovating process. In Bakhtin's words:

En el realismo grotesco, la degradación de lo sublime no tiene un carácter formal o relativo. Lo «alto» y lo «bajo» poseen allí un sentido completa y rigurosamente *topográfico*²⁷. [...] [L]a tierra es el principio de absorción (la tumba y el vientre), y a la vez de nacimiento y resurrección (el seno materno). [...] En su faz *corporal* [...] lo alto está representado por el rostro (la cabeza), y lo bajo por los órganos genitales, el vientre y el trasero. El realismo grotesco y la parodia medieval se basan en estas significaciones absolutas. Rebajar consiste en aproximar a la tierra, entrar en comunión con la tierra concebida como un principio de absorción y *al mismo tiempo* de nacimiento: al degradar se amortaja y se siembra a la vez, se mata y se da a luz algo superior. [...] La degradación cava la tumba corporal para dar lugar a un *nuevo* nacimiento. De allí que no tenga exclusivamente un valor negativo sino también positivo y regenerador: es *ambivalente*, es a la vez negación y afirmación. No es sólo disolución en la nada y en la destrucción absoluta sino también inmersión en lo inferior productivo, donde se efectúa precisamente la concepción y el renacimiento, donde todo crece profusamente (Bakhtin, 1984b: 25-6).

²⁷ All emphasis as in the original.

Likewise, in this atmosphere surrounding the presence of the “sordid” couples and “sodden hags” that serves as the context for Ridley's debasement, Woolf strategically includes the powerfully symbolical image of the Sphinx. Identified by Greek mythology as a “female archetype of woman as death-bringer” (Carpentier, 1998: 58) the Sphinx embodies the concept of the omnipotent Earth-mother or grave-womb – according to the carnival paradigm – that swallows and degrades so as to prompt forth fruitfulness and regeneration. Furthermore, like the earth, which swallows up those in need of transformation, and therefore unfitting for a productive existence, the Sphinx will also devour anyone incapable of understanding the absolute imperative of destroying anachronous systems of values. Of course, its presence in Woolf's novel turns out essential within its carnival parameters. Accordingly, a crucial overlapping between this figure and the image of the weeping Helen Ambrose, who comes thereby to embody the mythological character, is entailed. Indeed, at the very moment Ridley is contemplating his lamenting wife, the figure of “the polished Sphinx” irrupts into his vision. It is in front of this Sphinx-Helen that the “supplicating” Ridley, incapable of solving her question – “ 'You can't possibly understand' ” – is appointed as one of the unfit victims that are to be symbolically disposed of.

Not accidentally, while weeping for her children – as it is fitting, on the grounds of Helen's Mother-Earth dimension – Ridley shows further evidence of his absolute inadequacy. Hence, entertained with the postcard seller, the scholar appears as the absurd defender of a system that, to all forebodings, reveals itself clearly meaningless. Of massive circulation in England at the turn of the century – as M. Wollaeger has remarked – postcards represented a solid means of imperialistic propaganda. Hereby, in the midst of a culture of public exhibition, postcards “contribut[ed] to imperial stereotyping by disseminating primitivism images of indigenous peoples during the peak of England's global dominance” (2001: 44).

In this sense, emblematic of the ideal utopia construed around English society by the artifices of Empire and patriotism, those idyllic postcards Ridley seems fascinated by, constituted at the same time, a meaningful example of the artificiality of the patterns imposed throughout generations by the patriarchal system, rooted on a perniciously biased form of education.

That, however, is a question for you to answer. The question which concerns us is what possible help we can give you in protecting culture and intellectual liberty – we, who have been shut out from the universities so repeatedly, and are only now admitted so restrictedly; we who have received no paid-for education whatsoever, or so little that we can only read our own tongue and write our own language, we who are, in fact, members not of the intelligentsia but of the ignorantsia? (1996: 204).

It is this ideally blue and bucolic England, solely created to mask the reality “on the other side of that” upon which girls' education is founded, that Rachel finds “so detestable”: “ 'What is so

detestable in this country', she exclaimed, 'is the blue – always blue sky and blue sea. It's like a curtain – all the things one wants are on the other side of that' ” (351). Recurrently throughout the novel, Helen's identification with the Sphinx remains. Hence, during the ball celebrated on board, Hirst admires Helen's “largeness and simplicity, which made her stand out from the rest like a great stone woman” (150), just a little before Hewet envisions her sitting “in an arm-chair, with her hands on the arm of it, so – looking ahead of her, with her great big eyes” (207). Powerfully emblematic of the destruction by devouring, the motif of the Sphinx serves Woolf to introduce the carnivalesque acts of swallowing. Accordingly, in her embodiment as the mythological creature, Helen symbolically devours a corrupt party of waste males whose clinginess to a rotted system of conventional norms results in a vulgar fakery of a ‘silenced’ reality. One of the central features in a carnivalesque act of devouring – Bakhtin underlined – consists in the merging of bodies, which intermingle to the extent of annihilating any possibility of distinction between the consuming and the consumed body (1984b: 251).

In this process, Bakhtin underlined the act of devouring as central to grotesque realism, as well as to the phase of destruction that is a precedent for transformation and the springing of a new life.

Lo “inferior para el realismo grotesco es la tierra que da vida y el seno carnal; lo inferior es siempre un *comienzo*²⁸ [...] El infierno carnavalesco es la tierra que *devora*²⁹ y procrea [...] Por lo tanto lo terrible y extraterrenal son convertidos en *tierra*³⁰; es decir, en madre nutricia que devora para procrear algo nuevo más grande y mejor” (1984: 26, 86-7).

Accordingly, like the earth that swallows up men, the body becomes the symbolical grave body where a fusion between the consuming and the consumed body occurs. It is through this fusion and erasure of boundaries that renewal is fostered and enabled. As Bakhtin puts it:

Las imágenes del banquete están estrechamente ligadas a las del cuerpo grotesco. Es a veces difícil trazar una frontera precisa entre ambas, a tal punto están orgánica y esencialmente vinculadas, [produciéndose] una mezcla de cuerpos que comen y cuerpos comidos (1984: 251).

Likewise, aware of Terence's falsity on trying to pretend his heterosexuality, Helen appoints Hewet as one of the male victims to be raked out from society. Thus, in the midst of a scene reminiscent of Bakhtin's cannibalism, their bodies become confused, so that Helen “seemed to fade into Hewet” (170).

Furthermore, the agentive role of Helen in this devouring action becomes evident in a

²⁸ Emphasis as in the original.

²⁹ Emphasis added.

³⁰ Emphasis as in the original.

particularly violent image near the end of the novel. Hence, in one of the hallucinatory episodes Rachel experiences during her illness, she envisions an old woman – whom she had recognized in a previous appearance as her aunt – beheading a man with a knife. Significantly, it is immediately after Terence had kissed Rachel – a scene that occurs in Helen's presence – that Rachel's vision takes place: “[Rachel] opened [her eyes] completely when he kissed her. But she only saw an old woman slicing a man's head off with a knife” (395).

In the description of carnival feasts, Bakhtin had also remarked the relevance of dismemberments and carvings as an essential part of these banquet celebrations (1984b: 251). Moreover, these forms of ritual mutilations count, as well, with an anthropological precedent in primitive versions of carnival celebrations. Thus, as discussed in the analysis of *Mrs. Dalloway*, among the carnivalesque batterings, Frazer had observed the Roman custom of cutting the throat of the appointed member which he considered as the necessary victim previous to subsequent renewal. Likewise, in his examination of patterns of tribal initiation rites, Mircea Eliade points out the hero's passage over a bridge “as [...] sharp as a knife blade” as explicitly a variation of his passage through “the mouth [...] of the Mother Earth” (1958: 108).

At the same time, this ferocious portrayal of the woman as the “engulfing mother” or “castrator/decapitator of the male” – according to E. Grosz's description of this form of prefiguration of the female (1990: 96) – corresponds to Freud's theory concerning sexual development. According to the psychologist, the fear experienced by the boy on the sight of female genitals, which he envisions as a *vagina dentata* that threatens to either devour or castrate the male, victimizes him to the extent of infusing in him the horror of castration (1963: 212-3). While this confirms Terence's status as a victim, Freud's theory indeed insists upon the homosexual condition Woolf had implied in most of her patriarchal representatives in *The Voyage Out*. Hence, chiming in with the general vision of Helen as an omnipotent stone goddess or Sphinx-figure, her image as a decapitating villain reinforces Freud's connection between this “representation of woman as a being who frightens and repels” and the strong tendency among the Greeks to male homosexuality.

Furthermore, it is in this episode of Helen's devouring at the boat's ball the issue of males' homoerotic preferences is brought up. Significantly, a veiled identification of Mr. Ambrose with Pindar – precisely, a Greek poet into whom he struggles to reach “further and further” – is suggested through Helen's ambiguous answer about her husband – which only superficially is intended as a concise response about her husband's occupations:

But he was not in love with her. Did love begin in that way, with the wish to go on talking? No. It always began in his case with definite physical sensations, and these were now absent, he did not even find her physically

attractive. [...] He always found girls interesting to talk to, and surely these were good reasons why he should wish to go on talking to her; and last night, [...] and Helen in an arm-chair, with her hands on the arm of it, so – looking ahead of her, with her great big eyes – oh no, they'd be talking, of course, about the dance. [...] he exclaimed, "How d'you know what you feel, Hirst?" to stop himself from thinking.

[...] the other people with their aimless movements and their unknown lives were disturbing, so that he longed for the empty darkness (207).

M. Eliade notes another variant of the devouring act, or perilous return to the womb, whereby “the hero is swallowed by a sea monster” (1958: 52). In consonance with this fearful apprehension of females, Pepper's delight in his scatological descriptions of submarine monsters become powerfully symptomatic of that horror. Hence, his renderings of the “blind monsters lying curled on the ridges of sand at the bottom of the sea” (18) – which significantly causes Ridley's revolt – parallels Rachel, who, in tune with Pepper's account, comes to embody the fearful sea monster:

At last the faces went further away; she fell into a deep pool of sticky water, which eventually closed over her head. *She saw nothing*³¹ and heard nothing [...] While her tormentors thought she was dead, she was not dead, but curled up at the bottom of the sea (397-8).

Included within the class of patriarchal icons – by virtue of his profound misogynistic convictions, as well as his boastful pedantry – St. John Hirst is also appointed as obliquely one of those castrated males. Indeed, in a powerful suggestive scene, in which Rachel experiences an orgasmic reaction at the sight of “(t)he forms of great black trees r[ising] massively in front of her”, she purposefully emphasizes the contrast between these obviously phallic trees and Hewet's friend.

She stood in the middle of the pale square of light which the window she had opened threw upon the grass. The forms of great black trees rose massively in front of her. She stood still, looking at them, shivering slightly with anger and excitement. She heard the trampling and swinging of the dancers behind her, and the rhythmic sway of the waltz music.

"There are trees," she said aloud. Would the trees make up for St. John Hirst? (173).

As it is fitting to his condition, another form of swallowing is suggested for Hirst, implicitly devoured by a powerfully symbolic triangular shape: “Helen sat and looked at him with her needle in her hand. From her position she saw his head in front of the dark pyramid of a magnolia-tree” (234). Whereas a symbolic association between the female genitals and this triangular shape comes

³¹ Emphasis added.

to light, the female connotations of this pyramidal magnolia tree are reinforced by considering the original connection between Helen and the pyramids of Egypt. In the earlier drafts of *Melymbrosia*, Helen – formerly Lucilla Mrs. Ambrose – defines “herself [...] as old as the Pyramids” (Haller, 1983: 97).

Insofar as Helen's transposition to the ancient world reinforces her identity as the Great Mother, Hirst's passage into her uterus-womb acquires particular relevance. Hence, as it pertains to his being devoured, St. John experiences the degradation and ridiculization Bakhtin pinpoints as essential for the forthcoming renewal. Thus, the omnipotent Helen, confirmed as “possess[ing] the sublimity of a woman's of the early world” and the spinner of men's thread of fate, takes Hirst's “head in front of the dark pyramid of a magnolia tree” (234). Significantly, as an epitome of female genitals, the tree is blossomed with “smooth”, “heavy wax-like flowers” – reminiscent of bodily fluids – while at the same time the “beautiful bush spread[s] very widely”. In contrast, St. John's appearance displays the undignified quality of the rest of martyr-males:

[H]is face – he had thrown his hat away, his hair was rumped, he held his eye-glasses in his hand, so that a red mask appeared on either side of his nose – [he] was so worried and garrulous (235).

In fact, Woolf implies, the dethroning undergone by males – both within the fictional context of the novel and in its external social referent – merely stems from the tyrannical organization of a patriarchal society which fails to attain equilibrium in favour of a more logically structured existence. Hence, while exclusively centred upon a male-oriented system, the patriarchal oligarchy ruling over Victorian society had systematically interred the co-existence of a female reality, which it incessantly submitted to a cruel victimage. It is actually this profound obliteration operated by the patriarchal law that threatens to provoke an irremediable fracture of male dominance which – at the least sign of female empowerment – becomes profoundly debased and haunted by the most unbearable primitive terror of the unknown: “I believe we still don't know in the least how [women] live, or what they feel, or what they do precisely” (245).

In tune with this, the narrator in *The Voyage Out* deploys a social edifice still deeply imbued with the dictations of the patriarchal rule. Moreover, these fatherly precepts have been paradoxically assumed by women, whose conformist attitude and active participation in male aspirations results in their inevitable destruction. Hence, according to the narrator, this conspiracy to mask a society idealistically rendered, in which sexual identity is discarded, turns society into a grotesquely bestialized jungle-like existence.

If, in her last novel, Virginia Woolf had chosen the figure of Rev. Streatfield, the decrowned priest in *Between the Acts*, as the indirect spokes-voice for one of the central messages of the text – the necessity of promoting the erosion of boundaries in favour of a democratic non-hierarchical structure of society – a similar resort is employed in Woolf's first novel. If Rev. Streatfield would serve, to a certain extent, as a spokesperson for one of the messages at the core of the novel – “what if one spirit animates the whole?” (*Between the Acts*: 180) – yet maintaining the narrator's decentralizing purpose, a precedent to this is established in *The Voyage Out*. Nonetheless, it is not until the debunking of Mr. Bax's assumed authority and the organized religious edifice that supports him, that the parson becomes allowed to accomplish his commitment as a herald.

Hereby, from the very early deployment of his features, Mr. Bax appears as undignified as the narratively subverted mass – notably close to Bakhtin's notion of ‘*parodia sacra*’ (1984a: 127) he presides:

Standing in the pulpit he looked very large and fat; the light coming through the greenish unstained window-glass made his face appear smooth and white like a very large egg (267).

Significantly, Mr. Bax's portrayal is in tune with Woolf's indignation for the Church as a major site of patriarchal dominion. Moreover, noticing the necessity for Church ministers to resort to both theological and psychological reasons as a means of justifying female inadequacy for the ecclesiastical profession, Woolf had detected the roots of this assumed truth in the form of fear, deeply sown in women by patriarchal rule. Accordingly, the narrator would particularly attack contemporary justifications for patriarchal hegemony on the basis of a form of psychological inferiority of women, derived from a 'castration complex' or 'infantile fixation' – as Prof. Grensted, a Cambridge expert on Christian Philosophy, had argued. According to the Professor:

(I)t is clear that the general acceptance of male dominance, and still more of feminine inferiority, resting upon subconscious ideas of woman as 'manqué', has its background in infantile conceptions of this type. These commonly, and even usually, survive in the adult, despite their irrationality, and betray their presence, below the level of conscious thought, by the strength of the emotions to which they give rise. It is strongly in support of this view that the admission of women to Holy Orders, and especially to the ministry of the sanctuary, is so commonly regarded as something shameful (Grensted, 79-87).

Hereby, Mr. Bax – one of whose main concerns amounts to reminding women of their duties towards the maintenance of the status of their brilliant and most successful fathers – comes to embody Woolf's satirical identification of the sex shame implanted by male tyrannical preponderance as precisely “an egg”. As she explained it:

They have shown why the outsiders, even when there is no question or financial dependence, may still be afraid to speak freely or to experiment openly. [...] [T]hey have revealed to us the nature of that fear. For as Professor Grensted gave his evidence, we, the daughters of educated men, seemed to be watching a surgeon at work – an impartial and scientific operator, who, as he dissected the human mind by human means laid bare for all to see what cause, what root lies at the bottom of our fear. It is an egg. Its scientific name is ‘infantile fixation’. We, being unscientific, have named it wrongly. An egg we called it; a germ. We smelt it in the atmosphere; we detected its presence in Whitehall, in the universities, in the Church (1996: 249).

Furthermore, his sermon – which, as well as Rev. Streatfield's discourse possesses the mixed quality of irregularly swinging “from prayer to psalm, from psalm to history, from history to poetry” – includes among its pieces fragments from one of the most overt literary declarations of homosexuality, as is Swinburne's translation of Sappho's “*Ode to Aphrodite*”. Introduced into the narrative through the overlapping produced by St. John's readings, its inclusion entails a blunt apology of homoerotism into the homily, at the same time as it debases any attempt for solemnity. Indeed, while endowing the service with a patently blasphemous overtone, the inclusion of Sappho reaches its most irreverent moment through the juxtaposition of the Litany of the Virgin Mary and Mrs. Flushing's simultaneous reading of the *Ode to Aphrodite*, also intermingled with the claim of “the Resurrection of the body, and the life everlastin’ ”:

"What's that?" she whispered inquisitively.

"Sappho," he replied. "The one Swinburne did – the best thing that's ever been written."

Mrs. Flushing could not resist such an opportunity. She gulped down the *Ode to Aphrodite* during the Litany, keeping herself with difficulty from asking when Sappho lived, and what else she wrote worth reading, and contriving to come in punctually at the end with "the forgiveness of sins, the Resurrection of the body, and the life everlastin'. Amen" (266-7).

On the basis of that notion of religion as an instrument for mass control, God becomes reduced to “a kind of walrus” (23), whereas Christ, his Son, turns out a grotesque blood-stained plaster figure, inspired by the most everyday and unholy Ghost:

(a)s if the prayer were a torch applied to fuel, a smoke seemed to rise automatically and fill the place with the ghosts of innumerable services on innumerable Sunday mornings at home (262).

Moreover, in an openly blasphemous scene Woolf explicitly gives voice to Christ himself just to deploy him as the very embodiment of a Quixotic figure:

Then they returned to the New Testament and the sad and beautiful figure of Christ. While Christ spoke they made another effort to fit his interpretation of life upon the lives they lived, but as they were all very different, some practical, some ambitious, some stupid, some wild and experimental, some in love, and others long past any feeling except a feeling of comfort, they did very different things with the words of Christ (263-4).

In particular, Woolf emphasized the perils brought about by the herd-like adherence to a conventional and profoundly insincere experience of religious beliefs. Indeed, it is on seeing the meaninglessly “baaing” nurse – whose face becomes obsessively imprinted on Rachel's mind – that she feels a real sensation of “keen horror”:

She ceased to listen, and fixed her eyes on the face of a woman near her, a hospital nurse, whose expression of devout attention seemed to prove that she was at any rate receiving satisfaction. But looking at her carefully she came to the conclusion that the hospital nurse was only slavishly acquiescent, and that the look of satisfaction was produced by no splendid conception of God within her. How indeed, could she conceive anything far outside her own experience, a woman with a commonplace face like hers, a little round red face, upon which trivial duties and trivial spites had drawn lines, whose weak blue eyes saw without intensity or individuality, whose features were blurred, insensitive, and callous? She was adoring something shallow and smug, clinging to it, so the obstinate mouth witnessed, with the assiduity of a limpet; nothing would tear her from her demure belief in her own virtue and the virtues of her religion. She was a limpet, with the sensitive side of her stuck to a rock, for ever dead to the rush of fresh and beautiful things past her. The face of this single worshipper became printed on Rachel's mind with an impression of keen horror [...] (265).

Of course, in the midst of this unsolemnized service, in which God becomes dwindled to a bleeding plaster figure, whereas his minister turns out an absurdly egg-shaped man, the meaninglessness of the uncritical followance of its preachings comes to the surface. Especially, the narrator warns against the perilous flock-like adherence to religion as a means of collective control. In fact, this notion of religion as a form of indiscriminate dominion over the community was in consonance with the postulates on the psychology of crowds developed by G. Le Bon some decades before the publication of *The Voyage Out*. According to the theorist, the inevitable fanaticism into which religious sentiment derives provides leaders with a powerful instrument for the blinding and later government of collective minds.

Intolerance and fanaticism are the necessary accompaniments of the religious sentiment. They are inevitably displayed by those who believe themselves in the possession of the secret of earthly or eternal happiness [...] The Christian and Pagan Gods never exercised a more absolute empire over the minds that had fallen under their sway” (1896: 73-4).

As a form of oppression and annihilation of individual freedom, religious messages are submitted to a derisive ridiculization. Significantly representative of those herd theories, preaching turns out a meaningless “baaing” uttered by a “vast flock of the audience tamely praising and acquiescing” (265), or “inexpressive human voices falling round [...] like damp leaves” (ibid) – a projection, in fact, of the perpetual misunderstanding resting on the theatrical pretence religion consists in.

All round her were people pretending to feel what they did not feel, while somewhere above her floated the idea which they could none of them grasp, which they pretended to grasp, always escaping out of reach, a beautiful idea, an idea like a butterfly. One after another, vast and hard and cold, appeared to her the churches all over the world where this blundering effort and misunderstanding were perpetually going on, great buildings, filled with innumerable men and women, not seeing clearly, who finally gave up the effort to see, and relapsed tamely into praise and acquiescence, half-shutting their eyes and pursing up their lips (264-5).

As a background for this absurd sheepish “baaing”, preaching is accompanied by the unpleasant discordance of “an unsatisfactory piece of music badly played” by a clumsy insensitive conductor not very different from the witless representative saying Mass:

He was a man of the world with supple lips and an agreeable manner, he was indeed a man of much kindness and simplicity, though by no means clever, but Rachel was not in the mood to give anyone credit for such qualities [...] (266).

Moreover, while received by an audience displaying characteristics similar to the blind submission and fierce violence detected by Le Bon for crowds under the effect of fanatic sentiment.

Mr. Bax's discourse possesses the political quality of the imperial propaganda delivered by contemporary politicians. Indeed, in her *Three Guineas*, Woolf would explicitly warn against English leaders, who had “for God and Empire [...] written, like the address on a dog collar, round [their] necks” (1996: 185). A reliable example of Woolf's complaint is represented by Mr. Bax. Hereby, addressing his audience a discourse more suitable for a “leading article upon topics of general interest in the weekly newspapers” (267) than for a homily service, Mr. Bax elaborates a form of imperial propaganda echoing the recommendations “a very dear friend of [his] had told him [about] the success of our rule in India” (ibid.). Furthermore, whereas apparently claiming for the fact “that all human beings are very much the same under their skins” (ibid.), his preaching turns out a justification of European hegemony over natives, whom they compel to adopt a “strict code of politeness” (ibid.), as well as continental culture. Ironically acquiring a “more definitely clerical” tone, Mr. Bax is depicted as resorting to a pretendedly “innocent craftiness” while haranguing Christians on their duty to support Empire as a means for contributing to their obligation towards

“our fathers”. In this sense, Woolf particularly aims to bring down Mr. Bax's encodedly “innocent clerical campaigns” as potentially dangerous means for “assigning them their duties” towards their “successful” and “brilliant” fathers:

He exhorted [his audience] to keep in touch with men of the modern type; they must sympathise with their multifarious interests in order to keep before their eyes that whatever discoveries were made there was one discovery which could not be superseded, which was indeed as much of a necessity to the most successful and most brilliant of them all as it had been to their fathers. The humblest could help; the least important things had an influence (here his manner became definitely priestly and his remarks seemed to be directed to women, for indeed Mr. Bax's congregations were mainly composed of women, and he was used to assigning them their duties in his innocent clerical campaigns) (268).

Indeed, all this parodical performance occurs in the midst of a carnivalesque church in a manner that considerably echoes a similar event in *Between the Acts*. Accordingly, while the apparently temple-like building of the Barn was used as a tea-place, a likewise profane utility has been given to the church in *The Voyage Out*. Hence, re-converted after protestant reform, it had been transitionally used as a food and liqueur store. Additionally, it was especially after its later refurbishing, mostly resulting from women's commiseration, that a grossly grotesque character is provided for the place, fitted with the ugliest amalgam of improvised items:

The chapel was the old chapel of the monks. It was a profound cool place where they had said Mass for hundreds of years, and done penance in the cold moonlight, and worshipped old brown pictures and carved saints which stood with upraised hands of blessing in the hollows in the walls. The transition from Catholic to Protestant worship had been bridged by a time of disuse, when there were no services, and the place was used for storing jars of oil, liqueur, and deck-chairs; the hotel flourishing, some religious body had taken the place in hand, and it was now fitted out with a number of glazed yellow benches, claret-coloured footstools; it had a small pulpit, and a brass eagle carrying the Bible on its back, while the piety of different women had supplied ugly squares of carpet, and long strips of embroidery heavily wrought with monograms in gold (261-2).

Furthermore, it is once completed the decrowning of both the hypocritical Christianity and the ridiculous – though powerfully dangerous – nature of its ministers, Woolf employs his would-be figure of authority in order, as it was anticipated, to deliver her message. Paradoxically, through his promotion of imperial hegemony and the destruction of freedom, based upon gender and race patriarchal notions of outsidership, the bestialized society operated by the phagocytizing thrives Bax warns against, is enabled to flourish. Indeed, in his pretendedly naïve imperialist homily, Bax solicits a terrifyingly violent punishment for those who “daily mistake [his] words”:

"Be merciful unto me, O God," [...] "for man goeth about to devour me: he is daily fighting and troubling me... [...] all that they imagine is to do me evil. They hold all together and keep themselves close... Break their teeth, O God, in their mouths; smite the jaw-bones of the lions, O Lord: let them fall away like water that runneth apace; and when they shoot their arrows let them be rooted out" (263).

Certainly, chiming in with the cannibalistic civilization portrayed by Woolf, the priest significantly begs God for protection against devourers, addressing Him a prayer claiming for God's exercise of aggressive revenge against enemies. It is precisely through Bax's paradoxical sermon on the cannibalistic impulses ruling over society that the reality of the beastly savagery of Victorian civilization is revealed. Helen had remarked the actual presence of savagery and the most uncivilized blood-thirsty instincts in the apparent orderly existence of this society. She herself becomes the target of those primitive cannibalistic drives. Indeed, in tune with Rachel's victimization, it is paradoxically women's violence that reveals particularly destructive for themselves, who

where emotion was concerned [...] were as flies on a lump of sugar [...] It wasn't that they were cruel, or meant to hurt, or even stupid exactly; but [Helen] had always found that the ordinary person had so little emotion in his own life that the scent of it in the lives of others was like the scent of blood in the nostrils of a bloodhound (359).

Surprisingly, masked under the profoundly hypocritical ritual of lunches, teas or dinners, despite their having "nothing to say" nor "car[ing] a rap for" the others, the most cruel and savage instincts emerge:

She looked about her as if she had called up a legion of human beings, all hostile and all disagreeable, who encircled the table, with mouths gaping for blood, and made it appear a little island of neutral country in the midst of the enemy's country (360).

This cannibalization of Victorian society affects, of course, the previously ridiculed Mr. Ambrose. In tune with that primitive return, he becomes transformed into an irrational being "muttering rhythmically" while "surveying" both his surroundings and his possessions – "his guests and his food and his wife" – "with eyes [...] now melancholy and now fierce". Thereby, in the most jungle-like style, and owing to his reluctance to see his status disempowered, Ridley "abruptly" cuts his wife short spurring "Nonsense, nonsense" right before the primitive lapse will be masked again with the costumes provided by contemporary patterns of morality and correctness.

The entrance of Ridley into the conversation had a strange effect. It became at

once more formal and more polite. It would have been impossible to talk quite easily of anything that came into their heads, and to say the word prostitute as simply as any other word. The talk now turned upon literature and politics, and Ridley told stories of the distinguished people he had known in his youth. Such talk was of the nature of an art, and the personalities and informalities of the young were silenced (360-1).

Accordingly, along with male devouring, a form of grotesque cannibalism towards woman is targeted to women, implicitly slaughtered and dismembered by the phagocytic action of the passive attitude of the tradition-rooted older generations allows for the perpetuation of patriarchal dominance. Hereby, a meaningfully plastic suggestion occurs through the revolting scene of the chase and later decapitation of a hen. Loaded with a powerfully vindicating burden, this episode entails one of the core clues in the whole narration. Hence, at the same time as a grotesque recreation of female victimage, the scene possesses the dual praise-abuse nature of carnival politics. Thus, on the one hand, while abundant in scatological details, the scene entails the simultaneous presence of horror and disgust Mc Elroy had identified as the central elements of grotesque imagery (1989: 25). Likewise, this grotesque representation of the female juxtaposes the categories established by the patriarchal apprehension of the female, which – as J. Kristeva points out – enters the class of “corporeal rubbish”, as a result of the masculine incapacity of accepting the materiality of the body, its limits and cycles, corporeal fluids, or menstrual blood (in Grosz, 1990: 83).

Hereby, even though she is revolted by such a repulsive spectacle, it is not as a consequence of “(t)he blood and the ugly wriggling, for which she feels fascinated” – thus defiantly opposing the unsettling quality through which patriarchal icons envisioned the female. Simultaneously, the image of the half-flying, half-running-into-the-space hen reflects the ambivalent nature of grotesque imagery, in its attempt for transgressing conventional modes of perception and acceptance of reality against engulfing forms of closed dominion. Moreover, this intermingling positioning in the world stands as an external projection of Rachel, who assumes the same ambiguous status through her identification with a similar type of dual existence.

Nevertheless, this is not the only representation of the scapegoat position – and later cannibalization – provided for the female in Victorian society. Indeed, as illustrative of the birth mark imprinted upon women by a patriarchal dictatorship (Marcus, 1981: 103, n. 13), Rachel's own name happens to be the Hebraic term for “lamb”. The prototypical scapegoat figure, this reference in fact chimes in with the absurdly bucolic portrayal of Susan and Arthur as “lamb and ewe” (156). Hereby, in tune with the insincere type of conventional “sordid couples” at the opening of the narration, the nonsensicality of this idealized depiction comes to the surface through the grotesque evolution of Susan. Not long after her engagement, she metamorphoses into the gross version of her

apparent youth and delicacy:

Rachel suddenly took a violent dislike to Susan [...] She appeared insincere and cruel; [Rachel] saw her grown stout and prolific, the kind blue eyes now shallow and watery, the bloom of the cheeks congealed to a network of dry red canals (304).

Furthermore, Rachel arises as the appointed target for the form of cannibalization implied throughout the novel. In addition to her grotesque prey status in her transformation into a “victim dropped from the claws of a bird of prey” (35). Significantly, in the recount of her purely traditional life, symbolically enclosed within the precincts marked by Victorian furniture (242), Rachel gives Terence an account of the restrictive habits allowed for her, which include the systematic carving of the lamb’s neck at the hands of Aunt Clara (243). Representative of old exponents of Victorian values, Aunt Clara turns into the perpetrator of a system which – like Miss Allan's talismanic preservation of the *ménthe* bottle through generations – is zealously kept decade after decade. It is precisely through this allegorical victimization of Rachel that Aunt Clara becomes grotesquely reduced to an insignificant pebble, comparable to the gargoyle-like St. John Hirst or the fossilized Mr. Pepper.

“ 'Go on, please go on', [Terence] urged. 'Let's imagine it's a Wednesday. You're all at luncheon. You sit there, and Aunt Lucy there, and Aunt Clara here'; he arranged three pebbles on the grass between them.

'Aunt Clara carves the neck of lamb', Rachel continued. She fixed her gaze upon the pebbles (243).

Furthermore, in consonance with those carnivalesque acts of devouring, the depiction of the scenes of eating throughout the novel, along with the rendering of food, situates these acts – as it would later occur in *The Years* – at the very side of the most beastly and cannibalistic performances at the heart of presumably civilized Victorian society. Certainly, in the midst of the implied wilderness in the hotel terrace – wherein servants “bec(a)me lost” among the bushes and “waiters made their meal voraciously off broken meats³² ” (109) – food appears as non-appetizing and estranged as “the stringy foreign fowls” (276) or the “turkeys swelling unevenly like a bundle of air balls beneath a net” (279).

All this accounts for the monstrosity of a constraining and suffocating system that fangs on the individual's freedom, annihilating their existence. Indeed, Woolf, as a “committed socialist feminist” (Marcus, 1981: xiv) radically opposed the engorged appetite for empire, as well as the

³² Emphasis added.

fallacies of development and of the superiority of race and gender, sustained by a tyrannical patriarchal role:

There we have in embryo the creature, Dictator as we call him when he is Italian or German, who believes that he has the right whether given by God, Nature, sex or race is immaterial, to dictate to other human beings how they shall live; what they shall do (1996: 165).

Moreover, she was convinced that such greedy zeals within societies were bound to unmask the fakery of a civilization rooted upon the most primitive and blood-thirsty instincts for merciless dominion.

Inevitably we look upon societies as conspiracies that sink the private brother, whom many of us have reason to respect, and inflate in his stead a monstrous male, loud of voice, hard of fist, childishly intent upon scoring the floor of the earth with chalk marks, within whose mystic boundaries human beings are penned, rigidly, separately, artificially (ibid: 225).

Paradoxically, Terence and most of the hotel guests have organized a trip to live the jungle experience, unaware of the existence of real beastliness underlying the apparently civilized mask of the orderly Victorian society. As Helen ironically remarks on being accused of non-adventurous: “‘Oh, no,’ said Helen, ‘one’s only got to use one’s eye. *There’s everything here – everything*’,³³ she repeated [...]” (314-5).

Hereby, while the blue flags and postcards depicting natives celebrate the advance of imperial dominance, as well as the European superiority, the artifices of the bloody massacres underneath turn into the beastly image of “hairy” males, “with muscles like wire, fangs greedy for flesh, and fingers itching for gold” (96).

Significantly retaining a considerable resemblance to the deformed man haunting Rachel's nightmare after Richard Dalloway has kissed her, those monstrous conquerors share with the latter the emblematic quality portraying patriarchal oppression in a twofold direction. Hence, whereas Richard becomes a conspirator of the same impious imperialist hunger moving the conquerors – “had there been men like Richard Dalloway in the time of Charles the First, the map would undoubtedly be red where it is now an odious green” (96) – a corresponding form of sexual harassment is implied for imperial conquerors, insofar as the boat becomes the allegorical projection of those female “vessels” under male attack. In this sense, the description of the *Euphrosyne's* implicit initiation “in the middle of a great bay”, which Peach has connected with the type of grotesque characterization in Swift’s episode of the Lilliputians’ assault upon the hero in

³³ Emphasis added.

Gulliver's Travels (2000: 51), becomes intentionally symbolical:

(I)mmediately, as if she were a recumbent giant requiring examination, small boats came swarming about her. She rang with cries, men jumped on to her; her deck was thumped by feet (94-5).

Hereby, it does not considerably differ from the grotesque man in Rachel's vision. Significantly invading Rachel inside a damp, oozing tunnel – reminiscent of female sexual organs – she feels intimidated by a “deformed man who squatted on the floor gibbering, with long nails” and a face “pitted and like the face of an animal” (81).

In fact, while the reversal of the traditional beastly depiction of the native as closer to animals than to “the civilized human being” – here replaced by the imperial European conqueror – entails a sharp critique, a more poignant satire is entailed by the alluded presence of Gibbon's texts. Hence, a convinced believer in a form of physiology as a sign of moral quality, Gibbon defended a type of racial determinism which led him to establish a relationship between the physical features of natives and moral degeneration (Pick, 1989: 162). Accordingly, the subversion of the theories of Gibbon, whose convenience had been firmly stated by St. John Hirst – ironically, a patently ugly character – entails the opposition not only to racial determinism as an instrument of categorization and consolidation of male European superiority, but also as a debasing of the very patriarchal pillars that support those beliefs. Indeed, in her essay “*The Historian and 'the Gibbon'*”, Woolf remarked on the historian's unpleasant physiognomy, in terms which fall close to the grotesque:

The body of Gibbon's case was *ridiculous – prodigiously fat, enormously top-heavy, precariously balanced upon little feet* upon which he spun round with astonishing alacrity. Like Goldsmith he *over-dressed*,³⁴ and for the same reason perhaps – to supply the dignity which nature denied him. But unlike Goldsmith, his ugliness caused him no embarrassment [...] (*Collected Essays*, 120-1).

In this depiction of a grotesquely bestialized society in which, underneath the artificial mask of civilization, interestingly the narrator underlines the hypocrisy of an apparently civilized European society wherein, unlike in the seemingly savage community, the most phagocytic instincts operate among individuals, particular significance entails Mr. Bax's sermon at church. In the midst of this universe of cannibalistic devourings – where through different expiatory figures are appointed as the targets of the downturns and victimization typical of carnival – particular relevance acquires the character of Rachel. Already depicted in her lamb-figure dimension, the type of battering experienced by the girl amounts to her victimage on the part of the rigidly structured

³⁴ Emphasis added.

Victorian society. While not submitted to the derisive mockery undergone by male characters, as well as some female ones throughout the novel, Rachel counts on the respectful treatment of the narrative voice, for whom the heroine serves to attest for the muffled-down torture imposed by a patriarchal system that rests on the basis of the solid Victorian conventions.

Hence, as it has been discussed, Rachel suffers the harassment of a whole catalogue of grotesque males that constitute the pillars of patriarchal society. In this sense, chiming in with the virulent violence underlying the veils of politeness and the strict observance of civilized attitudes, a form of battering is inflicted upon Rachel through Richard's suggestively aggressive kiss to her: “'You tempt me', he said. The tone of his voice was terrifying. He seemed choked in fight” (80).

Hereby, tormented by the “terrifying” experience with this fervent defender of hegemony and social exploitation of the low classes, Rachel is haunted by the nightmarish presence of the “deformed man” who, symbolically penetrating a damp, oozing tunnel, provokes Rachel's horror and oppressive feelings – “the horror did not go at once. She felt herself pursued, [...] (a) voice moaned for her; eyes desired her”:

She must have been very tired for she fell asleep at once, but after an hour or two of dreamless sleep, she dreamt. She dreamt that she was walking down a long tunnel, which grew so narrow by degrees that she could touch the damp bricks on either side. At length the tunnel opened and became a vault; she found herself trapped in it, bricks meeting her wherever she turned, alone with a little deformed man who squatted on the floor gibbering, with long nails. His face was pitted and like the face of an animal. The wall behind him oozed with damp, which collected into drops and slid down. Still and cold as death she lay, not daring to move, until she broke the agony by tossing herself across the bed, and woke crying "Oh!"

Light showed her the familiar things: her clothes, fallen off the chair; the water jug gleaming white; but the horror did not go at once. She felt herself pursued, so that she got up and actually locked her door. A voice moaned for her; eyes desired her (81-2).

If Rachel's victimage at the hands of the female as co-conspirators through their inaction of male dominion has already been pointed out, insofar as it is portrayed in the novel as a form of cannibalistic phagocytation of Miss Vinrace, particular significance entails the second occurrence of the tunnel episode. Placed around the end of the novel, this scene – which situates instead two deformed women inside the passage – reveals the narrator's purpose of emphasizing the corrosive perils of female passivity in the context of patriarchal tyranny. Indeed, her profound concern with the necessity of taking action – as she had expressed it to Janet Case – echoed the cries of Suffragists, striving to raise women's awareness of the imperative of their active involvement in the cause. Moreover, precisely the earlier decades of the twentieth century – coinciding with both the

publication of *The Voyage Out* and the period of Woolf's young adulthood – witnessed, as Zwerdling remarks, a “concentration on female suffrage [...] unprecedented in feminist history” (1986: 214). Certainly, it is precisely Helen, the alleged representative figure of Rachel's matron – in charge for preserving the young girl's purity in its strictest Victorian sense – along with the mechanically praying nurse that turn out to be the inhabitants of the tunnel in this scene. Though apparently a trivial occurrence, responding – as T. Caramagno suggests – to a hallucinatory episode partly resulting from the narrator's enfeebled health (1992: 157).

The simultaneous coincidence of the three female characters entails a crucial relevance within the whole of the narrative, insofar as these three figures epitomize each of the vertices of the triadic matriarchy Harrison identifies. Certainly, in her *Themis*, Harrison envisaged these matriarchal trinities as connected with the yearly rituals of “Carrying Out the Death” that constituted the basis for carnival celebrations, as Frazer had signalled in his *Golden Bough* (1913: 232-3). According to Jane Harrison, this figure originally consisted of the twofold goddess Demeter-Persephone, whereby “(t)he Mother takes the physical side, the Daughter the spiritual” (1927: 276), the incorporation of its third personality on this episode provides a centripetal point for the convergence of Woolf's core meanings. Indeed, special significance is entailed by its previous immersion within the frame of a carnivalistic universe – as implied by the introduction of a fragment from *Comus*, a masque, whose inclusion of Locrine or Brute, the animal-countenance travellers in Milton's poem, enables a symbolical connection with the deformed, bestialized Richard in Rachel's vision. Hereby, frequently portrayed as plunging into the depths of the sea, Rachel corresponds – as Marcus has noted (1981: 89) – to the spiritual side of the goddess, who sets off on an underworld journey so as to promote the renewal of the land. On the one hand, constantly concerned with warding Rachel's virginity, as it has been pointed out, the stone-like Helen becomes the fictional embodiment of Harrison's Earth Mother, who “has for her sphere more and more the things of this life, laws and civilized marriage” (276).

Nevertheless, whereas Marcus' discussion restricts her analysis of the female element to a dyadic pattern, integrated by the mother-daughter deities, a tripartite image becomes more accurate in the analysis of this episode in order to account for the enigmatic presence of the nurse. Indeed, as Harrison remarks, this initially dual goddess turned into a trinitarian deity on the arrival of “patriarchal conditions” which threatened to diminish the power and nobility of the goddess (1927: 273). Certainly, imagining herself as simultaneously the heroine of three different novels, Rachel confirms the triadic identity that will enable her to accomplish the thrived-for renewal.

Moreover, while the three examples intendedly portray female cases of liberation against

conventional forms of oppression, special significance is entailed by Rachel's identification as Diana of the Crossways (137) insofar as it agglutinates together the various aspects of her plural personality as a “threefold Hecate of the underworld” (Harrison, 1927: 288), always portrayed – as Carpentier has noted – “at a crossroad of three ways or with three bodies” (1988: 80).

In that multiple identity – conforming to the laws of carnival politics – concerned with a return to the lowest and earthly as a means of liberation and refertilization, it is that third element that provides the energy necessary for the action required to carry out the transformation.

This additional self-entering the plural divine entity corresponds – according to Harrison, to the “Keres”, or tiny grotesque “winged women [or] demons, hurrying like the storm wind and carrying all things to destruction” (1991: 176). Later evolved into Harpies, or Snatchers, these witch-like females become associated with the nurturing Earth-mother, aiding her in the final accomplishment of the death and devastation that is to enable the regeneration of the crops. Endowed with the multiplicity that is inherent to carnival imagery, these goddesses also possess the indefiniteness and ambivalence of simultaneously evoking the fear of approaching death and the praise of forthcoming life (1991: 185).

Aware of the powerful value of these images as a means of dissolving the assumed dictatorship of the enclosing patriarchal predefinitions and labels, the narrator resorts to these female trinities as the ultimate vehicle to claim and effect Rachel's renewalist function. Indeed, along with the connection between Rachel and one mid-positioned hen, a winged creature populates the boat dance through the rendering of one of the guests, as a grotesque fowl:

"Astonishing!" she exclaimed at last. "What sort of shape can she think her body is?" This remark was called forth by a lady who came past them, waddling rather than walking, and leaning on the arm of a stout man with globular green eyes set in a fat white face. Some support was necessary, for she was very stout, and so compressed that the upper part of her body hung considerably in advance of her feet, which could only trip in tiny steps, owing to the tightness of the skirt round her ankles. The dress itself consisted of a small piece of shiny yellow satin, adorned here and there indiscriminately with round shields of blue and green beads made to imitate hues of a peacock's breast. On the summit of a frothy castle of hair a purple plume stood erect, while her short neck was encircled by a black velvet ribbon knobbed with gems, and golden bracelets were tightly wedged into the flesh of her fat gloved arms. She had the face of an impertinent but jolly little pig, mottled red under a dusting of powder (178-9).

However, it is precisely the character of the Nurse McInnis that embodies the witch in the triadic deity. Hence, explicitly the “little” companion of the Earth-Mother Helen in the tunnel episode, the Nurse patently embodies the fearsome figure that – associated with evil powers – is to

prompt Rachel's renewal.

"Nurse McInnis," said Helen, and the nurse smiled steadily as they all did, and said that she did not find many people who were frightened of her. After waiting for a moment they both disappeared, and having turned on her pillow Rachel woke to find herself in the midst of one of those interminable nights which do not end at twelve, but go on into the double figures--thirteen, fourteen, and so on until they reach the twenties, and then the thirties, and then the forties. She realised that there is nothing to prevent nights from doing this if they choose. At a great distance an elderly woman sat with her head bent down; Rachel raised herself slightly and saw with dismay that she was playing cards by the light of a candle which stood in the hollow of a newspaper. The sight had something inexplicably sinister about it, and she was terrified and cried out, upon which the woman laid down her cards and came across the room, shading the candle with her hands (385).

Along with the "sinister" card game, in which the newspaper, evocative of an ever-finished past, becomes reunited with the prospective life announced by the candlelit, further confirmation of the Nurse's demonic identity is revealed through the unsettling episode of her conversation with Terence. Hence, enigmatically seeming to start afloat "upon the stair" while revealing her malevolent quality – "when one looked at her she seemed to shrivel beneath one's eyes and become worthless, malicious, and untrustworthy", the Nurse hurls a direful announcement of Rachel's death:

"If you ask me," she began in a curiously stealthy tone, "I never like May for my patients" [...] "It may be a fancy, but I don't like to see anybody fall ill in May," she continued. "Things seem to go wrong in May. Perhaps it's the moon. They say the moon affects the brain, don't they, Sir?" [...] (W)hen one looked at her she seemed to shrivel beneath one's eyes and become worthless, malicious, and untrustworthy.

She slipped past him and disappeared (401).

Patently a demonic conjuration to the moon, this act, after which the evil Nurse mysteriously disappear, becomes a culmination of the obscure card-play which should provoke Rachel's death. Moreover, set in May, the sacrifice of the lamb-like Rachel significantly parallels the Spring Festivals described by Harrison as the rituals designed for the yearly promotion of fertility and regeneration. Indeed, these rituals frequently implied the burial of a girl's puppet incarnating the forthcoming refertilization which is "carried round, buried, burnt" (1913: 70-1). Significantly, fevered as a consequence of her illness, Rachel becomes immersed into an atmosphere of exhaustion and unbearable heat:

The afternoon was very hot, so hot that the breaking of the waves on the shore sounded like the repeated sigh of some exhausted creature, and even on the terrace under an awning the bricks were hot, and the air danced perpetually over the short dry grass. The red flowers in the stone basins were drooping with the heat, and the white blossoms which had been so smooth and thick

only a few weeks ago were now dry, and their edges were curled and yellow (380).

Moreover, in the midst of the “suffocating” heat, Rachel undergoes an early plunge into the depths, where she finds herself temporarily liberated from “her tormentors”:

At last the faces went further away; she fell into a deep pool of sticky water, which eventually closed over her head. She saw nothing and heard nothing but a faint booming sound, which was the sound of the sea rolling over her head. While all her tormentors thought that she was dead, she was not dead, but curled up at the bottom of the sea. There she lay, sometimes seeing darkness, sometimes light, while every now and then some one turned her over at the bottom of the sea (397-8).

It is precisely after the Nurse's ritual that a final burial of Rachel's disintegrating body occurs, while the “unfamiliar creaking and grating sounds [...] show a still hot earth” in a “sinister and full of hostility and foreboding” land (401), evidently symptomatic of a renewal still to come. Significantly, displaying the “undefined limitations of the grotesque body, a form of aerialism – in tune with the already discussed attempt for female self-validation, Rachel's body experiences the absolute liberation from societal constraints, thus enabled, in the middle of the concurrently expanding walls, to float aloof while “flitting round the room” (404).

Aside from its connection with the renewal pattern, a further dimension is entailed by the tunnel image of the deformed women. Hence, insofar as they represent a variation of the previous tunnel episode, the replacement of the male grotesque being by the two women undoubtedly introduces – as P. J. Smith underlines – a homoerotic dimension into the regenerative frame (1997: 143-4). Hereby, chiming in with the bodily liberation experienced by Rachel on her abandonment of conventional society, the inclusion of the two women – symbolically situated within Rachel's uterine passage, invokes the necessity of accomplishing a real sexual liberation far from the hypocritical pretences aiming to conform to enclosing and artificial forms of categorization which, by the end of the nineteenth century – as Gilbert and Gubar have noted – became “a central symbol of revolt against the upper classes and the society of exchange values and polar oppositions they had fostered” (1989: 326).

On the other hand, it should be noted that this scene does not obey to an indiscriminate apology of transvestism as the weapon for the liberation from those constraining models. Actually, no evident signs of homoerotic tendencies are portrayed for Rachel, who – inversely – suffers the harassment of other women's lesbian desires. Hence, the liberal Evelyn asks her upstairs to her room, where she employs her worldliness and the necessity of commitment with the feminist cause

in her attempt to seduce the inexperienced Rachel: “[Evelyn] was in a state of ... nervously [she] slipped [...] knee [...] She went on to consider [...] thinking about her”.

[Evelyn] was in a state of great excitement, and the muscles of her arms were twitching nervously. [...]

"I've never met a man that was fit to compare with a woman!" she cried; [...]

dabbing her wet cheeks with a towel. Tears were now running down with the drops of cold water.

"It makes me angry," [...]

"There's only one man here I really like," Evelyn continued; "Terence Hewet. One feels as if one could trust him."

[...]

"Why?" she asked. "Why can you trust him?"

"I don't know," said Evelyn. "Don't you have feelings about people? Feelings you're absolutely certain are right? I had a long talk with Terence the other night. I felt we were really friends after that. There's something of a woman in him –" She paused as though she were thinking of very intimate things that Terence had told her, [...]

in another moment Evelyn was saying that the finest men were like women, and women were nobler than men [...]

"I play," [...]

Evelyn laughed. "We none of us do anything but play. And that's why women like Lillah Harrison, who's worth twenty of you and me, have to work themselves to the bone. But I'm tired of playing," she went on, lying flat on the bed, and raising her arms above her head. Thus stretched out, she looked more diminutive than ever.

[...]

She put her hand on Rachel's knee.

[...]

"Being real, whatever Mr. Hirst may say. Are you real?"

Rachel felt much as Terence had felt that Evelyn was too close to her, and that there was something exciting in this closeness, although it was also disagreeable. [...]

But she did not want advice; she wanted intimacy. [...] she could not help seeing that Rachel was not thinking about her. [...] Evelyn was tormented by the little spark of life in her which was always trying to work through [...] people, and was always being rebuffed. [...]

‘It’s odd. People talk as much about love as they do about religion.’

‘I wish you’d sit down and talk’ (286-292).

Moreover, thus attired, Miss Allan looks as undignified as a kind of grotesque bug – “(t)he upper half of her body now became grey with black stripes on it” (298) – not different from the passengers “swarming like aimless ants” (29) or the “insect-like figures of Dalloway, Ambroses, and Vinraces”, expressly “derided” by the narrator (94).

Indeed, if Carpentier had pointed out the frequent presence of the witch in association with jars or vases from whence she escapes to bring forth destruction (1998: 79), particular relevance is entailed by these episodes of Rachel's victimage at the hands of her elders.

Particular significance is entailed throughout the novel by glass allusions. Thus, in her obsessive attempt for obtaining sexual favours from Rachel, Miss Allan covertly attempts to cast a form of bewitchery upon Rachel. Tempting the young lady through her offer for Rachel to try a piece of preserved ginger to extract the root from a jar, the woman insistently invites her to “add a new pleasure to life”, as she seems to predict Rachel's duty to do so before finding herself on her death-bed. This scene – which conforms a grotesque subversion of the canonical Elizabethan plot by the substitution of the young, handsome male lover, here replaced by an ugly, artful old crone – is closely linked to the woman's second attempt to attain her goal. Thus, on Rachel's repulse of her offer – “Rachel bit the ginger and at once cried, 'I must spit it out!' ” (296). Certainly, Miss Allan's second attempt will be similarly presided over by the element of the glass, whereby the sly elderly woman tries giving her to drink from a “slim elegant jar filled with a bright green fluid”, evocative of the persistence of old conventions throughout generations.

"Let me see – I have nothing else to offer you, unless you would like to taste this." A small cupboard hung above her bed, and she took out of it a slim elegant jar filled with a bright green fluid.

"Creme de Menthe," she said. "Liqueur, you know. It looks as if I drank, doesn't it? As a matter of fact it goes to prove what an exceptionally abstemious person I am. I've had that jar for six-and-twenty years," she added, looking at it with pride, as she tipped it over, and from the height of the liquid it could be seen that the bottle was still untouched.

"Twenty-six years?" Rachel exclaimed.

Miss Allan was gratified, for she had meant Rachel to be surprised (296).

Symbolically appearing “(o)n the eve of any foreign journey”, the bottle epitomizes Miss Allan's presentation of homoerotic initiation into sexuality as a talismanic omen for good fortune – “I consider it a kind of charm against accidents”.

Thus introduced, the glass allusion acquires its ultimate value as a centre from whence Rachel's destruction is doomed through the cryptic reference to glass breaking, in the midst of the

converging coincidence of different signs announcing Rachel's end. Indeed, as it is fitting to the destruction by fire of the expiatory victim – according to Harrison's description of the festivals of regeneration, an atmosphere of suffocating heat wherein the drooping flowers and “the stiff and hostile plants of the south” with “leaves seem[ing] to grow upon spines” accounts for the presiding infertility and sorrow, in which even “the breaking of the waves on the shore sounded like the repeated sigh of some exhausted creature”. In this setting, Terence – previously portrayed as a snake feasting upon a sheep – becomes for Rachel a brute at the same level as those present in the fictional context of the poem he paradoxically recites: “Rachel [...] went off upon curious trains of thought suggested by words such as 'curb' and 'Lochrine' and 'Brute', which brought unpleasant sights before her eyes” (380-1). Furthermore, while the heroine in Milton's poem displays a crown of lilies “twisted [...] knitting / The loose train of” her hair, it is precisely a headache – manifesting as a form of metaphorical thorn-crown, evocative of the waste condition around Rachel – that initiates Miss Vinrace's fatal illness. Hence, significantly resembling the torture suffered by Septimus, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, who physically experiences the oppressive burden of an annihilating society as he senses his head pierced by “stiff leaves rustled by his head” (*Mrs. Dalloway*: 75), Rachel feels “the pulse in her head beat so strongly that each thump seemed to tread upon a nerve, piercing her forehead with a little stab of pain” (382).

In this setting, it is precisely the mysterious episode of the glass breaking accompanying Rachel's announcement of her illness that finally appoints Rachel as the expiatory figure at the hands of an engulfing society embodied by the implicitly fled bottled *daimon*. In view of this, arising in Terence the most direful feelings – “his sense of dismay and catastrophe were almost physically painful” – the sound of “the shiver of broken glass” marks the final accomplishment of the regenerative destruction of the appointed victim.

In the midst of this carnival setting of death and renewal, a grotesque overtone presides over the scene, which displays the alienated, estranged quality of grotesque imagery, while the particular rendering of nature suggests a form of carnivalesque *danse macabre* over the fire on approaching death. Hence, at the sound of the exhausted sighs of the waves arriving on shore – reminiscent of life's end – “the air danced perpetually over the short dry grass”, a sight that contributes to the grotesque unfamiliarization of the landscape: “Owing to the heat and the dancing air the garden too looked strange – the bees were either too near of too far” (380-1).

In her description of the trinitarian goddess, Jane Harrison envisioned the completion of this process of destruction-regeneration as a result of the Great Mother's association with the witch, by virtue of which the Earth-Mother goddess – at the same time as a caring figure – participated as

well in the removal of the scapegoat in fertility myths and rites. Hence, as Carpentier has observed, “the usually nurturing Earth-mother, when wronged, can punish violently through association with the witch” (1998: 79). Consequently, a similar role is fulfilled by Helen Ambrose – the earthly deity in *The Voyage Out*. Hereby, like the winged demons throughout the novel, a crucial act leading to Rachel's final removal is performed by Mrs. Ambrose. Indeed, contrary to Rachel's engagement to Terence – a fact not so much linked to her function as the matronly figure, as M. Leaska portrays her (1977: 14), as to the evidence of the impossible satisfaction of her lesbian desires, as noted by P. Smith (1997: 133) – Helen determines to accomplish her revenge. Thus, in a passage critics have agreed on finding as one of the most cryptic in Woolf's narrative, Helen explicitly prompts Rachel's descent – an action Rachel will feel as a condemnatory “bolt from Heaven”. Moreover, it is precisely once darkness has concurrently descended (322), and the homosexuality of Rachel's fiancé become patently revealed by a laughing bird, in the midst of a phallic allusive Nature wherein Terence identifies himself with the “bent and crooked” flower or the cracking branches repeating his name (330), that Rachel's removal becomes definitely urgent.

A hand dropped abrupt as iron on Rachel's shoulder; it might have been a bolt from heaven. She fell beneath it, and the grass whipped across her eyes and filled her mouth and ears. Through the waving stems she saw a figure, large and shapeless against the sky. Helen was upon her. Rolled this way and that, now seeing only forests of green, and now the high blue heaven; she was speechless and almost without sense (330).

Additionally, while the expiatory May puppet – in Helen's deployment of these festivals (1913: 59-60) – was made up of grass and branches, the Rachel prompted onto her descent to death suggests the same quality, with “grass whipp[ing] across her eyes and *fill[ing]*³⁵ her mouth and ears” (330) – an image, in fact, Woolf reiterates later in the skull similarly stuffed with grass in *The Years*, where Sara envisions herself through a very similar allusion (137): “ ‘Running water; flowing water. May my bones turn to coral; and fish light their lanterns; fish light their green lanterns in my eyes’ ”.

Similarly, the dismembered bone recurs in *Jacob's Room*, where the protagonist comes across an “old sheep's skull without its jaw” with “(t)he sea holly [...] grow[ing] through the eye-sockets” (6).

As well as clearly pointing to the carnivalesque pattern of removal/regeneration of the selected victim, the scene becomes a convergence point of some of the central clues in the whole narration. Accordingly, provided the vindication for a free realization of sexual identity was

³⁵ Emphasis added.

signalled as one of the crucial meanings at the core of the novel, the enigmatic scene – even though cryptically implied – constitutes an enraged defence of an unconstrained form of sexual experience.

Hereby, once the heterosexual coupling between Terence and Rachel has proved its artificiality – on the grounds of the young man's patent homosexuality – a form of sexual approach to Rachel is initiated by Helen, with whom the girl suddenly starts rolling on the floor “this way and that, now seeing only forests of green, and now the high blue heaven” until leaving Rachel “speechless” with panting “and almost without sense”. Indeed, initially involving a suggested form of homoerotic intimacy between the two women, the first sight Rachel experiences while still “panting” from her experience is of “two great heads, the heads of a man and a woman, of Terence and Helen”, who kiss in front of her in what turns out a kind of parody of conventional norms and marriage:

Both were flushed, both laughing, and the lips were moving; they came together and kissed in the air above her. Broken fragments of speech came down to her on the ground. She thought she heard them speak of love and then of marriage (331).

Furthermore, allusive of an orgiastic mingling among the man and the two women, no sooner has the kiss occurred than a form of orgasmic embrace takes place between Rachel and Helen: “Raising herself and sitting up, [Rachel] too realized Helen's soft body, the strong and hospitable arms, and happiness swelling and breaking in one vast wave”.

Bluntly subversive, insofar as it represents a radical disruption of the Victorian sacredness of moral norms and values, the experience becomes crucial inasmuch as it enables their participants a complete liberation from established perspectives. Thereby, even though already standing, a turned-round angle of reality is adopted, thus debunking any conventional focalizations: “When this fell away, and the grasses once more lay low, and the sky became horizontal, and the earth rolled out flat on each side, and the trees stood upright” (331).

Hence, at the same time as this new reorganization is accomplished, a downsizing of society as an enclosing force occurs, whereby the latter is reduced, under the new perspective, to “a little row of human figures” (331). Indeed, this dwindling, which had already been anticipated as the passengers embark on board of the *Euphrosyne* – whereby England turns into “a shrinking island”, at the same time as, concurrently, “Europe shrank, Asia shrank, Africa and America shrank” (29) – persists on the trippers' entrance into the native village, representative not so much of a colonist experience as of their introduction into a realm of initiatory practices and sexual liberation. In tune with this, Tratner also points out – “South America is less an exotic place than the end of Rachel's

development” (1995: 84), while Marianne DeKoven insists upon the same aspect of the journey, insofar as it constitutes a voyage outside the “rigid structures of patriarchy and imposed values based on imperialism and conventional society” (1992: 85).

Thereby, it is precisely during their stay at the native camp that Helen notices “(h)ow small the little figures looked wandering through the trees” (333).

In addition, further symbolical meaning is entailed by the orgiastic episode after Rachel's descent. Thus, if Woolf emphasized the artificiality of gender as a social construct, and the interchangeability of sexual identities – as it has been remarked – particularly in tune with the carnivalistic politics of gender crossings, no different is Harrison's account of the primitive carnival rites celebrated during ancient Spring Festivals. Hereby, in her description of the revitalizing acts through previous removal of the old and decayed, Harrison insists on the celebration of a ritual dance – or “Zeus-Leap-Song” as the merry expression of joy at the prospective re-emergence of the god renewed, finally rescued from the swallowing Kronos. The song, in fact performed by a group of “armed and *orgiastic dancers*³⁶” (1912: 23), is aimed as an invocation “by leaping in conjunction” to bring forth fertility and regeneration (1912: 8-10).

In resemblance to these festivals, the episode of the orgiastic encounter affirms the necessity of true self-realization and the erasure of boundaries as a means of liberation from the devouring jaws of the Victorian evil of institutionalized hypocrisy. Furthermore, regarding most of the aspects at the core of the novel's ideology – as detailed in this analysis – find coherence through Woolf's scene, the enigmatic episode provides an additional clue to another element in *The Voyage Out*. Accordingly, it is the suggestion of a possible threesome among Terence and the two women – significantly “squatting on the ground in *triangular*³⁷ shapes” (331) – that provides a sense of unity for the recurring presence of triangular shapes throughout the narrative.

In a powerful symbolical scene, it is precisely on “expound[ing] her views of the human race” that Helen contemplated with complacency the pyramid of variegated fruits in the centre of the table” (359-60). Moreover, at the same time as a metaphorical form of engulfing genitals, in tune with the suggestion of the *vagina dentata*, the pyramidal magnolia tree wherein Helen envisions Hirst becomes a confirmation of St John's sexual ambiguity as a likely candidate for these orgiastic mergings, while Helen cryptically invites the scholar to opt for the Bar, allegorical of a free self-realization of his sexuality, instead of the constraining rules of institutional Cambridge (234-6).

³⁶ Emphasis added.

³⁷ Emphasis added.

In tune with this, even though not so graphically allegorized, the suggestion of sexual threesomes and orgiastic encounters occurs through a significant episode portraying Rachel as symbolically sitting at the centre of the homosexual couple integrated by Hirst and Terence, just as Helen, emphasizing the absurdity of Mrs. Flushing's "(d)ressing as she dresses", remarks that "(n)aked, [the lady] would be superb" (229). Indeed, in *Orlando* – Woolf's blunt declaration of the interchangeability of sexes against constraining forms of artificial categorization – the narrator would explain the artificiality of gender as a social construct on the basis of the unnatural impact of costume on identity:

(T)here is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them; we may make them take the mould of arm or breast, but [clothes] mould our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking [...] Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what it is above (2003: 92-3).

Accordingly, chiming in with the liberating dances depicted by Jane Harrison, the episode of Helen's bolt upon Rachel acquires its wholeness of meaning through its connection with the scene at the end of the boat ball. Hereby, resorting to that essential erosion of boundaries simultaneous to a democratization of organizational structures and beliefs, Rachel starts up a spontaneous, unconstrained tune at the piano, free from regulating rules of composition. Thereby, concurrently with the notes in the tune, which arrange and combine themselves in unrestrained freedom, Woolf claims for a similar intermingling of men and women, with total independence from pre-figured norms of conventionally acceptable couplings. Consequently, it is solely to the compass of this spontaneous tune that Terence lets his actual identity flow as soon as Rachel invites her audience to "invent the steps": "Hewet, swaying his arms and holding out the tails of his coat, swam down the room in imitation of the voluptuous dreamy dance of an Indian maiden dancing before her Rajah" (185).

The same sense of liberation inspires the rest of the dancers, who suddenly break into free-flowing performances. Hence, like Terence, Helene, who "caught the idea" uninhibitedly "seiz[ed] Miss Allan by the arm, and whirl[ed] round the room, now curtsying, now spinning round, now tripping this way and that like a child skipping through a meadow".

"Do you play? Would you play? Anything, so long as we can dance to it!"
From all sides her gift for playing the piano was insisted upon, and she had to consent. As very soon she had played the only pieces of dance music she could remember, she went on to play an air from a sonata by Mozart.

"But that's not a dance," said some one pausing by the piano.

"It is," she replied, emphatically nodding her head. "Invent the steps." Sure of her melody she marked the rhythm boldly so as to simplify the way. Helen caught the idea; seized Miss Allan by the arm, and whirled round the room, now curtsying, now spinning round, now tripping this way and that like a child skipping through a meadow.

"This is the dance for people who don't know how to dance!" she cried. The tune changed to a minuet; St. John hopped with incredible swiftness first on his left leg, then on his right; the tune flowed melodiously; Hewet, swaying his arms and holding out the tails of his coat, swam down the room in imitation of the voluptuous dreamy dance of an Indian maiden dancing before her Rajah. The tune marched; and Miss Allen advanced with skirts extended and bowed profoundly to the engaged pair. Once their feet fell in with the rhythm they showed a complete lack of self-consciousness. From Mozart Rachel passed without stopping to old English hunting songs, carols, and hymn tunes, for, as she had observed, any good tune, with a little management, became a tune one could dance to. By degrees every person in the room was tripping and turning in pairs or alone. Mr. Pepper executed an ingenious pointed step derived from figure-skating, for which he once held some local championship; while Mrs. Thornbury tried to recall an old country dance which she had seen danced by her father's tenants in Dorsetshire in the old days. As for Mr. and Mrs. Elliot, they galloped round and round the room with such impetuosity that the other dancers shivered at their approach. Some people were heard to criticise the performance as a romp; to others it was the most enjoyable part of the evening.(185-6).

Furthermore, endowed with the carnivalesque nature of the same arbitrary mixture "orts, scraps, and fragments" as both the pageant in *Between the Acts* and the music played by the anarchic gramophone, again as well as in Woolf's last novel, a great merry reunion of attendants marks the end of the dance – finally culminated by an assertion of the freedom of arrangements and combinations of the participants:

"Now for the great round dance!" Hewet shouted. Instantly a gigantic circle was formed, the dancers holding hands and shouting out, "D'you ken John Peel," as they swung faster and faster and faster, until the strain was too great, and one link of the chain – Mrs. Thornbury – gave way, and the rest went flying across the room in all directions, to land upon the floor or the chairs or in each other's arms as seemed most convenient (186).

At the same time as a rotund claim for the unrestrained flow of self-identity and emotion, this form of collective celebration in which each of the performers leap and dance at their will, consolidates Woolf's introduction of the pattern of a fertility festival in *The Voyage Out*. Indeed, evoking Harrison's account of May rituals, leaping and dancing becomes a means of bringing fertility and prosperity into the community, as well as of a form of social healing, whereby the freedom of association announces the advent of "something bigger" (Harrison, 1913: 245). Openly transgressing all norms and prejudices, Rachel becomes indeed the artifice of the longed-for

renewal. Contrarily to numerous analyses of the novel, which situate Rachel as the meaningless escapist from a reality to which she cannot manage to adapt herself – it is actually through the young lady that hope of regeneration can be conceived of. Thus, while for Marcus, “Rachel's inability to retain her autonomy in the face of [societal] conflicting possessiveness signals her decision to capitulate to oblivion [...] society” (1981: 100), M. Leaska agrees on describing the heroine's death as an extreme form of protection through withdrawal (1977: 38). Nevertheless, in tune with Rachel's regenerating potential, the symbolic presence of the moth entails particular significance. Hence, serving to anticipate Rachel's death by its allegorical embodiment of the girl – as it has been signalled – the image of the butterfly announces, as well, the forthcoming renewal as enabled by Miss Vinrace. Hence, in tune with the symbolical connotations of the moth in Woolf's work as allegorical of human essence – according to what Fleishman points out (1977: 8) – this image certainly marks some of the clues accounting for Rachel's role as a carnivalesque scapegoat. Furthermore, in tune with carnival ambiguities and non-definition of identities, Woolf herself regarded moths as “hybrid creatures, neither gay [...] nor sombre” (1942: 9)³⁸.

Hereby, her death, as it has been discussed, is deliberately announced by “several young women”, anxious to kill the unfitting outsider – “'Someone ought to kill it!' ” (205).

Significantly, it is in the midst of an entangled landscape that turns out to be a grotesque, non-hierarchical version of the tamedness of English forests, that the hope for renewal is announced by the symbolical presence of the moth. Hence, retaining an obvious resemblance with the depiction of the Ramsay's house in “*Time Passes*” – insofar as the anarchy governing it becomes as well a symbol of the prospective of regeneration – the vision of the jungle indeed entails some of the central aspects of grotesque images. Moreover, through this grotesque reconstruction of the orderly English landscape, the narrator ironically mocks the imperialist eagerness for transforming the colonized territory into a mimetic reproduction of the dominator's surroundings, at the same time as she validates a more democratic and “unmarked” socio-political and ideological re-organization. In this defiant panorama, the conventional perfection and neatness of the island's trees are replaced by the irregular shape of “the tropical bushes with their sword-like leaves”, while a clear interplay of chiaroscuro and interruptions comes to echo Ruskin's notion of the fine grotesque, wherein

A fine grotesque is the expression, in a moment, by a series of symbols thrown together in bold and fearless connection of truths which it would have taken a long time to express in any verbal way, and in which the connection is left for the beholder to work out for himself; the gaps, left or overleaped by the haste of imagination, forming the grotesque character” (Ruskin, 5: 132 [in Cianci and Nicholls, 2001: 172]).

³⁸ “*The Death of the Moth*”.

Simultaneously, presided by the discontinuous overlapping of green and yellow lights, the jungle landscape becomes evocative of the form of carnivalistic dualities and multiple reality Woolf indefatigably vindicates for – “it is well known how [...] the self splits up and one self is eager and dissatisfied and the other stern and philosophical” (1942: 12)³⁹. In view of this, the green and yellow pattern in the native land allegorizes the individual masked ambiguous nature as represented by Hirst, whose eyes symbolically reflect a similar chromaticity. Indeed, it is at the very moment when he tries to avoid Terence and Rachel's coupling – “ [...] (b)eware of snakes', Hirst replied [to Rachel]” – that his homoerotic “other self” becomes implied:

Into his eyes as he looked up at them had come yellow and green reflections from the sky and the branches, robbing them of their intentness, and he seemed to think what he did not say (315).

In a suggestively sensorial depiction, this scenario includes as well as the tangle of the knotting “creepers” – particularly accounting for the extrication of the jungle landscape W. Kayser signals as especially prompt for grotesque associations (1981: 183) – which becomes simultaneously linked to further forms of interruption. Hereby, different forms of discontinuity range from the visual “star-shaped crimson blossoms” and “yellow flowers”, to the intermittency of the “languid puffs of scent”, or the startling discordance of “the jarring cry of some [...] animal”. Simultaneously, in the middle of the interrupted overlapping of juxtaposing lights, the “crimson and black butterflies” outstanding in “yellow spaces” reveal the confirmation of the longed-for renewal.

Certainly, on the grounds of their recurrence at crucial moments of the novel, the presence of these moths in the midst of a grotesque landscape – not accidentally located immediately before Rachel's illness – promises a refertilization of the general panorama in the fictional context of *The Voyage Out*. Furthermore, similarly present at the opening and closure of the novel, the motif of the moth becomes allusive of a process of cyclical completion. Hence, beginning with the announcement of Rachel's renewing advent – as suggested by “the circular iridescent patch”, still displaying the lifeless presence of a “straw in the middle of it”, the motif progressively evolves to the revitalized image of the shiny-thoraxed moth flying among the guests after Rachel's death.

Along with this image, additional references point to that regeneration brought forth by Rachel's death. Hence, as usually in Woolf's narrative, the literary inclusion through Ridley's recitation of the stanza from Milton's “*Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*” affirms Rachel's identity as the new Queen of the renewed world (409). Hereby, describing the banishment of the

³⁹ “*Evening Over Sussex: Reflections in a Motor Car*”.

“damned crew” of false idols, representative of a false truth – the poem significantly becomes “strangely discomforting” for Terence and Hirst (228). Indeed, while alluding to the dethroning of those meaningless deities – with a direct reference to a “twice battered God of Palestine” as conforms to the Bakhtinian description of carnival decrownings – the narrator determinedly points to the debunking of contemporary outmoded structures, based upon praise of Empire and patriarchal dominion. At the same time, once decrowned those false divinities of Victorian society – as it has been discussed – Rachel clearly stands as the newly proclaimed Queen of the carnivalesque festival whereby the process of erosion and replacement has been accomplished.

Hereby, if in the primitive carnivals described by both Harrison and Frazer, the coming prosperity is heralded through the hope of rain, once Rachel's sacrifice has taken place, a haloed moon – which no longer involves the sinister overtone of the earlier Nurse's episode – announces the promise of the coming rain. Moreover, whereas in the above mentioned scene, a token of death accompanied the moon – which some critics, like Marcus, associate with the virginal presence of Rachel (1981: 103, n13) – a majestic quality characterizes now the celestial body, in the midst of a suggested re-emergence from the depths of the water, clearly reminiscent of the return to surface of Pepper's grotesque submarine monsters:

The windows were uncurtained, and showed the moon, and a long silver pathway upon the surface of the waves.

"Why," he said, in his ordinary tone of voice, "look at the moon. There's a halo round the moon. We shall have rain to-morrow" (412-3).

As it occurred in *Mrs. Dalloway*, this ritual act of refertilization after the sacrificial death does not come unnoticed. Hence, while Terence is overtly embraced by either “the arms of man or of woman” (413), the coming of the rain – which has been long-desired – “'(o)ne's quite forgotten what rain looks like' ” (426) – soon dissolves the oppressive landscape:

All that evening the clouds gathered, until they closed entirely over the blue of the sky. They seemed to narrow the space between earth and heaven, so that there was no room for the air to move in freely; and the waves, too, lay flat, and yet rigid, as if they were restrained. The leaves on the bushes and trees in the garden hung closely together, and the feeling of pressure and restraint was increased by the short chirping sounds which came from birds and insects (429).

Additionally, as it is fitting to carnival diversity, the celebration for the rain is uttered “simultaneously in many different languages”, at the same time as an unusual, unfamiliarized vision of the hotel guests “violently” exposes them to the blunt truth of themselves. Thus, fulfilling the

same function as the cracked mirrors at the end of *Between the Acts*, it is actually this spontaneous exposure of the lighting flashes of the characters that definitively unmask them from any pretended social pose, just as the play of alternative chiaroscuros on their faces perpetrates a downturning effect upon them. It is in this atmosphere of carnivalistic inversions and subversive bringings down that the longed-for rain finally comes upon the land, in the midst of the most patent panorama of Ruskinian interruptions and alternations combined with an almost total emptiness of both vision and sound:

[A] gust of cold air came through the open windows, lifting tablecloths and skirts, a light flashed, and was instantly followed by a clap of thunder right over the hotel. The rain swished with it, and immediately there were all those sounds of windows being shut and doors slamming violently which accompany a storm.

The room grew suddenly several degrees darker, for the wind seemed to be driving waves of darkness across the earth. No one attempted to eat for a time, but sat looking out at the garden, with their forks in the air. The flashes now came frequently, lighting up faces as if they were going to be photographed, surprising them in tense and unnatural expressions [...] Now and again their faces became white, as the lightning flashed, and finally a terrific crash came, making the panes of the skylight lift at the joints [...] The rain rushed down. The rain seemed now to extinguish the lightning and the thunder, and the hall became almost dark.

After a minute or two, when nothing was heard but the rattle of water upon the glass, there was a perceptible slackening of the sound, and then the atmosphere became lighter (429-30).

Before the end of the rain, a new episode of defiant exposure occurs as the electrical lights are turned on – a revelation that turns out even more terrifying and violent than the photographic image provided by the flashes:

At a touch, all the electric lights were turned on, and revealed a crowd of people all standing, all looking with rather strained faces up at the skylight, but when they saw each other in the artificial light they turned at once and began to move away (430-1).

Simultaneously, accompanied by a wind symbolical of forthcoming change, a new panorama comes over with “the clearing of the darkness and the light drumming of the rain upon the roof”, which carries away from them “the great confused ocean of air, [...] passing high over head with its clouds and its rods of fire, out to sea” (431). Likewise, as in *Mrs. Dalloway*, a renovating process has occurred among the characters. Hence, significantly embraced by either “the arm of man or of woman” (426), a new form of liberated self-realization is suggested for Terence, at the same time as the open sincerity between Evelyn and Mr. Perrott stands for the end of

hypocritical preferences. Thus, having heard Perrott's love declaration, Evelyn resolves to honestly express her intention of merely staying friends with the gentleman:

"That's splendid!" Evelyn exclaimed, grasping his hand. "Now you'll go back and start all kinds of things and make a great name in the world; and we'll go on being friends, whatever happens... we'll be great friends, won't we?"

"Evelyn!" he moaned suddenly, and took her in his arms, and kissed her. She did not resent it, although it made little impression on her.

As she sat upright again, she said, "I never see why one shouldn't go on being friends--though some people do. And friendships do make a difference, don't they? They are the kind of things that matter in one's life?" (427-8).

In this atmosphere of unconstrained vitality wherein the discordant "inarticulate cries [...] of children", as it would occur at the end of *The Years*, become the heralding chorus of a renovated land – a rotund affirmation of life is asserted:

(B)ut when the sun rose it ceased, and gave place to other sounds.

The first sounds that were heard were little inarticulate cries, the cries, it seemed, of children or of the very poor, of people who were very weak or in pain. But when the sun was above the horizon, the air which had been thin and pale grew every moment richer and warmer, and the sounds of life became bolder and more full of courage and authority (414).

Furthermore, explicit reference to Rachel's arising as the emerging Queen is included through the chess-game initiated after the storm. Accordingly, in tune with her function as the young figure and carrier of prosperity after the old and decayed set of conventions has been debunked, Rachel is proclaimed as the newly-raised Queen of the celebration, through whom the defeat of the priggish and misogynist Pepper becomes accomplished: " 'It was the move with your Queen that gave it away, Pepper', exclaimed Mr. Elliot" (437).

Of course, in this scenario of renewal, in which the symbolical passage down of Rachel results in the coming of refertilization, those individuals still anchored in outmoded precepts can no longer endure. In this sense, a practitioner of rigid conventions and social pretence, Miss Allan, like the old woman who "had the horror of being buried alive", mentioned by Dr. Lesage (408), undergoes a grotesque form of death in life:

At about half-past nine Miss Allan came very slowly into the hall, and walked very slowly to the table where the morning papers were laid, but she did not put out her hand to take one; she stood still, thinking, with her head a little sunk upon her shoulders. She looked curiously old, and from the way in which she stood, a little hunched together and very massive, you could see what she would be like when she was really old, how she would sit day after

day in her chair looking placidly in front of her [...] felt very old this morning, and useless too, as if her life had been a failure, as if it had been hard and laborious to no purpose. She did not want to go on living, and yet she knew that she would. She was so strong that she would live to be a very old woman. She would probably live to be eighty, and as she was now fifty, that left thirty years more for her to live. She turned her hands over and over in her lap and looked at them curiously; her old hands, that had done so much work for her. There did not seem to be much point in it all (415).

On the other hand, a different fate awaits Mrs. Thornbury. Previously raising as another Great Mother figure, as also suggested by the agricultural implications in her surname – “(t)his long life and all these children had left her very smooth; they seemed [...] to have left only what was old and maternal” (371) – Mrs. Thornbury is, after Rachel's death, endowed with a visionary ability of discovering the insubstantiality around her. Thus, suddenly provided with a form of absent body – reminiscent of Kristeva's notion of the dialectical presence/absence of the “female body as monstrous and lacking” (in Russo, 1995: 22-3) – the old woman is enabled to perceive the absurd inaction of the other hotel guests. Incorporeal as they seem to be, their lack becomes, not a means of vindication, but on the contrary, the mere consequence of their deplorable meaninglessness:

Through them [Mrs. Thornbury] looked at the hall which was now laid with great breadths of sunlight, and at the careless, casual groups of people who were standing beside the solid arm-chairs and tables. They looked to her unreal, or as people look who remain unconscious that some great explosion is about to take place beside them. But there was no explosion, and they went on standing by the chairs and the tables. Mrs. Thornbury no longer saw them, but, penetrating through them as though they were without substance, she saw the house, the people in the house, the room, the bed in the room, and the figure of the dead lying still in the dark beneath the sheets. She could almost see the dead. She could almost hear the voices of the mourners (415-6).

Chiming in with this scheme of debunkings and renewal the game of chess represents the ultimate confirmation of the cyclical fulfilment of the novel. Certainly, although encoded throughout the narrative, recurring reference to the chess motif anticipates the homogenizing purpose finally realized by the fertilizing rain over the main characters in *The Voyage Out*. Accordingly, the chess pattern enables the narrator to portray the absurdity of a rigidly box-squared society into neat compartments, wherein the clear-cut class division reveals the ridiculous artificiality of a chess board.

The streets were full of people, men for the most part, who interchanged their views of the world as they walked, or gathered round the wine-tables at the street corner, where an old cripple was twanging his guitar strings, while a poor girl cried her passionate song in the gutter. The two Englishwomen excited some friendly curiosity, but no one molested them.

Helen sauntered on, observing the different people in their shabby clothes, who seemed so careless and so natural, with satisfaction.

"Just think of the Mall to-night!" she exclaimed at length. "It's the fifteenth of March. Perhaps there's a Court." She thought of the crowd waiting in the cold spring air to see the grand carriages go by. "It's very cold, if it's not raining," she said. "First there are men selling picture postcards; then there are wretched little shop-girls with round handboxes; then there are bank clerks in tail coats; and then – any number of dressmakers. People from South Kensington drive up in a hired fly; officials have a pair of bays; earls, on the other hand, are allowed one footman to stand up behind; dukes have two, royal dukes – so I was told – have three; the king, I suppose, can have as many as he likes. And the people believe in it!"

Out here it seemed as though the people of England must be shaped in the body like the kings and queens, knights and pawns of the chessboard, so strange were their differences, so marked and so implicitly believed in (107-8).

Allegorical of this unfamiliar and alienating chess-board structure of society, people move along a denaturalized “avenue of trees [...] completely straight”, wherein at the turn of a corner, a “large square building” – symbolical of the strict tameness ruling over the social panorama, as well presided by the meaningless unreality of “bleeding plaster figures [standing] where foot-paths joined” – awaits them (108-9).

3. Discovering Jacob's Part: Carnival and Dismemberment in
Jacob's Room

3.1. Discovering Jacob's Part: Carnival and Dismemberment in

Jacob's Room

For I figure that the approach will be entirely different this time; no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen; all crepuscular, but the heat, the passion, humour, everything as bright as fire in the mist (*Diary II*, 13-14).

Undoubtedly, as Virginia Woolf herself had expressed it, her intention on writing *Jacob's Room* was one of mockery and derisive criticism. This parodical overtone has been traditionally associated with the narrator's desire for subverting and debunking the narrowing, as well as alienating deeply-rooted series of Edwardian literary conventions. Hence, a bedrock study in this concern by J. Little envisions *Jacob's Room* as a parodical reproduction of the traditional form of the *Bildungsroman*. On the other hand, other authors, such as S. Harris, without abandoning the notion of the novel as the vessel for contemporary literary and publicational norms, have interpreted Woolf's satirical purpose as still constrained by the limits of censorship.

Nevertheless, a more complex underlies beneath the surface of the novel's parodical composition. Indeed, a whole scaffolding sustaining the bulk of the narrative directly places *Jacob's Room* within the parameters of carnivalized literature. Even though, on interpreting Woolf's novel it often becomes necessary to resort to Bakhtin's concept of *reduced laughter* (1929: 132), still a powerful imprint of carnivalistic concerns in *Jacob's Room* becomes evident.

Indeed, at the same time she was beginning to conceive her plans for the novel, Woolf was also reading *Don Quixote*, a work Bakhtin would define in the same decade as "one of the greatest and at the same time most carnivalistic novels of world literature" (1929: 128). Certainly, the impact of these carnival concerns would not become unnoticed by Woolf, who admired the complexity in the construction of *Don Quixote*, praising the multisidedness of "these great characters" which simultaneously reflect the laughter and the satirical, subversive sting.

Principally that writing was then story telling to amuse people. So far as I can judge, the beauty, and thought come in unawares; Cervantes scarcely conscious of serious meaning, and scarcely seeing Don Quixote as we see him. Indeed that's my difficulty – the sadness, the satire, how far are they ours, not intended [...]? (*Diary II*, 1920: 55).

Significantly, by the same time, Woolf had defined her *Jacob's Room* – a novel certainly related by a "satiric narrator" (Zwerdling, 1986: 71) – as "the most amusing novel writing I've done" (*Diary II*, 1920: 40). Furthermore, if Bakhtin had insisted on the carnivalistic abolition of hierarchical barriers, as well as of any outstanding figures of leadership and power through their

'bringing down to earth' (1929: 125), a similar debasement will be performed by the narrator in *Jacob's Room*. Hence, a patent debunking of the tyrants of a patriarchal dictatorship is accomplished through the depiction of a whole catalogue of ridiculously pretentious representatives. In this sense, particular emphasis is placed, on the one hand, on warfare, as both the exhibition camp of masculinity and male dominance, and the alleged engine promoting the continuance of this potential. On the other hand, another focus of masculine authority – at the same time as a particularly powerful sanctuary buttressing the exclusion of the female – Cambridge will turn out the blank for the derisive demolition of such edifices.

Thus, dovetailed with this purpose of destroying dividing barriers, Bakhtin highlights the role of hierarchical inversions, whereby in connection with the category of profanation, “a whole system of carnivalistic debasings and bringing down to earth” is set up as a form of defiance against the conventionally established (1929: 118).

In tune with these principle, a similar caricaturization is experienced by the combatants observed in *Jacob's Room*, mockingly dwindled to the insignificance of a “block of tin soldiers” that, after “cover[ing] the cornfield, mov[ing] up the hillside, stops, reels slightly this way and that, and falls flat, save that [...] one or two pieces still agitate up and down” (132). Nevertheless, a more poignant mockery is achieved by the derisive reduction that occurs between of these soldiers to the category of a troop of insects, as the latter became depicted “pelted across the orchard and up Dods Hill and away on to the moor, now lost behind a furze bush, then off again helter-skelter in the broiling sun. A fritillary basked on a white stone in the Roman camp” (17).

Particularly concerned with utterly debasing male pride in war, Woolf reinforces her satire with the unsettlingly grotesque recreation in a minute account of eschatological details concerning the death of the insects: “(t)he stag-beetle dies slowly [...] Even on the second day its legs were supple. But he butterflies were dead. A whiff of rotten eggs had vanquished the pale clouded yellows”. Furthermore, a certain form of hybridization is displayed by the end of the same paragraph, when, having described the activities of each of the invertebrates, the narrator remarks: “(t)hey were all eating roast beef in Scarborough; for it was Sunday when Jacob caught the pale clouded yellows”.

Hence, through the skilfully played deceit on the reader – even when soon disentangled – certainly succeeds in evoking a momentary fusion between the insects involved in the military strategies and the group in which Jacob Flanders, one of the exponents of this masculine praise of battle and the patriarchal edifice that promotes it. In fact, this fusion responds to the Bakhtinian notion of the grotesque body, simultaneously displaying two entities within a single corporeal unit

in its twofold thrive for both defying any conventional categorization of outsideness and monolithical conceptions, at the same time as for mocking and subverting such established system of values (1987: 289). Even when concentrated within a considerably reduced span, this image turns out a powerfully complex structure of meanings, very much in consonance with Woolf's profound contempt for the absurd pretentiousness and vanity of the war-making males. Hence, while a colourful variety I displayed by the troop of insects, integrated by "the pale clouded yellows", "the purple butterfly", "the white admirals", or "the blues", not accidentally, the next scene presents Captain Barfoot, a man who "dressed himself very neatly in blue serge" (18). As well attesting to the grotesque hybridization between men and insects, this image becomes particularly significant from a woman who had attacked the ridiculous boastfulness entailed by military uniforms:

Obviously the connection between dress and war is not far to seek; your finest clothes are those that you wear as soldiers. Since the red and the gold, the brass and the feathers are discarded upon active service, it is plain that their [...] hygienic splendour is invented partly in order to impress the beholder with the majesty of the military office, partly through their vanity to induce young men to become soldiers (*Three Guineas*, 1996: 129).

Intimately dovetailed with this militaristic form of patriarchal dominance, as well as with its concern with providing an ideological justification for this feeling of superiority, the Cambridge precincts will also undergo a similar – both literally and figuratively – bringing down to earth. Indeed, the recurrence of the insect degradation will serve the twofold purpose of dethroning the self-appointed hegemony of Cambridge as the seat for the exercise of patriarchal tyranny, while at the same time denouncing the foundations of a system sustained by the same centralizing and vain ideals as militarism. Accordingly, even more explicitly than in the case of the battling insects, the ethereal procession of Cambridge men, whose corporeal reality had met a counterpart in the "great boots march[ing] under the [airy] gowns", is sharply contrasted by the broadly earthly "assembly" of insects in the forest, which, moreover, comes to interrupt the description of the service in King's College. Indeed, owing to their invertebrate *alter ego*, these dons congregate in a big fuss around the allegedly transcendental "light of Cambridge" – actually present in its physical realization by, as in the case of the insect, a lantern. Surrounded by the sound of pistol-shots, as well as a falling tree, the assembly of insects becomes led by a "large toad [which] being the most besotted of any [...] shoulder(s) his way through the rest". In fact, this does not turn out very different from the Cambridge meeting which, presided over by a priest, unfolds in the midst of the sound of the organ, along with the grave voices accompanying it. At the same time, the congregation obtains an absurdly romanticized "assent of the elements" – paralleled by the falling tree and the melancholy

sound of the wind in the insect world. In the light of this, it is obviously not only the insects' parade, inspired by "something senseless" that "(o)ne gets tired of watching" (24-5).

If, on analysing the devouring act of the insects in the former scene, a close connection with carnival politics had been brought to light – on the basis of the narrator's delight on the most eschatological details – a further meaning is implied by the suggested act of cannibalization that occurs in the same scene, where a double form of rapaciousness is implied by the inclusion of a hawk dropping the "bloody entrails" later devoured by the insects. Furthermore, it is through the later appearance of Jimmy's corpse serving as carrion for the crows – another species of birds of prey – that the former image becomes distressingly powerful: "Bowley [...] asked Jimmy to breakfast. And now Jimmy feeds crows in Flanders and Helen visits hospitals" (83). Nevertheless, while such scenes contribute to the introduction of cannibalization – a typically carnivalistic act – it is precisely through the inclusion of the Countess of Rocksber that the topic acquires particular force.

Indeed, Woolf sets up a whole carnival square in which an intermingling and mesalliance of different social strata momentarily takes place through the reunion of the Countess, representative of the upper classes, along with the middle-upper-class Mrs. Hilda Thomas, and Molly Pratt, a violet seller with whom Mrs. Thomas shares her wearing black stockings. The latter, however, as attested by her fur coats, would fall closer to the Countess – "(t)he comparison was much in Lady Rocksber's favour". As it pertains to a carnival market-place, exaggeration and excess surround the Countess, whose portrayal displays the protrudingness and overabundance typical of the grotesque body (1987: 289), as well as in the case of the "meaty-mouthed" Mrs. Thomas. On the other hand, Molly Pratt, the beggar reappearing in Woolf's later *Mrs. Dalloway*, becomes depicted through the foolery and ambivalent attitude of laughter and violence related to a carnival sense of the world. Yet, even though labelled as "stupid" – which is to be interpreted as a thrive for social denounce against the lack of opportunities for women, rather than as a pejorative remark – the beggar enjoys a higher status than her wealthier counterparts. Certainly, in tune with carnivalistic inversions, a patent lowering-down is undergone by the degrading depiction of the grotesque Countess Lucy – this, despite her theatrical placement on a physical level over her lower-class colleagues. In fact, the narrative deceit played upon the reader on discovering the implicit conventionality of this arrangement, along with the artificiality of her status relying on the inclusion of the window, reinforces the caricature and bringing down to earth of the formerly higher social strata:

The Countess of Rocksber sat at the head of the table alone with Jacob. Fed upon champagne and spices for at least two centuries (four, if you count the

female line), the Countess Lucy looked well fed. A discriminating nose she had for scents, prolonged, as if in quest of them; her underlip protruded a narrow red shelf; her eyes were small, with sandy tufts for eyebrows, and her jowl was heavy. Behind her (the window looked on Grosvenor Square) stood Moll Pratt on the pavement, offering violets for sale; and Mrs. Hilda Thomas, lifting her skirts, preparing to cross the road. One was from Walworth; the other from Putney. Both wore black stockings, but Mrs. Thomas was coiled in furs. The comparison was much in Lady Rocksbier's favour. Moll had more humour, but was violent; stupid too. Hilda Thomas was meaty-mouthed, all her silver frames aslant; egg-cups in the drawing-room; and the windows shrouded. Lady Rocksbier, whatever the deficiencies of her profile, had been a great rider to hounds. She used her knife with authority, tore her chicken bones, asking Jacob's pardon, with her own hands.

Along with contributing to the grotesque portrayal of the Countess through her earthly closeness to food, the image of the countess devouring her meat entails a deeper meaning. In this sense, Freud – as noted by Elizabeth Abel – envisions the totem feast as a form of confirming kinship relying, not on the father, but tied to a matrilineal social structure in which – in Freud's words – “there was no kinship between the man and the rest of the members of the family” (137-8). Significantly, Freud's account of the means through which such kinship is attained becomes dovetailed with the carnivalistic teleology of the bodily affirmation as renewal, as well as it enables the individual to enter the collectivity of his equals. Accordingly, Freud sustains that this kinship “is based not only upon the fact that we are part of the substance of our mother who has borne us, and whose milk nourished us, but also that the food eaten later through which the body is renewed, can acquire and strengthen kinship” (Freud [Abel, 1993: 24]).

It is within this setting that a real act of cannibalism is overtly performed. Hence, While in the manuscript version of *Jacob's Room* the Countess' act of breaking the bones of her meat becomes – insofar as it constitutes a transgression of the Jewish precept preventing from breaking the Paschal lamb's bones – an allegorically parodical form of cannibalization upon Jacob's body, whose close connection with a sheep's will be later analysed.

Certainly, while aiming to construe a parodical version of the *Bildungsroman* – in opposition to Little's denial of the development in *Jacob's Room* on the grounds that Jacob fails to accomplish the traditional introspection and meditative process that defines the hero of the this subgenre (1981: 120) – in fact an actual transformation is achieved, yet not within the limits of the perceptive norms of this mode, whereby the hero's upgrowing mainly accounted for a moral improvement (Batchelor, 1982: 23).

In view of this, many critics have pointed to the disappearance of the character in the novel. Accordingly, while Buckley has insisted upon the insignificance of Jacob as “too shadowy a figure

to be a tragic hero or inspire sympathy” (1974: 265), others have reached even further. Thus, J. K. Johnstone has affirmed that “the character [...] is not there; his effects upon others are there; but he himself is absent”, whereas R. Moss has defined this disappearance as “the murder at the hands of the author” (1981: 45).

Hence, while it is true that, neither a notion of the character as traditionally conceived, nor his upgrowing into the embodiment of the impeccable morality of the hero in Edwardian novels appears in *Jacob's Room*. Nonetheless, even though deprived of any privilege conferring him a position of leadership, in tune with carnival policy, does receive special emphasis ensuring his presence throughout the novel. Hereby, while Edwardian heroes – as a compilation of moral virtues and grandiosity of soul – enjoyed permanence beyond the narrative, Jacob turns into their grotesque lower-stratum projection through his transformation into the distressing image of the ram's skull carved on the Elizabethan doorway.

Certainly, not accidentally, Jacob is depicted from the very beginning of the narrative, in close connection with a sheep's skull, to which he is attracted as a little boy and which will accompany him throughout his childhood. Indeed, the recurrence of the same image five years later in *To the Lighthouse*, as well as its profound implications in the latter, attests to the particular significance of this element within Woolf's narrative. Similarly, in the context of *Jacob's Room*, the skull recurs at specially notable moments in Jacob's life, which become endowed with a symbolic value. Hence, while its first appearance represents for the Flanders an episode of experiencing the world as a toddler (6), its recurrence later on, once Jacob has begun his maturity in early adulthood, occurs at a crucial moment when Jacob feels as if hauled into “the world of the elderly” (28). At the same time, the presence of the skull in this scene provides Jacob's encounter with Bonamy, secretly in love with his friend, with a particular relevance.

Furthermore, Jacob's association with the skulls suggests an exclusively physical upgrowing in the character, whose rite of passage amounts to his grotesque transformation from a sheep's – reminiscent of the lamb-child binomial – into a ram's skull. This narratorial rejection to allow for any form of spiritual change by the focus on the lower earthly development as a denial of a moralistic teleology involved by the character becomes powerfully reinforced by the repetition – only altered by the plural form in “doorways”, as well as some minor punctuation marks – of the description of the skull's carvings on the doorways of eighteenth-century houses:

The eighteenth century has its distinction. These houses were built, say, a hundred and fifty years ago. The rooms are shapely, the ceilings high; over the doorways a rose or a ram's skull is carved in the wood. Even the panels,

painted in raspberry-coloured paint, have their distinction (155).

Simultaneously, the skull represents the dismemberment that is central to the imagery surrounding the grotesque body, with its emphasis on displaying whatever transgresses conventional boundaries (1987: 289). Nevertheless, resorting to the carnivalesque principle of exaggeration in her desire for trespassing even the representational barriers involved by a more common form of carnivalesque representation, the narrator allows her dismembered images to become reduplicated through the inclusion of a doubly dismembered skull – “[Jacob] ducked down and picked up the sheep’s jaw, which was loose” (6). Furthermore, Jacob’s kicking of the sheep’s skull similarly entails some crucial implications, very much in tune with Woolf’s denounce of the patriarchally-based war propaganda.

Hence, while the skull stands for a clear reminiscent of the carnivalesque laughing off the death – or “funeral laughter”, as Bakhtin has labelled it – the episode becomes ironically allegorical of the end of both Jacob and the narration. In this sense, the final scene, whereby the reader is left with only the skull and a pair of empty shoes, turns out the satirical grown-up equivalent of the episode in the nursery, while at the same time representing a new form of excessive dual dismemberment. Indeed, as Zwerdling has also noted, through the anti-heroic depiction of Jacob, Woolf radically opposed the veneration of dead soldiers that had been paid through the tradition of war poetry. In particular, the image of the sheep’s skull seems to represent an irreverent counterpart of Owen’s romantic elegy to the young combatants killed in his “*Anthem for Doomed Youth*”. Certainly, while Owen laments the absurd loss of the lives felled off in battle – “(w)hat passing-bells for those who die as cattle?” (in Zwerdling, 1986: 72), Woolf offers a disrespectful and irreverent recreation of the same image by the unsettling representation of the same skull, implicitly kicked – echoing Jacob’s episode in his cot – by the loose pair of shoes. Such a powerfully distressing image will serve the narrator to bluntly express her derisive contempt for the tyrannical pretentiousness of a patriarchal edifice which promotes war out of sheer egocentrism and eagerness for dominance: “Here, immediately, are three reasons which lead your sex to fight; war is a profession; a source of happiness and excitement; and it is also an outlet for manly qualities, without which men would deteriorate” (1996: 114).

On the other hand, as reminders of the missing feet, the shoes also imply a deeper significance in the scenario of carnivalesque and grotesque representation. Hence, the empty shoes in the final scene become signifiers within the Freudian notion of fetishism, whereby – as M. Russo has pointed out – these stand for the missing penis or castration (1995: 140). Furthermore, while Russo associates this image with the desire for subverting “the earlier perception of the female

genitals as mutilated or lacking a penis”, the connection in *Jacob’s Room* with the male evokes the symbolic castration and sterility of men as the tyrannical, yet barren representatives of a patriarchal construction.

In this sense, the shoes – as emblems of this male castration – become transferred to Bonamy, who is left with Mrs. Flander’s question: “‘What am I to do with these, Mr. Bonamy?’” (155), and with whom Jacob has implicitly shared a homoerotic relationship:

‘Tomorrow’s breakfast, sir’, [Mrs. Papworth] said, opening the door; and there were Sanders and Bonamy like two bull of Bashan driving each other up and down, making such a racket, and all them chairs in the way. They never noticed her [...]. And Bonamy, all his hair tousled and his tie flying, broke off, and pushed Sanders into the arm-chair, and said Mr. Sanders had smashed the coffee-pot and he was teaching Mr. Sanders – (88).

Moreover, a further reduplication of Jacob’s missing feet, simultaneously connected with his sheep caricature, is involved by the image of the cattle standing “on pointed wooden legs” (144), whereby the artificiality of the missing limbs becomes a grotesque reminiscent of the war Woolf determinedly abhorred.

Recurrently throughout the narration, the dismembered feet similarly acquire special significance in the character of Barfoot. Seemingly a blending of ‘bare foot’, the Captain’s name becomes ironically indicative of his missing limb. As in the previous cases his lack is also duplicated, at the service of exaggeration and mocking debasement – “he was lame and wanted two fingers on the left hand” (18) – which, along with the allusion in his name, turns the Captain into a ridiculously grotesque prop, worth of the circus environment purposely described immediately after his portrayal. Furthermore, while having thus pictured Captain barfoot, the narrator emphasizes this association by ironically remarking how Barfoot’s wife “knew that she would never see the Pierrots, or the brothers Zeno, or Daisy Budd and her troupe of performing seals”, while confined, not only to contemplate her husband, but even the no less grotesque Mr. Dickens. Another example of male bareness, Mr. Dickens only allows some masculine trace to be perceived in him when Mrs. Barfoot closes her eyes. Additionally, emphasis is also focused on his feet, which likewise display a certain disjoint or outstandingness in his “knobbed black boot sw[inging] tremulously in front of the other”.

[Mrs. Barfoot] closed her eyes. Mr. Dickens took a turn. The feelings of a man had not altogether deserted him, though as you saw him coming towards you, you noticed how one knobbed black boot swung tremulously in front of

the other; how there was a shadow between his waistcoat and his trousers; how he leant forward unsteadily, like an old horse who finds himself suddenly out of the shafts drawing no cart” (19).

Whereas dismemberment in the male becomes an exhibition of the castration and sterility of the patriarchal edifice, a different sign is implied by its occurrence in their female counterpart. Hence, the exposure of a dismembered figure through the mannequin in Evelina’s shop represents a form of transgression, as well as an inversion – as noted by M. Russo – of the conventional idea of female beauty as a complete, perfect picture easily susceptible of definition and categorization (1995: 140).

In Evelina’s shop off Shaftesbury Avenue the parts of a woman were shown separate. In the left hand was her skirt. Twining round a pole in the middle was a feather boa. Ranged like the heads of malefactors on Temple Bar were hats – emerald and white, lightly wreathed or drooping beneath deep-dyed feathers. And on the carpet were her feet – pointed gold, or patent leather slashed with scarlet (105).

The debunking of this notion of beauty and art certainly chimes in with Ruskin’s definition of the grotesque as an imperfect “structure in which gaps are elements themselves”, thus utterly opposed to the classical idea of perfection in art. In Ruskin’s words:

A fine grotesque is the expression, in a moment, by a series of symbols thrown together in bold and fearless connection of truths which it would have taken a long time to express in any verbal way, and in which the connection is left for the beholder to work out for himself; the gaps, left or overleaped by the haste of imagination, forming the grotesque character” (Ruskin, *X*: 88).

In this sense, the scene of the ladies suspended in the air through their reflection in the mirror – “some ladies looked for a moment into steaming bedrooms near by [...] (the long mirrors held the ladies suspended)” (153) – implies a similar subversion against the traditional forms of representation. Hence, while Ruskin had rejected the notion of perfection in art, the non-correspondence between the image and its mirror reflection in this episode becomes emblematic of Ruskin’s concept of the grotesque as a defiance and transgression of the mimetic reproduction of reality in the artistic creation.

At the same time, this form of aerialism in the female stands for what Balint has described as “symbolically related to erection and potency” (in Russo, 1995: 37), thus significantly reversing the conventional roles of power in the scenario of the barren, impotent male. Moreover, by defining a new space for the woman, also transgressing of traditional categories of representation, this even

comes to challenge – as noted by Russo – the Bakhtinian concept of the grotesque, whereby the female was securely enclosed by her confinement to the cave and the space of the symbolically “low” (1995:29).

In conclusion, it is in her desire for conquering this new female space that Woolf will precisely strive to debunk the repulsiveness of a war promoted by the vain, yet tyrannical forces of a patriarchal edifice. Hence, it is through the debasement and erosion of the pillars on which this edifice is sustained – such as the banal pretentiousness around Cambridge as a centre of education, and the absurdity involved by militarism – as well as through the unmasking of the barrenness of male ideals, that a new reordering of the space becomes essential – while of course delimiting the male ground, indeed “Jacob’s room”.

4. 'Let's Keep Together!': The Presence and Interrelation of Carnival and Unanimism in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

4.1. The Car and the Plane: Community Gatherings in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

4.2. Outsiders, Outcasts, and "Way-Blockers" in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

4.3. 'The Kings; The Fool and [...] Ourselves'.

This chapter explores the extent to which the respective paradigms of carnival politics and Unanimist postulates become convergent in *Mrs. Dalloway* – confluence, as will be discussed which ultimately recurs in Woolf's last novel. Indeed, considering the susceptibility of both novels to be analysed within very similar parameters, along with the examination of this mentioned coincidence between carnival and Unanimism, particular attention to outcast figures within this system is provided. Simultaneously, this connection will serve as the basis for the complementary association between the Bakhtinian implications of carnival life and its ancient origins, which establish an essential precedent to most of its core components. In this sense, special emphasis is placed upon the presence of the scapegoat as a symbolical centre of these carnival rites and ideological principles.

4.1. The Car and the Plane: Community Gatherings in *Mrs. Dalloway*

One of the crucial aspects Bakhtin remarks in his outline of carnival is its power to gather together into a cohesed community a number of individuals previously separated and disintegrated. Furthermore, this union is not limited to a physical encounter. On the contrary, a major achievement of carnival celebrations amounts to its potential to link its participants both emotionally and psychologically, thus emerging what he considers as “a new mode of interrelationship between individuals; counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life”. As he explains it:

All distance between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people. This is a very important aspect of a carnival sense of the world. People who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free familiar contact on the carnival square (1929: 123).

Analysing the nature of these communal formations, Gardiner emphasizes the emergence within them of what he calls “an intense feeling of unity and solidarity” (1992: 52). The same aspect is also noted by R. Cunliffe, who attributes such sentiments to the physical proximity favoured by the shared participation of the members in an experience. Thus, for Cunliffe, it is the spatial organization of these celebrations that constitutes “(t)he most powerful mechanism by which carnival created undistanced contact between subjects,” whereby what he calls “a profoundly visceral sense of *communitas*” is generated in each of its members (1993: 50).

Particularly in the novel of *Mrs. Dalloway*, a consistent concern with bringing different people to a point is patently revealed. The most obvious example amounts to Clarissa's party, where even without representing equal proportions, the opposite extremes of society gather together through the coincidence of the Prime Minister with politicians of Members of the Court, like Richard Dalloway or Hugh Whitbread, respectively, along with different types of artists, including a poet and a painter, as well as the lower-class Ellie Henderson. Indeed, the party constitutes one of the main poles around which the whole plot spins and is constructed. The novel opens up with Clarissa's arrangements for the party through her decision of buying flowers. “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself” (3).

The homogeneity in the real status of the different classes reunited in the party, as it occurs in carnival festivities, has been refuted by certain critics, such as Alex Zwerdling, who argues that:

Clarissa's party is strictly class-demarcated. No Septimus, No Rezia, no Doris Kilman could conceivably set foot in it [...] Even impoverished people, like

Clarissa's cousin Ellie Henderson, are invited only under pressure and out of habit [...] Clarissa's integration is horizontal [...] (1977: 73).

Yet, even when a complete social integration can be questioned, the fact is that the party actually serves as a linking device, at least at the level of the narrative. This integrating quality whereby the unity of the novel relies on the cohesion among characters has also been observed by Morris Philipson, who, in his analysis of the meaning of the party in *Mrs. Dalloway*, asserts that “what makes for the integration of the novel – giving the literary work its effective unity – is what makes for the integration of the individual characters in the novel [...]” (1974: 133). In this sense, Mrs. Dalloway's party represents a cohesive element connecting characters so different among each other, and even almost opposed, as in the case of Clarissa and Doris Kilman. Thus, while the party remains particularly important for the former, it is also latent in the mind of her antagonist, the repressed Miss Kilman, who reveals to Elizabeth her feelings for not being invited to the Dalloway's parties:

'I never go to parties,' said Miss Kilman, just to keep Elizabeth from going. 'People don't ask me to parties' – [...] 'Why should they ask me?' she said. 'I'm plain, I'm unhappy (144-5).

At the same time, the element of the party reverberates in Peter's memory with a kind of incantatory quality, considering its repetitiveness and the rhythmical and constant way in which it is uttered.

'Peter! Peter!' cried Clarissa [...] 'My party to-night! Remember my party tonight!' she cried, having to raise her voice against the roar of the open air, and, overwhelmed by the traffic and the sound of all the clocks striking, her voice crying 'Remember my party to-night!' sounded frail and thin and very far away [...]

Remember my party, *remember my party*⁴⁰, said Peter Walsh as he stepped down the street, speaking to himself rhythmically [...] (52).

Furthermore, this utterance preserves its power throughout the whole novel aiming to achieve the desired unity of the collectivity. Thus, having cast her incantatory spell on Peter, Clarissa repeats her formula to her daughter Elizabeth, whom she is afraid of missing in her integrating purpose. Therefore, knowing, on the one hand, Elizabeth's lack of interest – she herself states⁴¹ “[s]he did not much like parties” (144) – and on the other hand, the domineering action of the authoritarian Miss Kilman over her daughter, Clarissa opts for launching her unifying message before Elizabeth leaves home. On this occasion, Clarissa even takes her unifying purpose further by remarking the sense of togetherness through the inclusive 'our': “With a sudden impulse, with a violent anguish, for this woman was taking her daughter from her, Clarissa leant over the banisters

⁴⁰ My emphasis.

⁴¹ My emphasis..

and cried out, 'Remember the party! Remember *our*⁴² party to-night!' (138).

In any case, what Bakhtin highlighted as the bedrock of carnival collectivities amounts to the particular process undergone by the individual on becoming part of the crowd. For the Russian linguist, when a number of people gathered together into a group, a process of erosion of individual selfhood took place, whereby these individuals became fused into a whole, unique body. At the same time, a new awareness as a group soon emerged among them, thus acting as a linking element for the crowd. As Bakhtin puts it:

The individual feels that he is an indissoluble part of the collectivity, a member of the people's mass body. In this whole, the individual body ceases to a certain extent to be itself; it is possible, so to say, to exchange bodies, to be renewed [...] (1987: 229).

Certainly, his theory retains considerable similarities with the main postulates of the unanimist movement. The term, first used by Jules Romains in 1905, in a review called "*Le Penseur*", aimed to describe – as Norrish quotes it – “the portrayal of literature of collective movements and feelings” (1958: 3). Romains shared Bakhtin's belief that the individual went through a particular transformation when participating in a collective experience. This, the French author maintained, derived in the formation of a community, endowed with its own consciousness as a group. In this sense, the unanimist theory echoes to a great extent Bakhtin's concept of 'mass body'. As Norrish exposes it in his study of the unanimism of Jules Romains, the central idea of the unanimist movement sustained that:

when a number of men meet, however chance that meeting may be, provided they remain together, they tend to become – as Romains himself put it in a lecture in 1925⁴³ – “something other than a certain number of men' to become part of an individuality greater than their own, the individuality of the group (1958: 4).

It seems that Virginia Woolf herself did not remain neutral to the influence of the unanimist movement. Indeed, as McLaurin points out, the Bloomsbury Group soon developed an interest towards Romains' works (1981-2: 115). Thus, in 1914, Desmond MacCarthy and Sydney Waterlow, two Bloomsbury members, published a translation of the French author's "*Mort de Quelqu'un*" (1911). Even Virginia could have been the author of a review published in the "*Times Literary Supplement*", for which she was a regular reviewer, of Romains' *Les Copains*. On the other hand, another unanimist author, Charles Vildrac, had agreed on collaborating in a translation into French of Woolf's "*The Mark on the Wall*".

⁴² My emphasis.

⁴³ *Petite Introduction à l'Unanimisme*, given to different European universities over England, Sweden, Finland and Holland, and later published in 1933 as the last chapter of a series of essays under the title *Problèmes Européens* (1958:4, n.2).

Yet, McLaurin's thesis is far from representing an isolated interpretation. Actually, the author supports his remarks by the fact that other critics had previously noticed certain unanimist traces in some of Woolf's novels. Among these critics, McLaurin explains, E. M. Forster had observed a similarity between the atmosphere in the last chapters of *The Voyage Out* and that in Romain's "*Mort de Quelqu'un*", while Conrad Aiken or M. A. Leaska take the same French novel as a point of reference in their analysis of *To the Lighthouse* or *The Years*, respectively. Likewise, the sense of community that pervades *The Waves* has also suggested a reading of this sign to André Rousseaux, who interprets "(t)he social dreams in which Mrs. Woolf's characters are trapped" as a residue of the unanimism of Jules Romain's.

Thus far, two aspects need to be emphasized. The first one amounts to the high degree of convergence, and even intersection – as it now comes to light throughout the first part of this work – between Bakhtin's description of communities during carnival and the unanimist conception of collectivity. The second aspect refers to the at all beckonings likely influence of the French movement on Virginia Woolf. These two factors considered, it will be reasonable enough to analyse the sign and implications of the community gatherings in the novels of Virginia Woolf that are being examined in terms of the intersection between both theoretical approaches. In this sense, and despite the previously alluded preponderance of the party in the novel of *Mrs. Dalloway*, certain other episodes illustrate more clearly Woolf's overlapping of carnivalistic principles, on the one hand, and unanimist postulates, on the other hand, in her depiction of communities.

The first of these episodes occurs at the beginning of the novel, when the sound of a backfiring serves as a connecting element among a heterogeneous collectivity of individuals. Integrated by an assorted number of people of all ages and conditions – as in the case of the Bakhtinian community – the spontaneous 'crowd' brings together from enigmatic, impressionistically rendered drivers and passers-by, as well as "old ladies on top of omnibuses", "women" and "boys on bicycles", to the humorous Edgar J. Watkiss, along with Miss Pym, the shop assistant, and even an unnoticed first encounter between Septimus and Clarissa.

[...] oh, a pistol shot in the street outside!

'Dear, those motor cars,' said Miss Pym, going to the window to look, and coming back and smiling apologetically with her hands full of sweet peas, as if those motor cars were all her fault.

The violent explosion which made Mrs. Dalloway jump and Mrs. Pym go to the window and apologise came from a motor car which had drawn to the side of the pavement precisely opposite Mulberry's shop window. Passers-by who, of course, stopped and stared, had just time to see a face of the very greatest importance against the dove-grey upholstery, before a male hand drew the blind and there was nothing to be seen except a square of dove grey [...]

(O)ld ladies on the tops of omnibuses spread their black parasols; here a green, here a red parasol opened with a little pop. Mrs. Dalloway, coming to the window with her arms full of sweet peas, looked out with her little pink face pursed in enquiry. Every one looked at the motor car. Septimus looked. Boys on bicycles sprang off. Traffic accumulated (14-16).

Not by chance, the narrator has summoned up to her crowd representative members of the most deeply rooted English institutions of her time. In the light of this, certain critics have accused Woolf and the rest of the Bloomsbury writers of promoting the perpetuation of traditional values through, according to R. H. Tawney, the former's "cloistered and secluded refinement, intolerant of the heat and dust of creative effort" (1952: 81).

Other authors in the 1930s agreed with Tawney's view, such as F. R. Leavis, who summarized the main notes of this type of writing as "Articulateness and *unreality*⁴⁴ cultivated together; *callowness* disguised from itself as articulateness; *conceit* casing itself safely in a confirmed sense of *high sophistication*" (1952: 257). Yet, despite the charge against Virginia Woolf as an elitist writer, the vision offered through her presentation of such communities rather chimes in with the carnivalistic debunking and decrowning of official authority. Indeed, Alex Zwerdling has emphasized Woolf's concern with providing not only a testimony of the profound changes that were occurring in her society, but also with giving an impulse to those changes through her writings. In Zwerdling's words:

She was acutely aware of the ways in which her society was changing and used her pen both to record the effects of those changes on the lives of her characters and to bring about change (1986: 26).

Thus, the allusion to Empire through an implicitly drunk Colonial involved in a fight after insulting the House of Windsor directly points to a sheer disbelief and mockery of the former imperial glory. Similarly, the inclusion of the character of Sir John Buckhurst is not a random decision. Certainly, the portrayal of the retired old Judge while waiting to cross to the other side at the same time as he faces the younger Clarissa, with whom he is to literally change places, undeniably suggests the carnival rite of the replacement and death of the old king, or "quisquilloso" with the new one. As Bakhtin puts it:

Estos quisquillosos representan el derecho antiguo, la vieja concepción, el viejo mundo, y están vinculados a lo antiguo, fugaz y agonizante, *pero son a la vez inseparables de lo nuevo que nace de lo viejo; participan del mundo ambivalente que nace y muere a un tiempo*, mientras apuntan a un polo negativo, *a la muerte*; su muerte es una fiesta de *muerte y resurrección*⁴⁵ [...] (1987: 185).

Furthermore, if Bakhtin conceived the process of regeneration and renewal as particularly

⁴⁴ My emphasis.

⁴⁵ Emphasis as in the original.

linked to the female genre (183-5), the narrator's choice of Clarissa as the character through which this rite of renovation is accomplished acquires special significance. On analysing the vision of the woman offered by Rabelais in his work, Bakhtin comments the ambivalence inherent to the female genre, both as the receptacle of death and as the womb and genesis of life:

En la «tradición gala», la mujer es la tumba corporal del hombre [...], destinada a todas las pretensiones abstractas, a todo lo que está limitado, acabado, agotado. Es una inagotable vasija de fecundación que consagra a la muerte todo lo viejo y acabado. Como la Sibila de Panzoust, la mujer de la «tradición gala» levanta sus faldas y muestra el lugar de donde todo parte (los infiernos, la tumba), y de donde todo viene (el seno maternal) (1989: 216).

Marriage, one of the main pillars of the British society of the early twentieth century, is also alluded through the reference to the girls shopping for their wedding. As in the case of the other institutions, a similar desire for the abolishment of conventions underlies the portrayal of the future brides. Indeed, the emphasis on the purity and chastity epitomized by the “white underlinen threaded with pure white ribbon” (19) these brides-to-be are required to wear directly points to the oppressive feelings that the narrator herself experienced towards the conventionalities of marriage as a form of imposition upon women.

Observing the direction towards which the education for women is biased in her time, Woolf denounces in *Three Guineas* the preceptal character of marriage, which rules over women's lives. In particular, Woolf aims to denounce the enforcement, on the one hand, to preserve virginity until marriage and, on the other hand, the imposition for women to yield this intactness to their 'master'.

And what was the great end and aim of these years, of that education? Marriage, of course. '... it was not a question of *whether* we should marry, but simply of *whom* we should marry' [...] It was with a view to marriage that her mind was taught. It was with a view to marriage that she tinkled on the piano, [...]; sketched innocent domestic scenes [...]; read this book [...]; charmed and talked. It was with a view to marriage that her body was educated; a maid was provided for her; that the streets were shut to her; that the fields were shut to her; that solitude was denied her – all this was enforced upon her in order that she might preserve her body intact for her husband. In short, the thought of marriage influenced what she said, what she thought, what she did. How could it be otherwise? Marriage was the only profession open to her (1938: 148-9).

Therefore, this multifarious multitude reunited around the passing of the royal car, through which the narrator promulgates and enacts the decay of the solid building of Victorian society along with the institutional pillars supporting it, undoubtedly appeals to the description of carnivalistic gatherings, whose major purpose – as expressed by Bakhtin – consisted in the debunking and erosion of the rigid system of theocratic authority:

The laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order

of ordinary, that is noncarnival life, are suspended during carnival: what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it [...] (1929: 129).

Indeed, this closer relationship between the members of the crowd, who participated in common rites and celebrations – Bakhtin maintained – helped to create a new vision of man and the world that opposed and debased the suffocating officialdom.

It could be said [...] that a person of the Middle Ages lived, as it were, *two lives*: one was the *official* life, monolithically serious and gloomy, subjugated to a strict hierarchical order, full of terror, dogmatism, reverence, and piety; the other was the *life of the carnival square*, free and unrestricted, full of ambivalent laughter, blasphemy, the profanation of everything sacred, full of debasings and obscenities, familiar contact with everyone and everything. Both these lives were legitimate, but separated by strict temporal boundaries (1929: 123-130).

A similar purpose of opposition to authority and the established system is also central to Romains' theory of the group. Indeed, Bakhtin's conception of carnival as the vehicle for the transgression of medieval authority is not so far from the unanimist notion of collectivity. In Romains' "Naissance de la band", one of the parts of his twenty-seven-volume work *Les hommes de bonne volonté*, and where he curiously includes a character called "Clarissa", Odette Jerphanion explicitly refers to the Middle Ages to praise the potential of the feudal structure along with the perilous system of values on which it stands.

Permítame una analogía histórica – prosiguió –. El feudalismo de la Edad Media, en su hinchazón espontánea, ¿en qué terminó? En el reinado de la fuerza, en un reinado dividido, anárquico, de la fuerza. ¿En qué consistió la obra de las grandes órdenes de caballería? Inventaron un remedio específico. Al espíritu feudal puro, que al final sólo daba salteadores y aventureros puros, le agregaron un ideal que lo superaba y sublimaba (1958: 236).

This belief in the political power of social formations to subvert the conventional order acquires particular importance in a time which the French psychologist Gustave Le Bon termed as "the era of crowds". Indeed, in his 1896 *The Crowd. A Study of the Popular Mind*, Le Bon observes the prominent role of the masses in the eradication of the former social, political and ideological structures at the turn of the century:

While all our ancient beliefs are tottering and disappearing, while the old pillars of society are giving way one by one, the power of the crowd is the only force that nothing menaces, and of which the prestige is continually on the increase. The age we are about to enter will in truth be the ERA OF CROWDS⁴⁶ (1896: 14).

If carnival, as we have seen, vindicates the rule of the populace, among whose members a temporary king of the carnival is appointed whereas official government is debased and decrowned,

⁴⁶ Capitalization as in the original.

the society at the beginning of the twentieth century – Le Bon argues – is undergoing a similar raise of popular power to the detriment of monadic, centralized authority:

To-day it is the traditions which used to obtain in politics, and the individual tendencies and rivalries of rulers which do not count; while, on the contrary, the voice of the masses has become preponderant. It is this voice that dictates their conduct to kings, whose endeavour is to take note of its utterances. The destinies of nations are elaborated at present in the heart of the masses, and no longer in the councils of princes (1896: 15).

Precisely, while the real presence of the Prince, one of the alleged occupants of the car in *Mrs. Dalloway*, remains in the darkness, it is the voice of the crowd that we literally hear throughout this episode. Actually, the passing of the royal car serves mainly as a device to provide the special form of physical and psychological cohesion that both Bakhtin and Romaine attributed to the crowd. In fact, the definition of the group that Jerphanion, one of the gang's founders, provides in the “Naissance de la Bande”, significantly reminds us of the portrayal of carnival collectivities, with which it shares at least two points of intersection. The first of these points alludes to the particular sentiments experienced by the members participating in these groups. Hence, while Romaine employs terms such as 'enthusiasm' or 'comradeship', Bakhtin defines the same emotions by highlighting the free and familiar contact that arises within these collectivities. Our second point of intersection refers to the particular nature of the crowd as a life apart from the ordinary world. Certainly, the concept of 'second life' the medieval man experiences for Bakhtin seems parallel to Romaine's idea of the group as a microcosm beyond the limitations and constraints of the external world:

– El espíritu de banda ¿qué es? Cierta sentimiento de camaradería, de ardor, el entusiasmo de actuar juntos, de conspirar juntos; la idea de que la banda constituye un cuerpo privilegiado [...] Más allá comienza el mundo exterior (1958: 236).

Once these concepts have been clarified, it is necessary to remark that the scene of the automobile in *Mrs. Dalloway* reaches its climax at a crucial moment when the utmost expression of unity in this episode is achieved. Hence, the crowd gathered around the mysterious car becomes fused into Bakhtin's 'mass body', whose members are perfectly integrated into a unique whole, when:

For thirty seconds all heads were inclined the same way – to the window. Choosing a pair of gloves – should they be to the elbow or above it, lemon or pale grey? – ladies stopped [...] (19).

The narrator continues to describe the particular nature of the group, whose extraordinariness lies on the unity, not so much at a physical level, but more important, at a psychological one. Indeed, the collectivity becomes thus imbued by a unifying spirit, which endows the formation with a

quality higher – as the unanimists expressed it – than that of its individual members, even beyond the frontiers of rational explanation. So much it is so that, once the members of the crowd become fused into a single whole, the pulse of this ‘mass body’ generates a vibration even more powerful than an earthquake:

when the [ladies'] sentence was finished something had happened. Something so trifling in single instances that no mathematical instrument, though capable of transmitting shocks in China, could register the vibration; yet in its fullness rather formidable and in its common appeal emotional; for in all the hat shops and tailors' shops strangers looked at each other and thought of the dead; of the flag; of Empire [...] For the surface agitation of the passing car as it sunk grazed something very profound (19).

The depiction of this process of fusion that occurs within the members of a crowd certainly chimes in with the interpretation of the carnivalistic *mésalliances* that Bakhtin provides in his study of Rabelais' work. Moreover, the Russian critic emphasizes the vehemence of the feelings and emotions that arise among these individuals, who experience carnival celebration with a particular intensity. In this sense, as Gardiner also notes, a new type of personal relationships are established among the members of the group. As the author defines it, carnival “is an enactment (however fleeting or temporary) of a transformed set of social relations, a 'living possibility' which is 'lived by the whole man, in thought and body'” (1993: 37).

It must also be noted that the Bakhtinian conception of the crowd as a special form of collective integration of different individuals, who become united into a whole, cannot have been alien to Woolf in a time short after Le Bon proposed the same theory. The French thinker was particularly interested in the transformation of the individual mind which becomes, as he calls it, a “collective mind” on being integrated within the group. Moreover, if both Bakhtin and Woolf described a heterogeneous crowd, constituted by people of all classes and conditions, Le Bon insists on the emergence of cohesiveness despite its multifarious nature:

The most striking peculiarity presented by a psychological group is the following. Whoever be the individuals that compose it, however like or unlike be their mode of life, their occupations, their character or their intelligence, *the fact that they have been transformed into a group puts them in possession of a sort of collective mind*⁴⁷ which makes them feel, think, and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them would feel, think, and act were he in a state of isolation [...] The psychological group is a provisional being formed of heterogeneous elements which for a moment are combined, exactly as the cells which constitute a living body form by their reunion a new being which displays characteristics very different from those possessed by each of the cells singly (1896: 29).

Curiously, Bakhtin, Le Bon, and Woolf share the resort to the body metaphor to describe the

⁴⁷ My emphasis.

integrity of individual members into a unitary whole. Thus, while Le Bon explains it through the reference to the cells that compose “a living body”, Bakhtin identifies the crowd with a “mass body” resulting from the fusion of single beings. In tune with these renderings of the fused whole, Virginia Woolf shares the same image to depict the notion of the unitary entity. This is particularly evident in her essay “*Reflections in a Motor Car*”, in which, after her presentation of her different selves as separate beings, she concludes with the happy reunion of all of them:

None of my selves could see anything beyond the tapering light of our headlamps on the hedge. I summoned them together [...] Now we have got to collect ourselves; we have got to be one self. Nothing is to be seen any more, except one wedge of road and bank which our lights repeat incessantly. We are perfectly provided for. We are warmly wrapped in a rug; we are protected from wind and rain [...]

“Off with you,” I said to my assembled selves. “Your work is done. I dismiss you. Good-night.”

And the rest of the journey was performed in the delicious society of my own body (1942: 13-14).⁴⁸

In any case, Woolf makes the unity of the crowd, in the previous episode from *Mrs. Dalloway*, tangible for the reader through the pictorial device of literally wrapping the scene with a cohesive, self-engulfing element. In this sense, the presence of the sudden breeze at the closure of the scene is worth considering:

A breeze flaunting ever so warmly down the Mall through the thin trees, past the bronze heroes, lifted some flag flying in the British breast of Mr. Bowley and he raised his hat as the car turned into the Mall and held it high as the car approached; and let the poor mothers of Pimlico press close to him, and stood very upright (21).

Yet, however chance the metaphor may be, the novel of *Mrs Dalloway* consistently displays moments of integration among the characters. Indeed, hardly has finished the episode of the automobile when a new, unexpected event provides the force to reunite the community. If we have commented on the unifying effect of the breeze, another sensorial element comes into play when “(t)he sound of an aeroplane bore(s) ominously into the ears of the crowd” (21). The unifying function of this sound is later confirmed through its second occurrence. On this occasion, the noise fulfils again the carnivalesque role of creating a sense of 'communitas' among people from different origins and conditions:

Then, suddenly, [...] the aeroplane rushed out of the clouds again, the sound boring into the ears of all the people in the Mall, in the Green Park, in Piccadilly, in Regent Street, in Regent's Park [...] (23).

In his depiction of a communal life flourishing in an atmosphere of freedom and equality –

⁴⁸ “*Evening Over Sussex: Reflections in a Motor Car*”, *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*.

“a second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance” (1987: 9) – Bakhtin has often been accused of excessive utopianism. In this sense, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White consider that the schema of an idealistic fellowship living in perfect freedom and equality obeyed to Bakhtin's desire for providing – as expressed by the authors – “an image – ideal of and for popular community as a heterogeneous and boundless totality” (1986: 10) in the context of a pre-capitalist Europe. This social aspect of Bakhtin's writings has also been noted by Michael Acouturier, who underlines the critic's preoccupation with the historical process whereby Europe “emerge[d] from a socially isolated [...] semipatriarchal society” and entered “into international and interlingual contacts and relationships” (1983: 235-6).

Actually, the novel of *Mrs Dalloway* entails much of this image-ideal mentioned by Stallybrass and White. In a scene in *Mrs Dalloway*, a series of elements certainly suggest a form of utopian perfection. Indeed, from a unanimist point of view, one of the moments of absolute union even beyond the members of the community occurs while the amazed crowd gather together to watch the plane. “All down the Mall people were standing and looking up into the sky. As they looked the whole world became perfectly silent [...]” (22).

In any case, such utopianism ultimately aims to present an ideal of freedom and egalitarianism which, if not reached, at least ought to be imitated as accurately as possible. Hereby, the depiction of the gulls flying across echoes the atmosphere of unoppressiveness and lack of constraints which is typical of carnival, at the same time as the remark on their arrangement – “first one gull leading, then another” – reinforces the rejection of authoritarianism. Yet, if the presence of birds involves a significant allusion to the decentralization of authority, the inclusion of the aeroplane becomes even more potentially loaded. Assuming the nature of the plane as an extension of the bird image, Stephen Kerne argues that “[f]rom Ovid to Shelley the soaring bird was a symbol of freedom” (1983: 242).

Indeed, the description of the aeroplane's flight as it “turned and raced and swooped exactly where it liked, swiftly, freely, like a skater [...] or a dancer” certainly chimes in with that image. Considering this description, G. Beer has identified the aeroplane as “an image of equalizing as opposed to hierarchy, of freedom and play” (1996: 161). According to the critic, the plane elicits the formation of a community, in which the real sense of 'communitas' is not provided by the smoke message, but rather by the freedom involved in the act of interpreting the message. On the other hand, this “heterogeneous and boundless totality” envisioned by Bakhtin certainly has a place in *Mrs. Dalloway*, where the spontaneous crowd includes from the upper-class Clarissa Dalloway, and the tail-coated gentlemen in clubs to the vagrant Molly Pratt, or “the poor mothers of Pimlico”.

However, the element of a multifarious crowd of people gathered around the symbol of royalty is not exclusive to *Mrs Dalloway*. Actually, quite a similar episode occurs in *Orlando*, where a wide variety of people come together on seeing the Prince with his lover, the Princess Sasha.

Concerning the latter scene, the carnivalesque vision needs to be apprehended at two different levels. From the mimetic point of view, the episode significantly takes place during the celebration of a Frost Carnival, where the uproarious crowd is imbued with the festive spirit which involves a colourful display of the “white glare from the torches, bonfires, flaming cressets” in contrast with “the orange light of sunset,” along with the presence of the fireworks, or the sound of music. Furthermore, at the diegetic level, the narrator also resorts to the carnivalesque device of long enumerations, one of the features identified by Bakhtin as typical of the atmosphere of the public market-place (1987: 159):

By this time Orlando and the Princess were close to the Royal enclosure and found their way barred by a great crowd of [...] people, who were pressing as near to the silken rope as they dared. Loth to end their privacy and encounter the sharp eyes that were on the watch for them, the couple lingered there, shouldered by apprentices; tailors; fishwives; horse dealers; cony catchers; starving scholars; maid-servants in their whimples; orange girls; ostlers; sober citizens; bawdy tapsters; and a crowd of little ragamuffins such as always haunt the outskirts of a crowd, screaming and scrambling among people's feet – all the riff-raff of the London streets indeed was there, jesting and jostling, here casting dice, telling fortunes, shoving, tickling, pinching; here uproarious, there glum; some of them with mouths gaping a yard wide; others as little reverent as daws on a house-top; all as variously rigged out as their purse or stations allowed; here in fur and broadcloth; there in tatters [...] (26).

Nevertheless, if it is true that the description of the crowd gathered around the Prince had already appeared in *Mrs. Dalloway*, an important distinction is to be made. Thus, whereas the crowd around the Prince merely splits up in *Orlando*, the narrator in *Mrs. Dalloway* goes a step further in her desire for the debasement of officialdom. Hereby, any suggestion of popular admiration for royal authority is dissolved when the crowd in *Mrs. Dalloway*, originally formed around the presence of the Prince, suddenly changes its focus of unity on hearing the sound of the aeroplane, while the car is still passing. Indeed, whereas no one sees the car leave, people “[a]ll down the Mall”, [...] standing and looking up into the sky “do watch the aeroplane temporarily disappear behind the clouds” (23). This shift of focus is overtly highlighted by the narrator through the inclusion of a brief reference to the royal car as a parenthetical comment in the middle of the description of the aeroplane. In this case, the dynamic rhythm of discourse entails not only the motional aspect, but also the emotional involvement of the narrative voice in her decentralizing purpose:

(and the car went in at the gates and *nobody looked at it*⁴⁹), and shutting off the smoke, away and away it rushed, and the smoke faded and assembled itself round the broad white shapes of the clouds (22).

Analysing the value of the aeroplane in the novel, G. Beer establishes a sharp contrast between the symbols of the car, patently a symbol of royalty and the institutional system, and the aeroplane, which represents for Beer the car's homogenizing and decentralizing antagonist:

In *Mrs. Dalloway* the aeroplane is set alongside, and against, the car. (Both are observed by most of the book's named and unnamed characters). The closed car suggests the private passage of royalty, and becomes the spectacular centre for the comedy of social class [...] [The] briefly named characters respond to 'some flag flying in the British breast' and gaze devotedly on the inscrutable vehicle whose occupant is never revealed [...]

Instead of the muffled superplus of attributed meaning represented by the car, the aeroplane is playful, open, though first received as ominous (1996:160).

As consistently explained throughout this section, the actual importance of the aeroplane's scene lies – Beer agrees – on “the communal act of sky-gazing”. Indeed, Woolf's choice of the plane as the centripetal force operating an homogenizing effect on the gathered crowd also chimes in with some of the mainstream theories in her time. Certainly, in 1938, Gertrude Stein, as noted by Beer, praised in her work *Picasso* the emergence of a new type of beauty as a consequence of the possibilities of flight. In particular, she pointed out the new reordering of the earth that was being promoted through the emergence of the bird view, whose most immediate effects were the decentralization of power, along with the doing away with borders (1993: 167).

In any case, this advocacy for unity is overtly expressed by Clarissa herself, who feels that:

[...] somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there [...]; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself (9-10).

Indeed, her ontological theory, which she directly inherits from Durkheim (1993: 396-401), has been labelled by A. Fleishman (1975: 81) as “group mind or unity of consciousness.” If A. McLaurin understands such a definition as a clear reference to the unanimist postulates (1975: 81), we have now introduced a new perspective by unveiling its connection with the type of anti-hierarchical and solidly unified community that Bakhtin associates with carnival festivities, insofar as only through proximity to other human beings can the individual achieve his self-realization.

As it has become evident, it is in the light of this conjugation between unanimist theories

⁴⁹ My emphasis.

and carnivalistic premises that communal encounters in *Mrs. Dalloway* need to be analyzed and apprehended. Indeed, it has been remarked, three of the crucial events in the novel, such as the party, on the one hand, and the contemplation of both the royal car and the aeroplane, on the other, constitute the pillars on which this interpretation of communities in the novel lies and stands.

4.2. Outsiders, Outcasts, and “Way-Blockers”

in *Mrs. Dalloway*

Throughout the preceding section, the communities in this novel have been presented as all-encompassing entities, endowed with an endless capacity for integration. Thus, the members of these groups have appeared as beings who rejoice together in an atmosphere of utter cohesion and familiarity. Yet, beside this perfectly integrated body, the presence of certain outsiders distorts the utopian image of the fused whole, thus revealing the existence of some drop atoms. Indeed, after Bakhtin published his theory of carnival – more fully developed in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929) and *Rabelais and His World* (1968) – different authors expressed their disagreement with some of the premises sustained by the Russian author. From various sources, his definition of carnival as a homogenizing encounter of the people, advocating for equality and freedom, was dismantled as a utopian dream which in fact stressed difference and discrimination towards some of its participants.

Hence, for Simon Dentith, the inversions and decrownings which are typical of carnival involved a two-fold process. Hereby, the author expresses:

It is hard to accede to a version of carnival which stresses its capacity to invert hierarchies and undermine boundaries, without at the same time recalling that many carnival and carnival-like degradations clearly functioned to reinforce communal and hierarchical norms [...] The carnival inversions, the world-turned-upside-down of these festivities, were clearly not aimed at loosening people's sense of the rightness of the rules which kept the world right way up, but on the contrary at reinforcing them (1993:74).

A similar view is shared by Natalie Zenon Davis, who – as noted by Dentith – agrees on this double-sidedness of carnival. More specifically, she focuses on the ambiguous nature of carnivalistic celebrations, in particular as regards marginal groups in Renaissance Europe, insofar these festivities provided an occasion for overturning communal hierarchies, yet at the same time symbolically underlining them. Moreover, S. Averintsev even opposes the creation of carnivalistic communities, which he considers as artificially created. Indeed, for the author these groups are not constituted following a natural process, but rather through an effort for bringing together a variety of people. In the light of this, Averintsev comes to label such process as universalism (2000: 146). B.Groys, another author mentioned by Averintsev, goes further by vehemently expressing a disclaimer against carnival, which he views as “horrible”, on the grounds of its – according to the author – obligatory character for the community upon which it operates. In addition, the author

underlines the cruel treatment it imposes on its outsiders:

El carnaval bajtiniano es horrible; Dios nos guarde de vernos en medio de su carnaval. No cabe hablar de una democracia: según Bajtín, nadie tiene el derecho democrático de esquivar la total obligación carnavalesca, de no participar en el carnaval, de quedar fuera. Por el contrario, precisamente aquellos que lo hacen, son los que en primer lugar se someten a una alegre denigración y apaleamiento (Groys, 78-9 [Averintsev, 2000: 147]).

These aspects considered, the carnivalesque worlds of *Mrs Dalloway* and *Between the Acts* are neither exempt from the presence of outsiders, nor even from the discriminatory attitude towards them. Perhaps the most evident example is represented by Septimus. Unable to integrate himself within the majority of people, he is perfectly aware, from the very beginning, of his condition – “It is I who am blocking the way” (16). Indeed, Septimus reveals himself utterly different from the crowd. Hence, he is unable to see what other people see, whereas his visions do not correspond with the communal reality. Thus, while the gathered crowd admires the sky-writing, including Rezia, who struggles to bring him to the crowd by making him behave like the rest, Septimus hardly feels any interest in it:

'Look, look, Septimus!' she cried. For Dr. Holmes had told her to make her husband (who had nothing whatever seriously the matter with him but was a little out of sorts) take an interest in things outside himself (23).

Even when he does obey and look at the sky, he experiences it as a reality of his own – “So, thought Septimus, looking up, they are signalling to me.” A victim of apocalyptic visions, Septimus identifies Peter – as presented to the reader – as Evans, his officer and friend, who died in war. Actually, the recurring vision of Evans, which the others obviously cannot see, represents one of Septimus' most evident symptoms of his exclusiveness from the mass of people. Yet, Bakhtin assured, nobody is allowed to remain unbound to carnival life:

[...] el carnaval está hecho para todo el pueblo. Durante el carnaval no hay otra vida que la del carnaval. Es imposible escapar, porque el carnaval no tiene ninguna frontera *espacial*.⁵⁰ En el curso de la fiesta sólo puede vivirse de acuerdo a sus leyes [...] (1953:13).

In the light of this, all efforts must concentrate on achieving the integration of outsiders, even in spite of them – what Averintsev called 'forced universalism'. Thus, in a world in which individualism involves a threat to communal cohesiveness, the only solution available amounts to the adherence to the group's norm. Hence, after Septimus' episode of hallucinatory visions, Dr Holmes' advice constitutes a clear strategy to suffocate any individualizing attempt thereby bringing the patient to communal, socially accepted conventions.

⁵⁰ Emphasis as in the original.

There was nothing whatever the matter, said Dr. Holmes [...] When he felt like that he went to the music hall, said Dr. Holmes. He took a day off with his wife and played golf (99).

The same applies to his colleague, Dr. Bradshaw. Indeed, a fervent worshipper of the Goddesses Proportion and Conversion, the physician epitomizes a form of mass control based on the enforcement to an artificial kind of communal living. Indeed, the action of both deities amounts to the destruction of individual identity, which is utterly suffocated by the imprint of the crowd. Yet, even when 'disguised' as the purest forms of communal bonding, Conversion reveals itself a mere strategy to justify the discriminatory cruel feasting towards the unfit minority.

Conversion [...] shrouds herself with white and walks penitentially disguised as brotherly love through factories and parliaments; offers help, but desires power; smites out of her way roughly the dissentient, or dissatisfied; bestows her blessing on those who, looking upward, catch submissively from her eyes the light of their own (109-110).

Likewise, Proportion provides the parameters out of which it is licit to reject and destroy any individual, yet always in the name of communal harmony. Actually, its depiction is dovetailed with some of the principles spread by the eugenist movement. Emerged during the first decades of the twentieth century, eugenics constituted an attempt to prove scientifically the convenience to operate a sort of 'natural selection' on the population, “a cause which would ultimately lead to the elimination of the unfit, the propagation of the fit, and the raising to a higher level, moral, intellectual, and spiritual, of the human race” (1911: 103).

Not by chance, Woolf was thinking about George Savage, one of the doctors whom Leonard Woolf trusted to examine his wife – as noted by Q. Bell (1980: 26) – when she stated that “Sir William [...] made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their view until they, too, shared his sense of proportion [...]” (109). Surprisingly, Savage expressed in similar terms his desire for segregating and excluding those who did not submit themselves to communal norms.

(N)ational progress [can] only take place when means [be] taken to increase the fit and decrease the unfit [...] Lepers and those affected with plague are segregated for the good of the community, and why should not those suffering from feeble-mindedness, which is really much more dangerous? (1911: 103)

Thus, Savage holds, the solution – always in the name of communal benefit – is that these unfit “be segregated for life, or given the alternative of sterilisation” (106-112).

Accordingly, Septimus is perfectly aware of his segregated status marked by his exclusion from the general flux of life. “he was quite alone, condemned, deserted, as those who are about to

die are alone” (101). Even the most elementary aspects, such as the sensorial capacity or the emotional impulses, remain apart from him, as if behind a screen:

But beauty was behind a pane of glass. Even taste [...] had no relish to him [...] He looked at people outside; happy they seemed, collecting in the middle of the street, shouting, laughing, squabbling over nothing. But he could not taste, he could not feel (96).

Moreover, his lack of integration also affects his marriage, in which he finds himself completely alienated, to the extent to make Rezia feel they “had been alone together” (158). Thus, after his brief plunge into merriment and joy with Rezia, through an occasional joke and play with her “(d)ancing, skipping round and round the room”, Septimus suddenly notes his gradual tearing away from the community, which vanishes before his eyes until utter separation occurs: “the sounds of the game became fainter and stranger and sounded like the cries of people [...] passing farther and farther away. They had lost him!” (159).

It is then, once isolation has appeared, that Septimus “started up in terror”. Indeed, this is very much in tune with the description of the reactions provoked upon the poet in Romains '*La Vie Unanime*' on finding himself apart from his original community. As Norrish describes it:

The soul and the mind of man, if not his flesh, cannot endure solitude without suffering, without a sensation of *drowning*,⁵¹ and so the escapist, terrified by nature, turns back to 'les unanimes' (1958:8).

In addition, Norrish employs a nautical image to describe the feeling of loneliness that invades the outsider – “a sensation of drowning”. Curiously, Woolf resorts to a similar metaphor when portraying Septimus, who recurrently throughout the novel envisions himself as a “drowned sailor” lying “on the shore of the world” (101-2): “He was drowned, he used to say, and lying on a cliff with the gulls screaming over him” (154). Actually, Septimus shares with the unanimists the belief that communication represents the bedrock of existence. Indeed, while Septimus Smith stated – “Communication is health; communication is happiness” (102) – Jules Romains, that very year of 1925, in his lecture “*Petite Introduction à l'Unanimisme*” placed communication as a natural, intuitive principle in healthy human beings, whereas, for him, isolation would be directly connected with vice and madness (1925:231, [1958: 9]). In the light of this, it is just natural that Septimus, who has ultimately acknowledged himself as an “outcast” (101), should wonder – “And would [I] go mad?” (98).

The binomial isolation-madness reappears in *Between the Acts*. Here, confirms the exclusion of Giles Oliver from the emotional and mental bond created among the participants who have been able to catch Miss La Trobe's message:

⁵¹ My emphasis.

Flowing, and streaming, on the grass, on the gravel, still for one moment she held them together – the dispersing company. Hadn't [Miss La Trobe] for twenty-five minutes, made them see? [...] She saw Giles Oliver with his back to the audience. Also Cobbet of Cobbs Corner. She hadn't made them see (88).

Moreover, not at random, he employs a sentence from the Fool in *King Lear* (IV, vii, 62) to express at a certain moment his suspicion of madness - “I fear that I am not in my perfect mind”, while his muttering significantly sounds “(e)xiled from its festival” (78).

However, the most obvious case of outsidership in *Between the Acts* is that of Miss La Trobe. Like Septimus, she has offered a gift to the community, although, as well as it occurred in *Mrs Dalloway*, she is not to expect any tribute in return for her sacrifice, but rather despair and humiliation (189). Indeed, as in the case of Septimus Smith, Miss La Trobe is finally defined as an “outcast” to whom “Nature had somehow set apart from her kind” (190). Obliterated by the audience, who leave Pointz Hall after the end of the pageant, she begins to feel “the horror and terror of being alone.” Yet, her loneliness is prolonged even when she tries to find shelter at a pub, where she also has to suffer the rejection and mockery of the group gathered there:

She turned the handle of the public house door. The acrid smell of stale beer saluted her; and voices talking. They stopped. They had been talking about Bossy as they called her [...] (190).

On the other hand, the unanimist conception of isolation as the germ of vice and corruption is embodied by the character of Miss Kilman in *Mrs Dalloway*. Indeed, continually excluded from the 'parties', Kilman becomes a dark, evilish figure trying to submit people to her will by “inflict[ing] positive torture” through her vicious practice of religion (12).

But Miss Kilman did not hate Mrs Dalloway. Turning her large gooseberry-coloured eyes upon Clarissa, [...] Miss Kilman felt, Fool! Simpleton! You who have known neither sorrow nor pleasure; who have trifled your life away! And there rose in her an overmastering desire to overcome her; to unmask her. If she could have felled her it would have eased her. But it was not the body; it was the soul and its mockery that she wished to subdue; make her feel her mastery. If only she could make her weep; could ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to her knees crying, You are right! [...] It was to be a religious victory. So she glared; so she glowered (137).

Her isolation becomes even more evident after Elizabeth leaves Miss Kilman in the shopping centre. Furthermore, this alienation is stressed by the contrast established between Doris Kilman's lonely stroll, and the immediately following episode of Elizabeth's solitary wandering around the city. Thus, Elizabeth's plunge into London's streets becomes “an impulse, a revelation” of her growing up into womanhood. Rejoicing in her freedom, Elizabeth Dalloway experiences the pleasure ensured by the liberating effect of temporary isolation. However, after this brief stage, she

becomes aware of the necessity of returning to the society where she belongs. Even before her return, the potential of the crowd to guarantee communal bonding is proclaimed and raised over the authority addressed from monadic sources. Hereby, individual authorship, along with “single clergymen” and preceptal books become overpowered by the impact of “buildings without architects’ names”, as well as the immense “crowds” of daily commuters from the city:

It was the sort of thing that did sometimes happen, when one was alone – buildings without architects' names, crowds of people coming back from the city having more power than single clergymen in Kensington, than any of the books Miss Kilman had lent her, to stimulate what lay slumbrous, clumsy, and shy on the mind's sandy floor, to break surface, as a child suddenly stretches its arms; it was just that, perhaps, a sigh, a stretch of the arms, an impulse, a revelation [...] She must go home. She must dress for dinner. But what was the time? (150).

In any case, Elizabeth's lonely fare is at the same time an immersion into the crowd itself, which allows her to experience the joy of community – “She liked the geniality, sisterhood, motherhood, brotherhood of this uproar. It seemed to her good” (151).

Furthermore, if in *Between the Acts* the togetherness among people was symbolized by the grouping displayed by different elements in Nature, as well as by objects, the collectivity of commuters in the streets of London is announced by the assembled clouds which, even despite their physical separation, still retain the 'accumulated robustness', 'fixity', and 'solidity' that enables them to rest “in perfect unanimity.” In contrast, no sooner has Miss Kilman begun her stroll than she feels completely at a loss:

She got up, blundered off among the little tables, rocking slightly from side to side, and somebody came after her with her petticoat, and she lost her way, and was hemmed in by trunks specially prepared for taking to India (145-6).

Her visit to Westminster Cathedral makes more patently obvious her isolation by bringing to the fore her failure within the community. Even despite her being surrounded by other people, Miss Kilman continues to be neglected by the faceless mass of worshippers coming in and out of the cathedral: “But Miss Kilman held her tent before her face. Now she was deserted; now rejoined” (146).

Moreover, her alienation transcends the physical level to reach an emotional and even spiritual dimension. Hence, whereas the others find their way to God smooth – as she perceives it – Doris Kilman unsuccessfully struggles to achieve it, yet she is doomed to remain wandering “on the threshold of [the] underworld”.

She seemed to struggle. Yet to others God was accessible and the path to Him smooth. Mr Fletcher, [...] Mrs Gorham, [...] approached Him simply, and

having done their praying, leant back, enjoyed the music (the organ pealed sweetly), and saw Miss Kilman at the end of the row, praying, praying, and, being still on the threshold of their underworld, thought of her sympathetically as a soul haunting the same territory (146-7).

Even when not exempt from the negative connotations previously described, the most prominent outsider figures in both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Between the Acts* are in fact simultaneously presented as yielders of a sacrifice at the service of communal welfare. Indeed, the theme already appears through Septimus, who, at the beginning of the novel, had expressed his vehement advocacy for universal harmony. Yet, it is particular through the character of Miss La Trobe that this role acquires a new meaning. Certainly, Miss La Trobe's portrayal as "a slave to her audience" – as we already pointed out in our previous chapter – turns her into the epitome of the Romanian notion of man in community whereby the individual self is rendered for the collectivity.

Within these parameters, the presence of outsiders in the novels mentioned is justified, thus enabling a reconciliation of both a kind of manichaeistic implication of the utopian conception of communities, on the one hand, and the concern with the necessity of individual sacrifice in the name of collective benefit, on the other hand. Simultaneously, the emergence of the slave-sacrifice binomial, as conceived by unanimist theories, directly refers us to the figure of the scapegoat, particularly as conceived by the original forms of carnival traditions, which will constitute the focus of our discussion throughout the following part of this essay. Hence, the analysis of such ancient elements and rites will undoubtedly become crucial in order to apprehend the essence of the incorporation of carnival into Woolf's novels, of course in connection, as it has become clear, with the particular sign of communal bondings in them.

In sum, communal gatherings both in *Mrs Dalloway* and *Between the Acts* – as well as the example extracted from *Orlando* – participate, it has been seen, in the emotional bonding described by Bakhtin in connection with carnivalistic collectivities. Such union resulted, at the same time, in the erasure of any type of division, ranging from hierarchical frontiers and social barriers to the pure transgression of natural limitations, thus enabling a longed-for sort of both physical and psychological cohesion. In this sense, such description overlaps the postulates of French unanimists, positive defenders of the emergence of a unitary consciousness on occasion of collective experiences, particularly in connection with modern life. It is precisely in the London of the 1920s as well as in the pre-war scenario of Pointz Hall that both theories converge and flourish – and under which these Woolfian communities are to be interpreted. This analysis is necessarily completed by a reference to the other side of the coin as a most immediate consequence of both crowding processes, the appearance of individuals condemned to remain rejected or unable to join the rest in their role as outsiders.

4.3. 'The Kings; The Fool and [...] Ourselves'

Thus far, the scapegoat has been analysed in terms of its connection with the temporary king appointed in Carnival, as well as in the ritual festivals observed by Frazer. In this sense, its function basically amounted to become the carrier of collective pains and evils, which ended at the same time as the king himself was also ridiculed and destroyed. Yet, in that mockery invariably inflicted on him, the king was consistently associated with some kind of foolery or derangement which provided a form of justification to the harassment he was the object of. Indeed, Frazer points to the origins of this character – the immediate predecessor of the Carnival King – highlighting his grotesqueness:

We have seen that in Italy, Spain, and France, that is, in the countries where the influence of Rome has been deepest and most lasting, a conspicuous feature of the Carnival is a burlesque figure personifying the festive season, which after a short career of glory and dissipation is publicly shot, burnt, or otherwise destroyed, to the feigned grief of genuine delight of the populace. If the view here suggested of the Carnival is correct, this grotesque personage is no other than a direct successor of the old King of the Saturnalia, the master of the revels, the real man who personated Saturn and, when the revels were over, suffered a real death in his assumed character (1913: 312).

Of course, Bakhtin does not exclude this double nature of the temporary monarch. Indeed, he agrees with Frazer on remarking the carnivalistic nature of the Saturnalia and the European Festival of Fools. In this sense, Bakhtin – it has been noted – points to “the mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king” as “(t)he primary carnivalistic act”, at the same time as he connects this aspect with the ambivalence and “the joyful relativity” that characterize the carnival sense of the world. Thus, if carnival celebrates change and replaceability – as Bakhtin holds – it is just natural and logically expected that a decrowning should lie behind the crowning, whereby the mock king is to be ridiculed and beaten (1929: 124-5).

Not by chance, the description of the Carnival Fool, or King of the Bean, one of its later impersonations (1913: 313), is intimately dovetailed with the portrayal of Septimus. Indeed, Frazer also points to the Roman custom of electing and crowning a soldier as a mock king who was later harassed and who ended up killing himself as an offer to Saturn, the god he represented:

Thirty days before the festival [the soldiers] chose by lot from among themselves a young and handsome man, who was then clothed [...] to resemble Saturn. Thus arrayed and attended by a multitude of soldiers he went about in public with full license to indulge his passions and to taste up every pleasure [...] But if his reign was merry, it was short and ended tragically, for when the thirty days were up and the festival of Saturn had come, he cut his own throat [...] (1913: 309).

Like Roman soldiers, Septimus, the shell-shocked ex-combatant, had also enjoyed his moment of glory. During one of his visits, Bradshaw reminds his patient – “You served with great distinction in the War?” (105).

As it is fitting, Septimus is raised above the rest of humankind on a throne with leaves around his head, while an anthem is heard in the background. In addition, a world of beauty and splendour opens up before his eyes, thus symbolizing the fertility and renewal brought about by the crowning of the new king, which takes place in an atmosphere of joy and universal acceptance. What is more, the newly crowned king enjoys the full license he is allowed and thus, he rejoices in the sensorial beauty that had been previously denied to him. Significantly, the ritual is completed when “(t)he word 'time' – epitomizing the change and replaceability of periods and seasons – split its husk [and] poured its reaches over him”, while at the same time “[words] from his lips fell like shells”. As it is obvious, this agricultural metaphor comes to reinforce the idea of fertility and regeneration through the new reign. Indeed, the renovative effect of the crowning of the new king becomes soon noticeable. Immediately after the ritual Peter realizes that “(n)ever had he seen London look so enchanting – the softness of the distances; *the richness; the greenness*⁵²” (78). In this sense, the episode of Septimus' crowning is worth considering.

He lay back in his chair, exhausted but upheld. He lay resting, waiting, before he again interpreted, with effort, with agony, to mankind. He lay very high, on the back of the world. The earth thrilled beneath him. Red flowers grew through his flesh; their stiff leaves rustled by his head. Music began clanging against the rocks up here [...] became an anthem, an anthem twined round by a shepherd boy's piping [...] which, as the boy stood still, came bubbling from his pipe [...]

Long streamers of sunlight fawned at his feet. The trees waved, brandished. 'We welcome', the world seemed to say; 'we accept; we create'. 'Beauty', the world seemed to say. And as if to prove it [...] wherever he looked at, at the houses, at the railings, at the antelopes stretching over the palings, beauty sprang instantly. To watch a leaf quivering in the rush of air was an exquisite joy. Up in the sky swallows swooping, swerving, flinging themselves in and out, round and round, yet always with perfect control as if elastics held them; and the flies rising and falling; and the sun spotting now this leaf, now that [...], dazzling it with soft gold in pure good temper; and now and again some chime [...] tinkling divinely on the grass stalks – all of this [...] made out of ordinary things it was, was the truth now; beauty, that was the truth now. Beauty was everywhere.

' It is time', said Rezia.

The word 'time' split its husk; poured its reaches over him; and from his lips fell like shells [...] words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time [...] (74-6)

Furthermore, if we have shown the considerable extent to which Septimus fits the

⁵² My emphasis.

description of the Carnival King, his madness comes to dissolve any doubt about Septimus' suitability for the throne. Hence, Frazer mentions a so-called 'Abbot of Unreason' (1913: 312) as one of the derivations of this mock king. Yet, it is Bakhtin who underlines foolery as a typically carnivalistic element. As a result of his analysis of the term 'fool', which he considers as inherently ambivalent, on the grounds of its encapsulating both praise and abuse, Bakhtin situates foolery as central to the politics of carnival inversions, whereby he who possesses it becomes the king of this 'monde à l'envers' (1987: 385).

Indeed, Septimus himself enacts different episodes of buffoonery. Hence, it is he who voices the general dislike against Holmes and Bradshaw, in opposition to the usual hypocrisy employed by the latter's guests:

[...] so that without knowing precisely what made the evening disagreeable, and caused this pressure on the top of the head [...], disagreeable it was: so that guests, when the clock struck ten, breathed in the air of Harley Street even with rapture [...] (110-111).

Thus, he does not hesitate to mock their authority by resorting to some of the devices Bakhtin underlined as most typical of the language of the public-market square. Hence, not only does Septimus dare to defy Bradshaw's attempt to deprive him from his freedom by replying him with an ironical pun:

' We have been arranging that you should go into a home,' said Sir William.

' One of Holmes's homes?' sneered Septimus (106).

In addition, the patient does not hesitate to address Holmes as “the damned fool” or “the brute”.

Mrs. Peters, the lady for whom Rezia is sewing a hat, neither does escape from Septimus' mockery. While joking with his wife, the newly-crowned king of fools portrays Mrs. Peters as “a pig at a fair”, thus provoking also Rezia's laughter (157). Similarly, the view of different characters, as offered through his eyes, turns out particularly carnivalesque. Indeed, this depiction constitutes a grotesque panorama of risible figures, most of which have been deprived of their own names to adopt a pejorative one, such as 'Amelia Whatshername', or 'the Toms and Berties'. On the other hand, when their name is preserved, as in Brewer, it becomes an obvious reference to the carnivalistic concern with drinking, which Bakhtin points as one of the principal features of the grotesque body (1987: 252). Moreover, Septimus' act of buffoonery comes reinforced by the physical caricaturization he carries out through which they, as well as the King of Fools, are ridiculed to the extent of being stripped off their clothes.

There was Brewer at the office, with his waxed moustache, coral tie-pin,

white slip, and pleasurable emotions – all coldness and clamminess within, [...]; or Amelia Whatshername, handing round cups of tea punctually at five – a leering, sneering obscene little harpy; and the Toms and Berties in their starched shirt fronts oozing thick drops of vice. They never saw him drawing pictures of them naked at their antics in his notebook (98).

Yet, if – as Bakhtin remarks – “a decrowning glimmers through the crowning”, the case of Septimus is not an exception and thus, his raise above the rest is soon counterpointed by the opposite process. Indeed, Septimus is ridiculed and metaphorically beaten on different occasions. No sooner has the ceremony finished, a first slap on Septimus' face is suggested – thus implicitly turning him into the red-faced king described by Bakhtin. Hence, transformed into the Shelleyan figure of 'Ozymandias' – J. Latham (1969: 265-6) has identified him – the gigantic Septimus, who only momentarily stands over his subjects, immediately “receives [...] on his face” the impact of Rezia's broad complaint about her unhappiness.

Significantly, it is precisely the well-known literary figure of a dictator vanished and obliterated by time that Woolf has chosen to enact the debasement and dethroning of authority and imposition in her novel. Certainly, the impressive image of the standing “colossal figure” is soon, as it is typical of Bakhtin's carnivalistic decrownings (1929: 125), deprived from its previous solemnity and symbols of power, and patronisingly forced to sit down, at the same time as Septimus feels how “(t)he millions lamented; for ages they had sorrowed.”

Septimus cried, raising his hand [...] like some colossal figure who has lamented the fate of man for ages in the desert alone with his hands pressed to his forehead, furrows of despair on his cheeks, and now [...] the desert's edge [...] broadens and strikes the iron-black figure (and Septimus half rose from his chair), and with legions of men prostrate behind him he, the giant mourner, receives for one moment on his face the whole –

'But I am so unhappy, Septimus,' said Rezia, trying to make him sit down (76-7).

We had already pointed to the humiliating treatment by the doctors. Moreover, beneath such a vexatious attitude there lies an implicit violence, often unmasked through Septimus' perceptions. Hence, whereas his public side shows him as an “agreeably” – speaking and smiling person – “Dr. Holmes was such a kind man”, Rezia thinks (101) – the doctor is actually perceived by Septimus as a dangerous beast lurking for attack, or as Septimus images him, a “repulsive brute, with the red-blood nostrils” whom he even envisions as roughly “making himself roar with laughter or rage” (154).

Likewise, Bradshaw's act of devouring the “(n)aked, defenceless, the exhausted, the friendless” chimes in with the features associated with Bakhtin's grotesque body (1989: 285). Not only that, the gaping, devouring mouth that Bakhtin notes becomes a clear reminiscence of the

image of Saturn, the god who devoured his sons and to whom offers were to be addressed in the celebration of the Roman Saturnalia – thereby its name.

Furthermore, a form of repressed aggressiveness against Septimus, the mock king, underlies the weird act Bradshaw performs with his arms in order to reaffirm his mastery.

There in the grey room [...] [his patients] watched him go through [...] a curious exercise with the arms, which he shot out, brought sharply back to his hip, to prove [...] that Sir William was master of his own action, which the patient was not (111).

Indeed, Holmes' portrayal as a beast of prey is in tune with Septimus' conclusion on the humankind that claims for the death of the Carnival Fool – “(t)hey hunt in packs. Their packs scour the desert and vanish screaming into the wilderness. They desert the fallen” (98). Paradoxically, one of the occasions on which Septimus is ridiculed, it is precisely by “a maimed file of lunatics” (98) that this mockery is effected. Though mentioned as a brief reference, the inclusion of these deranged soldiers after the First World War entails significant implications. Indeed, while – as J. Bourke has noted – “(b)y the end of the war, 80,000 cases of war neuroses had passed through army hospitals”, often these men suffering from nervous shock were accused of cowardice and treated as malingerers (1996: 211).

Moreover, as Knox-Shaw has remarked, great controversy arose in Parliament when, in September 1922, it was announced that mentally-ill ex-servicemen in asylums were to forego their right to a pension due to the expiration of the Royal Warrant, and therefore, to be wholly supported under the provision of the Poor Law. The British government justified its decision, as expressed by Knox-Shaw, “on the grounds that their mental derangement was judged to have been due to causes other than the war” (1995: 99). Actually, not only military authorities held this view. For most medical officers as well, the matter was reduced to fear and feeble nature. One of these doctors, Archibald MacKendrick – as quoted by Bourke – insisted that “the symptoms may be founded on fact”, but “they are mostly imaginary” and ultimately depending on the patient's self-conviction that these are true (1996: 212).

Yet, the purpose underlying the addition of these “lunatics being exercised or displayed for the diversion of the populace (who laughed aloud)” (98) goes beyond such public denounce. Indeed, this scene constitutes one of the most inherently carnivalistic moments in the novel. Not accidentally, it is precisely on watching this troop that Septimus wonders – “(a)nd would [*I*]⁵³ go mad?” This act of self-recognition certainly contributes to the assumption of his own role as an expiatory Fool. Actually, Septimus becomes once more aware, on contemplating the external

⁵³ Emphasis as in the original.

projection of his own self through this 'file of lunatics', of the public exhibition and ridiculization to which he is being exposed.

Furthermore, it is not only the populace that addresses their laughter and mockery to the elected victim, as in Frazer's Festival of Fools. In fact, if carnival represents – as Bakhtin defines it – the field where ambivalence and double-sidedness flourish, it is to be expected that not only just the external agents, but also Septimus' self-projection will enact such decrowning. In fact, not only Septimus' own self is outwardly reflected. In a world where the rule is two-sidedness and relativity, the whole of humankind becomes projected onto the apocalyptic visions that haunt Septimus, thus partaking in the vexation and beating of the Carnival King.

[Septimus] lay on the sofa and made [Rezia] hold his hand to prevent him from falling down, down, [...] and saw faces laughing at him, calling him horrible disgusting names, from the walls, and hands pointing round the screen (73).

Like Roman soldiers, Septimus understands that he himself is to respond to the voices of the world claiming for his death, and thus assumes his duty of becoming the performer of his own destruction. In addition, he even contemplates the possibility of following the Roman tradition of using a knife: “Getting up rather unsteadily, hopping indeed from foot to foot, he considered Mrs. Filmer's nice clean bread-knife [...]” (163).

Septimus' death, as has already been mentioned, becomes an offering for the welfare and renewal of his people, as he himself announces on his flinging himself through the window – “I'll give it you!” (164). Hence, after her retirement, Clarissa returns to the party with renovated energy and vital impulse, as we pointed before. “But what an extraordinary night! [...] She felt glad that he had done it, thrown it away while they went on living” (204). Thus, Thomas C. Beattie agrees on connecting this epiphanic moment of Clarissa's acceptance of Septimus' death with her own “sense of renewal and self-acceptance,” which enables her to “confront the world” (1986: 533). Similarly, Marilyn S. Samuels insists on Clarissa's renewal, on the grounds that, “[...]she is no longer brushed by age' but has been sharpened to an even greater intensity by light from the real sun” (1972: 399).

In fact, intended as the central scapegoat figure through her suicide in Woolf's initial plans, Clarissa turns, after the introduction of Septimus, not only into the receiver, but also into the herald of redemption. Thus, on Clarissa's return to the party, a renovated atmosphere involves the guests, who experience a noticeable return to a new youth – “They were young; that was it” (210). Hereby, Sally, a middle-aged lady, becomes again a girl of twenty – “'Sally was fifty-five, in body', she said, but her heart was like a girl's of twenty” (212). Likewise, Peter appears in Sally's eyes as “younger, she thought, than any of them” (208). Her hypothesis is indeed reinforced by Peter

himself, who suddenly realizes the intensification of his “power of feeling”. Moreover, on seeing the now renewed Clarissa, he does experience the height of emotion, which evolves from extreme 'terror' to 'ecstasy' and 'extraordinary excitement':

'I will come,' said Peter, but he sat on for a moment. 'What is this terror? What is this ecstasy?' he thought to himself. 'What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?'

'It is Clarissa', he said.

For there she was (213).

Also Richard, as Sally notices, “has improved”. Nevertheless, the most significant change is undergone by Elizabeth, who turns into an emblem of fertility in the novel through her transformation, by the end of the party, into a pretty young woman, sexually attractive to the eyes of her father, who is initially unable to recognize his own daughter.

For her father had been looking at her, as he stood talking to the Bradshaws, and he had thought to himself, 'who is that lovely girl?' And suddenly he realized that it was Elizabeth, and he had not recognized her, she looked so lovely in her pink frock! (212)

In his account of carnivalistic crownings and decrownings, Bakhtin points to the presence, in the same ritual, of two different kings. Accordingly, since a fundamental concept in this process amounts to renewal and replaceability, any enthroning necessarily encompasses both the old, beaten king, and the new one. As Bakhtin puts it:

Volviendo al quisquilloso de la jeta roja, apaleado y satisfecho “como un rey o dos”, ¿no es este en el fondo un rey de carnaval? [...] mientras todos piensan que el quisquilloso (el rey viejo) ha sido molido a palos, éste brinca vivito y coleando (rey nuevo) (1987:180).

Certainly, two different crowning rites occur in *Mrs. Dalloway*. After the already commented act in which “(t)he word 'time' [...] poured its riches over him” (76), a very similar one takes place. On this occasion as well, Nature shows its conformity with the enthroning of the new king who, as in the previous crowning act, is lying back on the sofa, while the different elements in Nature flood in the room as if, as it had happened before, manifesting their acceptance of the new monarch - “ '(w)e welcome', the world seemed to say; 'we accept' ” (76). Eventually, treasures are laid on Septimus's head while, at the same time, a sense of fearless tranquillity invades him. Thus, in the midst of a spectacle of lights and shadows, allegorical of the carnivalistic concern with the permutability of times and periods, the second crowning rite occurs:

Going and coming, beckoning, signalling, so the light and shadow, which now made the wall grey, now the bananas bright yellow, now made the strand grey, now made the omnibuses bright yellow, seemed to Septimus Warren

Smith lying on the sofa in the sitting-room; watching the watery gold glow and fade with the astonishing sensibility of some live creature on the roses, on the wall-paper. Outside the trees dragged their leaves like nets through the depths of the air; the sound of water was in the room, and through the waves came the voices of birds singing. Every power poured its treasures on his head, and his hand lay there on the back of the sofa, as he had seen his hand lie when he was bathing, floating, on the top of the waves [...] (152-3).

Yet, a different sign permeates this second crowning, which takes place right before Septimus' death. Indeed, in tune with Bakhtin's outline of carnivalistic crownings, the act involves both an old and a new King of Fools. Hereby, the previously appointed Septimus, who had raised his hand on his coronation as a sign of his just-acquired power, makes now evident his abdication through his 'lying', 'floating' hand – a gesture obviously symbolic of his approaching death.

Woolf places special emphasis on ensuring the coincidence of both the dead old king and the new one. This encounter occurs in the scene in which Septimus' body is carried in an ambulance, while – not accidentally – Peter stops to contemplate the vehicle, as one of the emblems of civilization. Moreover, the narrator does particularly strive to prevent the episode from becoming unnoticed, thus highlighting it through the implicit irony in Peter's comment praising the civilization that has actually felled off Septimus' life.

'One of the triumphs of civilization', Peter Walsh thought. 'It is one of the triumphs of civilization', as the light high bell of the ambulance sounded. Swiftly, cleanly, the ambulance sped to the hospital, having picked up instantly, humanely, some poor devil; some one hit on the head [...] (165).

Hence, the second crowning ritual points to Peter Walsh, the new King of Fools, even though enacted through Septimus, the moment right before his being killed. The narrator makes this point clear by the reunion of both kings in the same “moment, in which – as Peter reflects – things [come] together; this ambulance; and life and death” (166), thus resorting, in fact, to the ambiguous and double-sided nature of carnivalesque images. Moreover, it is not by chance that Peter should interpret the sight of the ambulance carrying the “poor devil” of Septimus dead as a 'triumph', considering that, actually, the death of the old monarch entails for Peter his arisal as the newly-crowned King of Fools.

Constantly portrayed as a feeble character, Peter is permanently haunted by the awareness of his eminent defeat as a Carnival King.

'And [Clarissa] would think me a failure, which I am in their sense', he thought; 'in the Dalloways' sense. Oh yes, he had no doubt about that; he was a failure [...] – he was a failure! (47).

The same recognition is made by his old colleagues in the upper society, who immediately identify Peter as a “battered” victim doomed to his own fate and destruction due to “some flaw in

his character” (118). It is precisely the self-assumption of such a role that transforms Peter into an even more ridiculously weak character, unable even to cope with his overwhelming sentimentality.

It had been his undoing – this susceptibility – in Anglo-Indian society [...] 'I have that in me', he thought, standing by the pillar-box, which could now dissolve in tears [...] It had been his undoing in Anglo-Indian society – this susceptibility (166-7).

In a patriarchal society strongly influenced by Victorian ideals, Peter is, however, a mere puppet at the mercy of women. Actually, Suzette A. Henke has identified the same feature in Prentice, the fervent liberal in Woolf's unpublished short story “*The Prime Minister*”. Hence, defined by Henke as “the prototype for Peter Walsh”, Prentice appears as a dependent figure, pitied by maternal females throughout the story. As Henke describes him: “Prentice needs solitude and comfort from any woman around, [...] he presents a naïve and boyish persona to the women who feel sympathy for his [...] helplessness” (1981:129).

Indeed, during a dinner in Bourton, in his common past with Clarissa, while everyone is having fun boating on the lake, he is the only one left aside. Thus, lacking the determination to decide by himself, he absurdly remains by old Miss Parry talking about wild flowers until she tells him to leave. As it is inherent to the mock king, Peter finds himself the victim of a conspiracy while the others laugh. Moreover, his role as a scapegoat is reinforced by the image of Peter “as though he had been cut out of wood”, a clear reminiscence of the branches and tree-trunks employed in the rituals of “Carrying Out the Death” accounted by Harrison in her *Ancient Art and Ritual*. Hereby, if she notes the destruction of this puppet or branches by being thrown into the fire as a form of collective expiation (1913: 68), the “wood-made” Peter, now disjoint from the group, feels himself literally “in Hell”, while condemned to suffer “infernally”. At the same time, Peter's descent into Hell while other people seem to laugh at him connects him more closely with his forerunner as a King of Fools. Certainly, Septimus, like Peter, is carried down to the destructive fire, where he goes through the humiliations inflicted by people 'laughing' at him and calling him “horrible disgusting names”:

[Septimus] lay on the sofa and made [Rezia] hold his hand to prevent him from falling down, down, he cried, into the flames! and saw faces laughing at him, calling him horrible disgusting names, from the walls, and hands pointing round the screen (73).

Actually, Peter is not very far from Septimus' suffering during the episode in Bourton.

So [Clarissa] left him. And he had a feeling that they were all gathered together in a conspiracy against him – laughing and talking – behind his back. There he stood by Miss Parry's chair as though he had been cut out of wood, talking about wild flowers. Never, never had he suffered so *infernally*! [...] He

almost cried out that he couldn't attend because *he was in Hell*⁵⁴! People began going out of the room [...] They were going boating on the lake by moonlight [...] And they all went out. He was left quite alone.

'Don't you want to go with them?' said Aunt Helena – [...] she had guessed (68).

Dispossessed of any will of his own, Peter is also manipulated by the old vagrant in the tube station, whose commands he feels incapable of disobeying. Indeed, when the old woman compels him to give her his hand, “Peter Walsh couldn't help giving the poor creature a coin as he stepped into his taxi” (90). Similarly, the 'grey nurse' sitting by him in Regent's Park, who haunts his spontaneous doze, “overpower[s] the solitary traveller”, at the same time as he looks for her “charity, comprehension [and] absolution”, desirous to escape from the grotesque society of “these miserable pygmies, [...] these ugly, these craven men and women” that condemns him (62-3). Yet, it is particularly Clarissa that inflicts the cruellest battering upon Peter. Indeed, it is she that prompts him back into Hell by recalling Peter's failed past:

'For why go back like this to the past?' he thought. 'Why make him think of it again? Why make him suffer, when she had tortured him so *infernally*⁵⁵? Why?'

'Do you remember the lake?' she said, in an abrupt voice [...] (46).

Much as Peter tries to escape his fate, his role within his society is inevitably to be fulfilled. Even though he tries to conceal his foolishness, he cannot prevent Clarissa from spotting him out: “Stop! Stop!” he wanted to cry. For he was not old; his life was not over; not by any means. 'Shall I tell her', he thought, 'or not? [...] she would think me a failure [...]’” (47). Actually, like the rest of characters, Clarissa does not hesitate to envision Peter as an utter fool, even mocked by his Indian child-wife, who, Clarissa believes – “flattered him; she fooled him”. Clarissa then continues to confirm Peter's identity, about which she feels: “What a waste! What a folly! All his lifelong Peter had been fooled like that [...]” (50). Even in his attempt to look as brave and daring through his play with the knife he mechanically fidgets with, Peter appears even more ridiculous and impotent, serving instead as a booster of Clarissa's rage against him:

'For Heaven's sake, leave your knife alone!' she cried to herself in irrepressible irritation; it was his silly unconventionality, his weakness, his lack of the ghost of a notion what any one else was feeling that annoyed her, had always annoyed her; and now at this age, how silly! (50)

Furthermore, in the middle of his visit to Clarissa, Peter becomes the exact image of a Quixotic battered king. Thrown through the air by forces he cannot control, Peter bursts into a sudden, childish cry reminiscent of Sancho's parallel episode in what Bakhtin has acknowledged as

⁵⁴ My emphasis.

⁵⁵ Idem.

one of the most patently carnivalesque novel (1929: 128). The predecessor of modern Carnival, as Frazer defines it, the Roman Saturnalia was – it has already been mentioned – centred upon the election of a mock king, whose reign epitomized a temporary inversion of hierarchical roles through the abolishment of class privileges. Additionally, in his description of this mock King of the Saturnalia, Frazer notes the evidently parodical overtones this figure entailed with respect to the official monarch. Thus: “The person on whom the lot fell enjoyed the title of king, and issued commands of a playful and ludicrous nature to his temporary subjects” (1913: 308).

This feature remained throughout the centuries. Indeed, Bakhtin points out the same feature in medieval Carnival, one of whose chief purposes amounted to the defiant mockery and debunking of official authority through the decrownings and debasements of the previously elevated.

And he who is crowned is the antipode of a real king, a slave or a jester; this act, as it were, opens and sanctifies the inside-out world of carnival [...] (T)he symbols of authority [...] become almost stage props [...] (1929:124)

He continues to describe in detail these decrowning rituals, whereby: “ritual vestments are stripped off the decrowned king, his crown is removed, the other symbols of authority are taken away, he is ridiculed and beaten” (125). It is precisely the figure of highest authority – at least, as overtly identified – within the novel, the Prime Minister, that becomes the emblem of mocked authority. Whereas this character – which Susan Dick identifies with the Liberal David Lloyd George (1989:317) – already appeared in Woolf's unpublished draft with the same title, it still lacked by 1922 the caricaturesque overtone this figure acquired in its definitive form for the novel of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Indeed, the change in its portrayal is to be interpreted as in tune with Virginia Woolf's own carnivalistic sense of the world and her desire for debunking and dethroning the oppressive 'official' conventions of the society of her time. As she herself expressed it: “I want to criticise the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense” (1923:248).

Accordingly, the Prime Minister becomes a ridiculous puppet, utterly devoid of its authority, or – as Alex Zwerdling has expressed it – “a form of power without its substance”. (1977: 71). Indeed, it is precisely in a London that Peter has just described “as if floating off in carnival” (180) that the Prime Minister makes its appearance among the collectivity.

As it is typical of the upside-down logics that governs the carnival sense of the world, the power of the Prime Minister as a symbol of authority becomes dwindled and ridiculed by the debasing treatment of one of the Dalloways' maids. Actually, throughout the report of Mrs. Walkers' flux of thought, practical, earthly matters connected with food and kitchen-ware – one of the chief elements in carnival imagery – come to overshadow the 'majesty' represented by the Prime

Minister.

'The Prime Minister was coming', Agnes said: so she had heard them say in the dining-room, she said, 'coming in with a tray of glasses'. Did it matter, did it matter in the least, one Prime Minister more or less? It made no difference at this hour of the night to Mrs. Walker among the plates saucepans, cullenders, frying-pans, chicken in aspic, ice-cream freezers, pared crusts of bread, lemons, soup tureens, and pudding basins which, however hard, they washed up in the scullery, seemed to be all on top of her, on the kitchen table, on chairs, while the fire blared and roared, the electric lights glared, and still supper had to be laid. All she felt was, one Prime Minister more or less made not a scrap of difference to Mrs. Walker (181).

Certainly, Bakhtin had remarked in his *Rabelais* the carnivalistic concern with the abundant enumerations of food and kitchen utensils. According to Bakhtin, this feature constituted the basis of carnival inversions whereby the low and earthly is emphasized, while the high and elevated is thus debased and decrowned (1987: 24-5). In tune with this principle, the portrayal of the Prime Minister depicts him as a risible, grotesque puppet the narrator handles at her will by spontaneously placing him selling biscuits "behind a counter", as Ellie Henderson – significantly, another member of the lower classes – imagines him. Hence, according to the decrowning rite, the Prime Minister as a 'symbol of English society' becomes utterly devoid of its meaning, thus turning into a mock version of its previous value, while "(h)e tried to look somebody". Yet, despite his pretentiousness and pomp, the Prime Minister cannot conceal his identity as a ridiculous puppet nobody cares about. Moreover, the "gold lace" he is "rigged up in" precisely represents a degraded equivalent of the "soft gold" and "golden glow" that had surrounded Septimus during his crowning rituals.

Indeed, the oppressive social system in Woolf's time, a direct heir of the Victorian period, as well as the rigid carcass of conventionalisms that preserved it, are debunked through the depiction of "this symbol of [...] English society." Actually, the Prime Minister is degraded and mocked even beyond pure laughter, to provoke even a sort of pity – "(h)e looked so ordinary". As perceived by Ellie:

One couldn't laugh at him. He looked so ordinary. You might have stood him behind a counter and bought biscuits – poor chap, all rigged up in gold lace. And to be fair, as he went his rounds, first with Clarissa, then with Richard escorting him, he did it very well. He tried to look somebody. It was amusing to watch. Nobody looked at him. They just went on talking, yet it was perfectly plain that they all knew [...] this majesty passing; this symbol of what they all stood for, English society (188-9).

In *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf re-enacts the Osirian myth by including in her novel the presence of this dying-god, which is resurrected and embodied by Septimus Smith. Curiously, Osiris, whose birth had been forbidden and cursed by the evil Set, retains a significant parallel with Septimus, who experiences the prohibition of the monster-like Dr. Bradshaw, a man who "forbade childbirth".

Additionally, in her *Ancient Art and Ritual*, Jane Harrison defines Tammuz – the Babylonian equivalent of Osiris – as “the true son of the waters”, representative of a “life that springs from inundation, and that dies down in the heat of the summer” (1913: 19). Indeed, Septimus, whose recurring portrayal as “a drowned sailor” suggests a similar sea-related origin, precisely dies in mid June, whereas he reminds himself the Cymbelian formula “Fear no more the heat of the sun”, at the prospect of a renovating death.

Indeed, “the Lord who had come to renew society” (16), as Septimus envisions himself, is perfectly aware, from the very beginning, of his role as a scapegoat, self-assuming the fate that awaits for him: “It is I who am blocking the way’, he thought. Was he not being looked at and pointed at; was he not weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for a purpose?” (16). As noted by Harrison, after the yearly removal and destruction of the Tammuz effigy, a ritual which is conceived as a passage “below the earth to the place of dust and death”, his lover, the goddess Ishtar experienced as well a temporary death through her trip into such lifeless underworld: “And the goddess went after him, and while she was below, life ceased in the earth, no flower blossomed and no child of animal or man was born” (1913: 19). Thus, once the godlike Septimus has died, Ishtar-Clarissa undergoes a similar travel towards her companion. Retired from the party, life enters into suspension for Clarissa, who immerses herself into a temporary death:

But this young man who had killed himself – had he plunged holding his treasure? ‘If it were now to die, ‘twere now to be most happy,’ she had said to herself one, coming down, in white [...]

Somehow it was her disaster – her disgrace. It was her punishment to see sink and disappear here a man, [...] in this profound darkness [...] (202-3).

Bakhtin's emphasis on the beating of the carnival king as a means to prevent the inroads of age, thus favouring renewal and change, undoubtedly lies on the basis of Frazer's observations. Indeed, the anthropologist describes a similar process whereby social evil is expelled through the election of a scapegoat, which after being beaten and harassed in different manners, is finally removed, following a rite known as 'Carrying Out the Death' (1913: 225-7). Jane Harrison describes one of the most famous ones, the rituals of the Greek 'Charila'.

The king presided and made a distribution in public of grain and pulse to all, both citizens and strangers. And the child-image of *Charila*⁵⁶ is brought in. When they had all received their share, the king struck the image with his sandal, the leader of the Thyiades lifted the image and took it away to a precipitous place, and there tied a rope round the neck of the image and buried it.

[...] The image is beaten, insulted, let down into some cleft or cave. It is clearly a “Carrying out the Death” [...] (1913:80).

⁵⁶ Emphasis as in the original.

Significantly, little after the allusion to a child-image of Septimus - “[Rezia] must have a son like Septimus’, she said ” (98) – the expiatory figure feels descending “another step into the pit” (99). Like the Greek ‘Charila’, Septimus is then brought in front of Dr. Holmes, a man of power who supplies his subjects with an extra portion of porridge – not accidentally “(Rezia would learn to cook porridge)” (100). The doctor clearly acts as Septimus’ condemner by humiliating his patient through his patronizing and inconsiderate attitude:

‘There was nothing whatever the matter’, said Dr. Holmes [...] ‘When he felt like that he went to the music hall’, said Dr. Holmes. ‘He took a day off with his wife and played golf. Why not try two tabloids of bromide dissolved in a glass of water at bedtime?’ (99)

Indeed, Septimus acknowledges Dr. Holmes as a kind of spokesman for his society. “‘Once you stumble’, Septimus wrote on the back of a postcard,’ human nature is on you. Holmes is on you” (101). Actually, at this moment he becomes definitely aware of his sacrificial fate – “The verdict of human nature on such a wretch was death” (100). Certainly, Septimus clearly stands as the expiatory victim doomed to remain in “the edge of the world”, “the inhabited regions”. Thus, after hearing the whole world clamour – “Kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes” – Septimus feels he is “quite alone, condemned, deserted, as those who are about to die alone” (101). It is precisely then, once Holmes’ double-intentioned remark has been uttered – “(t)hrow yourself into outside interests” (100) – that the sacrifice of the scapegoat is performed. Hence, Septimus’ body is lifted outside the window, at the same time as he announces his offer to society: “‘I’ll give it to you!’ he cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer’s area railings” (164).

Furthermore, this act retains a considerable parallel with another tradition contemplated by Harrison. Thus, in the Spring Feast of Ascension celebrated in Transylvania, a puppet symbolizing Death is thrown out of a window. Indeed, on observing Harrison’s account of this particular festivity, many similarities can be noticed with the sacrificial Septimus. Accordingly, during the Feast, the girls of the village dress up the rough puppet, which must also be carrying a threshed-out sheaf of corn tied into its head and body. Afterwards, the figure is dressed up in girls’ clothes and “put [...] at an open window that all the people when they go to vespers may see it” (1913: 69). It is then, once vespers are over, that the puppet is carried at the same time as a hymn is tuned just before the flinging of the Death, which is finally thrown into a river. Moreover, the continuation of the rite becomes of particular significance, whereby:

(O)ne of the girls is dressed in the Death’s discarded clothes, and the procession again winds through the village. The same hymn is sung. Thus it is clear that the girl is a sort of resuscitated Death (1913: 70).

We have already commented on Septimus’ doom to death from the very beginning. Indeed,

his portrayal as “a great destroyer of crops”, as Rezia envisions him, does bring to the fore the image of the Death puppet, whose fabrication required cutting a considerable number of corn sheafs. Moreover, like the Transylvanian figure, Septimus symbolically wears the female garments of a veiled homosexuality noticed by critics like Henke, who diagnoses his madness as the repression of his homosexual feelings for Evans (1981: 139). In fact, the relationship between the soldier and his officer is described in terms that undoubtedly remind us of the homosexual love existing between Jacob and Mr. Bowley in *Jacob's Room*: “It was a case of two dogs playing on a hearth-rug [...] They had to be together, share with each other, fight with each other, quarrel with each other” (94).

In addition, the apparently innocent transcript of Rezia's opinion comes to reinforce this view. For her, Evans was “a quiet man' [...], undemonstrative in the company of women”, yet soon noticing the presence of Septimus, a man who “drew the attention, indeed the affection of his officer.”

Thus configured by his society, Septimus is the object of constant humiliation, not only by the doctors. In fact, Septimus recalls an occasion in which even a “maimed file of lunatics” ridicule him by playing different sorts of antics in front of him. Even Rezia, his loving wife, feels ashamed of her husband, and tries to pass unnoticed among the multitude of people watching the royal car: “Septimus!” said Rezia. He started violently. People must notice [...] For she could stand it no longer [...] Far rather would she that he were dead!” (24-5). Condemned by human nature, Septimus realizes, his body is thrown out of the window, while Dr. Holmes' insults - “The coward!” (164) – are heard in the background. Furthermore, though allegorically, Septimus' plunge is immediately envisioned as his own flinging into a river. Indeed, while reflecting on his death, Clarissa remembers “(s)he had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine” (202).

Yet, right before Septimus' death, a hymn to life is tuned, “[Septimus] did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot” (164). Significantly, it is his successor, Clarissa, who repeats a similar hymn to the continuation and renewal of life after Septimus' “removal”, at the same time as she decides to return with her peers. Indeed, Susan Henke has emphasized this aspect in Clarissa's parties, defining them as “a paean to life, a hymn to continuing existence” (1981: 142). Indeed, the description of the scene clearly involves such a positive and vitalistic tone:

But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow 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 [...] But she must go back. She must assemble (204).

A similar appreciation is remarked by Caroline Webb, for whom the end of the novel represents a

form of “returning vitality”. Analysing Clarissa's moment of reflection, Webb concludes: “Despite Clarissa's discovery of death at her party, the novel ends with an scene evoking a life that if not present is at least imminent” (1994: 285). What is more, Clarissa, like the Transylvanian girls, allegorically undergoes the process of dressing Septimus’ “clothes” through her identification with the discarded figure – “(s)he felt somehow very like him – the young man who had killed himself” (202). This sort of reincarnation, whereby the aborted life of Septimus finds a continuation through Clarissa – suddenly radiating the ecstasy of living – constitutes a form of resurrection in what becomes Clarissa's personal “carrying out the Death”. Indeed, Woolf herself had expressed her desire to include such polarity in her novel – “I want to give life and death” (1923: 248). In the light of this, Hillis Miller also agrees on interpreting this episode, which he considers as the climactic moment of the novel, as a triumph of life over death or – in Miller's words – “the seemingly miraculous return to life of the heroine” (1982: 200).

As in the grammatical rules of Greek, the language which so fascinated Woolf (1925),⁵⁷ the theme of the scapegoat undergoes in *Mrs. Dalloway* a process of 'reduplication'. Hereby, it is not only enacted by different characters throughout the novel, but it additionally recurs in the form of a series of allegorical allusions to the lamb. Thus, in her attempt to make Septimus focus his attention on 'reality', Rezia has her husband look at what turns out to be a veiled projection of Septimus, symbolically presented at the same time as:

(T)he greatest of mankind, Septimus, lately taken from life to death, the Lord who had come to renew society, [...] for ever unwasted, suffering for ever, the *scapegoat*,⁵⁸ the eternal sufferer [...] (27)

Paradoxically, while Rezia struggles to make her husband develop outside interests, she actually carries one step further Septimus' realization of his own identity as a scapegoat. “Oh look', she implored him. But what was there to look at? *A few sheep. That was all*”.⁵⁹ Indeed, the apparently innocent remark consisting of these last two sentences clearly constitutes a carnivalesque device through which the image of the scapegoat becomes debased and patently deprived from its solemnity. Hence, the motif is reduced to its purely physical and most ordinary dimension. Yet, at the same time, it undoubtedly brings to the fore the relevance of the scapegoat figures within the novel, also as part of the carnivalesque world of *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Nevertheless, this is not the only occasion on which the motif reappears in its allegorical form. Significantly, once of the guests of Clarissa's party, one Sir Harry, turns out to be a painter, thus enabling the introduction of the motif in terms of its artistic representation. In tune with the

⁵⁷ “On Not Knowing Greek”, *The Common Reader*, First Series.

⁵⁸ My emphasis.

⁵⁹ Idem.

embodiment of the scapegoat in Regent's Park, the image of the expiatory animal in this case is no more dignified. Hence, not only is Sir Harry depicted as “the fine old fellow who had produced more bad pictures than any other two Academicians in the whole of St. John's Wood”. In addition, his paintings unsurprisingly reflect this very lack of artistry, thus showing the deplorable rendering of an absurdly stereotypical meek-and-mildness: “[His pictures] were always of cattle, standing in sunset pools absorbing moisture, or signifying, for he had a certain range of gesture, by the raising of one foreleg [...], ' the Approach of the Stranger’” [...] (192)

Much in tune with this degraded view of the figure of the scapegoat provided by the motif of the lamb in *Mrs. Dalloway*, this character of the expiatory victim – common not only to Bakhtin and Frazer, but also to Woolf, as it has been described – involves a further dimension, which will be discussed throughout this work.

5. The Swaying Pig and the Toothless Lady: The Presence of the Grotesque in *To the Lighthouse*.

5. The Swaying Pig and the Toothless Lady: The Presence of the Grotesque in *To the Lighthouse*

Her own idea of him was grotesque, Lily knew well [...] Half one's notions of other people were, after all, grotesque (*To the Lighthouse*, 289).

Throughout this essay, Woolf's resort to a grotesque aesthetics will be analysed insofar as it represents a vehicle for the necessary re-foundation of the social and ideological system. In this sense, after a revision of different typologies of the term, a twofold distinction of this notion will emerge, in consonance with the dual function the inclusion of this symbolic code will entail. As a consequence, while virtually discarded from the interpretation of Woolf's works, the actual account of its presence and significance within her narrative will bring to the fore the narrator's creation of an alter-reality vehemently desired by a woman in permanent struggle with the social reality of her time.

Hence, with the exception of Hargreaves' article "*The Grotesque and the Great War in To the Lighthouse*", which offers a succinct approach to the most obviously grotesque aspect in the novel, like the construction of Mrs. McNab and Mrs Bast, as well as on their role within Woolf's discourse on the primary, yet understated function of the female during and after the conflict, the crucial presence of a grotesque aesthetics in Woolf's narrative in *To the Lighthouse* has been consistently ignored. It becomes useful, though, to consider Bakhtin's concept of "*reduced laughter*" as a form of interpreting modern novels within the paradigm of carnivalized literature, with its essential resort to the patterns of grotesque realism, insofar as these modern works cannot be expected to rely on specifically the same ideological and metafictional bases as properly carnivalesque novels, such as Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* or Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, to mention two of the most emblematic titles of those regarded by Bakhtin as the bedrock fictional works of carnival literature. However, it is on the grounds of their structure, as well as on the creative and philosophical conceptions underlying modern novels, as it is the case of Dostoevsky's *The Karamazov Brothers* or Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* that, in Bakhtin's words:

Under certain conditions and in certain genres [...] laughter can be reduced. It continues to determine the structure of the image, but it itself is muffled down to minimum: we see, as it were, the track left by laughter in the structure of represented reality, but the laughter itself we do not hear (1929: 114).

Accordingly, even though not always through overt allusions, a patently grotesque

undertone is heard all throughout Woolf's novel. Discussing Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque, Stallybrass and White have distinguished two different subconcepts in the critic's use of this term. Hence, while for these authors, one type merely stands for the opposition to classical patterns of representation – centred upon a strict balance and self-control, along with a sheer repression of any scatological issues – the second subcategory “is formed through a process of hybridization or inmixing of binary opposites, particularly of high and low, such that there is a heterodox merging of elements usually perceived as incompatible” (1986: 44). Yet, whereas for Stallybrass and White the latter is perceived as more subversive, on the grounds of its being the only one capable of “unsettl[ing] any fixed binarism”, it is in fact essential to consider that, on the contrary, the idea of a system dramatically opposed to the established norms and conventions similarly involves a radical form of transgression against the existing universe of values and beliefs.

In fact, what Stallybrass and White point as two different submodels within the generic concept of the grotesque actually reflects what Bakhtin had defined as the carnivalistic ambivalence of grotesque imagery, whereby the extreme poles of praise and abuse converge into a unique entity. This obeys to the dyadic purpose entailed by these images of serving as an anathema to officialdom through the derisive destruction of conventional roles and hierarchical patterns, while at the same time buttressing the creation of a new order, built on the pillars of freedom and egalitarianism.

Deeply ambivalent is [...] carnival laughter itself. Genetically it is linked with the most ancient forms of ritual laughter. Ritual laughter always directed toward something higher: the sun [...], other gods, the highest earthly authority were put to shame and ridiculed to force them to renew themselves (Bakhtin, 1984: 126-7).

According to this concept, the finality underlying the resort to the grotesque element in *To the Lighthouse* will require to be considered within this dual paradigm of demolition/regeneration, accurately chiming in with the socio-political scenario in which the novel emerged. In consonance with this, Ruskin also came to distinguish between two different types or modalities within grotesque realism. Hence, whereas in a minor realization, the performer would aimlessly wander “mock[ing] at all things with the laughter of the idiot and the cretin”, yet without being able to feel or understand anything, - the so-called ignoble grotesque – a more specific, goal-centred mode is represented by the noble type. Its major feature, therefore, amounts to “a depth known by the performer of which is to be mocked, which he would feel in a certain undercurrent of thought even while he jests with it” (Ruskin, 2004: 67).

In this sense, it is clear that Virginia Woolf was concerned with the latter form, whose aim of destroying imposed patterns and tyrannical authority through derisive mockery was central to the life and belief of the narrator: “And the more and more I come to loathe any dominion of one over another; any leadership, any imposition” (*A Writer’s Diary*, 1919).

At the same time, Woolf was convinced that a return of the body into high culture was essential in order to attain an invigoration and re-fertilization of these cultural forms, which ought to be “returned to an earth-bound centre”, able hence to reach ‘the common reader’. In this sense, she expressed her admiration for the Elizabethans and their French counterparts, namely Montaigne and Rabelais (Dusinberre, 1997: 225), the latter of whom she recognized as masterfully promoting a new compatibility between the body and the book through his “ineradicable connections between human ideals and man’s grossest functions” (S. Greenblatt, 1982: 12 [in Dusinberre, 1997: 206]).

Thus, Mrs. Ramsay’s ardent desire for going to the circus, which Bakhtin has pointed as one of the most obviously grotesque manifestations in modern culture (1984: 131), immediately associated with the form of dismemberment represented by the deployment of “fresh legs” – paradoxically displayed by a “one-armed man” exhibiting “on top of a ladder” (21) – turns out an early setting-the-scene element, already preparing the ground for the grotesque atmosphere subtly wrapping the narration in *To the Lighthouse*. Moreover, it is in this atmosphere that the exaggerated enthusiasm of the disturbingly unpleasant Tansley keeps up with Mrs. Ramsay’s expectations becomes for her the object of mockery:

‘Let’s go’, he said, repeating her words, clicking them out, however, with a self-consciousness that made her wince. ‘Let us go to the circus’. No. He could not say it right. [...] Had they not been taken, she asked, to circuses when they were children? (21).

Nevertheless, one of the most highly grotesque elements in the novel is undoubtedly represented by the presence of the boar’s skull hanging in the nursery, an image which indeed tallies with one of the features pointed out by Bakhtin in his account of the grotesque politics that governs carnival. Accordingly, the critic highlights the presence within the grotesque aesthetics of dismembered bodily parts as a form of opposition to conventional one-sided representation (1987: 173-4).

On the other hand, it becomes essential to consider that the narrator’s choice of a boar is not accidental. In fact, the pig-figure as the eliciting agent of some form of distress would similarly be

suggested in Woolf's short story "*The Duchess and the Jeweller*" (1938), one of the sketches which, along with "*The Shooting Party*", "*Country House Life*", and "*Scenes from the Life of a British Naval Officer*", she had originally planned as "Caricatures" (Dick, 1989: 309). In the former story, the Duchess is depicted in terms which denote her excess and fatty nature, closer to a pig-like characterization than to a glamorous identity, at the same time as she is paradoxically attended by a so-called Oliver Bacon:

Then she loomed up, *filling the room* with the aroma, the arrogance, the pomp, the pride of all the dukes and Duchesses *swollen*^[1] in one wave. And as a wave breaks, she broke, as she sat down, spreading and splashing and falling over Oliver Bacon the great jeweller, covering him [...]; for she was very large, very fat, tightly grit in pink taffeta [...] (1989: 250).

Accordingly, the pinkish and tightly-packed voluminous lady, glimmering under her exaggerated array of plumes and bright colours, becomes thus the very portrayal of the fair pig pointed described by Stallybrass and White as one of the central pieces in carnivalesque imagery in its zeal for the merry exhibition of the lower stratum: "Amongst the menagerie of fairground creatures, it was undoubtedly the pig which occupied a focal symbolic place at the fair (and in the carnival)" (1986: 44).

Furthermore, Woolf had already resorted to the same image in her previous novel *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), when the ironical Septimus imagines Mrs. Peters, the woman for whom Rezia, his wife, is sewing a hat, as "a pig at a fair": "'There' [Rezia] said, pinning a rose to one side of the hat [...]. But that was still more ridiculous, Septimus said. Now the poor woman looked like a pig at a fair (157).

Nonetheless, particular complexity and significance is acquired by the boar's presence in *To the Lighthouse*. Indeed, in tune with the circus setting suggested at the beginning of the novel, the boar – shockingly placed at the nursery – accurately chimes in with Stallybrass and White's remark of the grotesque hybridization between human babies and pigs in modern circus acts. Hence, these authors highlight Paul Bouissac's account of such acts, in which:

(T)he 'August' [...] puts on 'grotesque' female clothes with huge artificial bosoms and enters carrying a 'baby' in a blanket [...]. When the baby cries [...], August picks it up and the audience suddenly discovers that the baby is actually a piglet (Bouissac, 1976: 164 [1986: 58]).

As Stallybrass and White observe, the grotesque in this act emerges as a result of the distressing “interchangeability of pig and baby”, which momentarily become impossible to be differentiated by the audience. It is this transgression that brings the audience to a blunt awareness of:

[W]hat it had always ‘known’ but found it difficult to acknowledge except in moments of frustration: that there is no clear separation of the human from the animal, that the squealing [...] baby is in the language of praise-abuse, a little pig (1986: 58-9).

Significantly, this blurring of the line dividing “Man the Master from the Brute” (*Between the Acts*, 165), along with the terror this entails, had also been pointed out by Virginia Woolf, who accounts for the horrors of the war on the contemplation of some pictures sent by the Spanish Government during the civil War of the mutilated, unrecognizably human, children’s bodies:

They are photographs of dead bodies for the most part. This morning’s collection contains the photograph of what might be a man’s body, or a woman’s; it is so mutilated that it might, on the other hand, be the body of a pig. But those certainly are dead children [...] (1938: 117).

Indeed, the boar is certainly more evidently assimilated to a child in the novel by Mrs. Ramsay’s somehow maternal act of wrapping the pig in her shawl, a scene which violently rocks the traditional image of the female as merely a child-bearer by depicting an absurd and grotesquely unsettling version of the conventionally stereotyped model. Nevertheless, this shaking and erosion of traditional values is not exclusively achieved by the human/animal hybridization mentioned above. Hence, Stallybrass and White have also noted the essential role of hierarchical inversions in popular grotesque imagery, reflected in certain prints and woodcuts depicting a ‘world turned upside down’. Significantly, the type of downturnings taking place in this *monde renversé* – as these authors observe – “addresses the social classification of values, distinctions, and judgements which underpin practical reason” through a re-ordering of the terms of a binary pair. Accordingly, the relations between subject/object, agent/instrument, husband/wife, master/slave, or anima/human are inverted in a way such that they may involve a clearly subversive reversal of traditional roles through the depiction of a wife holding her husband down while she beats him, or a woman

standing with a gun in her arms whilst her husband sits spinning (1986: 56-7).

A similar display of powerfully transgressing prints is arrayed in front of the reader in *To the Lighthouse*, where this contrast gains in subversive force by explicitly contrasting the classical referent of the Piety – or Mother-Son picture – with the mocking, almost blasphemous rendering of the nurturing mother wrapping the pig’s skull. It is significantly the liberal Lily that, opposing Bankes’ reverence of the traditional equation ‘female-mother’ through his own interpretation of the picture, first profanes the alleged sacredness of the self-enclosing encasement of child-bearing categorization:

Mother and child then – objects of universal venerating [...] might be reduced, he pondered, to a shadow without irreverence.

But the picture was not of them, she said (81-2).

Indeed – as J. Lilienfeld has noted – the notion of motherhood “is designed to keep women powerless, for the only power they are allowed in patriarchal society is their ambiguous hold on small children” (1981: 159).

In tune with this purpose of defying and definitely transgressing the Victorian hierarchical system of values, the figure of the pig - particularly in the post-*bellum* scenario after the First World War – becomes straightforwardly associated with the Jews. Stallybrass and White trace back the origins of this patently racist conjunction to primitive Christian times, yet growing considerably more ferocious as a consequence of German anti-semitism (1986: 53-4). While stating that Woolf determinedly chose to represent this allegorization would probably become excessively manichaeistic, the truth is that such an association cannot have passed unnoticed for the unconvinced wife of a Jew, a race she particularly relucted to: “I do not like the Jewish voice; I do not like the Jewish laugh” (*Diary I*, 1915: 6). In addition, Mrs. Bast’s remark highlighting its overseas origin reveals itself particularly suggestive of this connection: “Shot in foreign parts no doubt” (209).

Accordingly, it is licit to contemplate an association between the pig – often connected with a pejorative designation for authority representatives, including chauvinists and fascists (1986: 44) – and the despotic figure of the husband as the agent of patriarchal impositions. Furthermore, this hypothesis becomes reinforced by a certain parallel implicitly suggested between the boar and Mr. Ramsay as the major husband figure in *To the Lighthouse*. Hence, while Mrs. Bast’s comment brings to the fore the shooting of the animal, right at the moment Jasper shoots a flock of birds, Mr. Ramsay significantly laments how “(s)ome one had blundered”, at the same time as “(h)is eyes

trembl[e] on the verge of recognition” (41). Certainly, this symbolical blundering and destruction of the tyrannical father Mr. Ramsay in “The Window” eventually becomes ridiculed and dwindled to a pitiable “figure of infinite pathos” (226) desperately seeking for not only Lily’s compassion – “his need was so great, to give him what he wanted: sympathy” (221), but even a universal form of commiseration:

Sitting in the boat, he bowed, he crouched himself, acting instantly his part – the part of a desolate man, widowed, bereft; and so called up before him in hosts people sympathising with him; staged for himself [...] a little drama; which required of him decrepitude and exhaustion and sorrow (243-4).

Likewise, another pillar of the same despotic patriarchal edifice, Charles Tansley, undergoes a similar downturn. The very emblem of the educated male, the scholar appears from the very opening of the novel as the grotesquely pompous pedantics Woolf would later describe in *Three Guineas* in constant need of “emphasiz[ing] their superiority over other people, either in birth or intellect, by dressing differently, or by adding titles before, or letters after their names” (1938: 129-30).

Indeed, mocked not only by the children, but even by Mrs. Ramsay, who “could not help laughing herself sometimes” (15), Tansley possesses some of the typical marks of ugliness that are central to grotesque realism – (h)e was such a miserable specimen, the children said, all humps and hollows [...]; he poked; he shuffled”. He was a sarcastic brute, Andrew said”. However, it is rather his own condition that turns the pedantic Tansley into an even more ridiculous figure:

It was not his face; it was not his manners. It was him – his point of view [...] (W)hat they complained about Charles Tansley was that until he had turned the whole thing round and made it somehow reflect himself and disparage them – he was not satisfied (16).

Actually, this particular “point of view” of the educated man would also be observed by Woolf in *Three Guineas* as the source of man’s blindness to his own ridiculousness. Thus, the fact that women “see the same world”, yet “through different eyes”, owing to their lack of opportunities to access education (1938: 126) results in men being incapable of realising how grotesque – as exemplified by Charles Tansley – their pomp and pretentiousness becomes. In this sense, the ostentatious Tansley’s dreams of Mrs. Ramsay’s seeing him “gowned and hooded”, as it pertains to the usual attire of the educated man, turn him in fact into one of the caricaturesque clown-like types portrayed in *Three Guineas*:

If you will excuse the humble illustration, your dress fulfils the same function as the tickets in a grocer's shop. But here, instead of saying 'This is margarine; this pure butter; this is the finest butter in the market', it says, 'This man is a clever man [...]; this man is a very clever man [...]; this man is a most clever man [...]' And still the tradition, or belief, lingers among us that to express worth of any kind, whether intellectual or moral, by wearing pieces of metal, or ribbon, coloured hoods or gowns, is a barbarity which deserves the ridicule which we bestow upon the rites of savages (128-9).

Furthermore, the same image of the "idiotic" males in "hood and masks", which Woolf labelled as "brutal bullies" recurs in her *Diary*, when the author expresses her absolute hatred towards the tyranny of Nazism: "Meanwhile these brutal bullies go about in hoods and masks, like little boys dressed up, acting this idiotic, meaningless, brutal, bloody, pandemonium" (*Diary IV*, 1934: 223-4).

Moreover, this suggestion is powerfully reinforced by the sharp contrast between Tansley's fantasies of parading in that attire in order to achieve Mrs. Ramsay's admiration and his utterly foiled daydreaming on realising she – through her rather "different eyes" – not accidentally, is just able to see the actual display of a circus picture.

He would like her to see him, gowned and hooded, walking in a procession. A fellowship, a professorship, he felt capable of anything and saw herself – but what was she looking at? At a man pasting a bill. [...] the vast flapping sheet [...] revealed [...] the advertisement of a circus (20-1).

In tune with this view, the grotesquely portrayed Tansley comes to a considerable extent assimilated to the unsettling boar in the nursery. Hence, just as Mrs. Ramsay laments the presence of the skull hanging over the children, she similarly fears the threat of the "annoying Charles Tansley"'s banging his books above her children's heads (173-4).

Like Mr. Ramsay, who constantly strives for being pitied, Tansley is in permanent search for female commiseration. Nevertheless, his frequently frustrated attempts, as well as his vain efforts for showing off any form of superiority, actually reveal his profound envy of female achievements, at the same time as the scholar cannot hide his utter weakness.

In this sense, his ridiculousness becomes even more evident by the opposition marked by his remark of lacking "dress clothes", which again comes to stress his failure to attain his own professional self-fulfilment.

[...] (F)or that was true of Mrs. Ramsay – she pitied men always as if they lacked something – women never, as if they had something [...] He was not

going to be condescended to by these silly women [...] Why did they dress? [...] He had not got any dress clothes. They never got anything worth from one year's end to another. They did nothing but talk, talk, talk, eat, eat, eat. It was the women's fault. Women made civilisation impossible with all their "charm", all their silliness" (129).

Ironically, it is on women that Tansley so much depends to achieve his own self-realization. Hence, despite his unsuccessful attempts for despising women, he will, conversely, become the blank of female mockery and disapproval. Thus, Lily actually takes her turn by mocking him, which switches on Tansley's awareness of his complete dependency on women, yet also of his absolute failure with them:

Could she not [...] if she wanted revenge take it by laughing at him?

'Oh, Mr. Tansley', she said, 'do take me to the Lighthouse with you. I should so love it.'

She was telling lies he could see. She was saying what she did not mean to annoy him, for some reason. She was laughing at him [...]; she despised him: so did Prue Ramsay; so did they all [...] (H)e wished he had known how to answer Miss Briscoe properly. He wish he could think of something to say to Mrs. Ramsay, something which would show he was not just a dry prig (130-1).

While Tansley has proved himself a genuine mockery of the educated man, an even more subversive form of decentering and derisive downturn of intellectual authority is represented by the certainly grotesque and debased depiction of the real-world Hume. Indeed, while a reference to different empiricists and intellectuals of Woolf's time is reduced to *ad absurdum* – “[Mr. Ramsay] had promised [...] to talk “some nonsense” to the young men of Cardiff about Locke, Hume, Berkeley, and the French Revolution” (70) – an even sharper debunking is performed by the caricaturizing presentation of Hume stuck in a bog, while humiliatingly having to be rescued and forced to pray by a woman. Even though Mossner's accounts of Hume's life include this anecdote as true (1970: 562-3), the exhibition of the lower stratum as well as the emphasis on the scatological nature of the story stand for the quintessential purpose of turning down and debasing the alleged superiority of any centralizing and restrictive form of authority in the novel. Indeed, as G. Beer has observed: “(t)he giant tower proves to be a gross man subsiding [...], held in anecdote” (in Reid, 1993: 76).

Consequently, the resort to a grotesque optics in *To the Lighthouse* has been presented insofar as it fulfils a function of eroding and efficiently demolish imposed barriers, as well as it challenges and reverts the conventionally established hierarchical order. Simultaneously, this

destruction and downturn of the existing order aimed at promoting the replacement and renovation of the old world through the re-ordering of those subverted patterns, yet now on the basis of a communal, freer, and more humanized form of existence.

On the other hand, a different sign is entailed by the presence of the grotesque aesthetics in section two. Hence, centred upon the restoring action of the enigmatic Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast, “Time Passes” brings to the fore a new aspect of a symbolic code defined within the grotesque paradigm. Accordingly, the parenthetical “Time Passes” section, which constitutes a between-the-acts interruption in the Ramsays’ narrative, entails a conception of the grotesque, not so much as a destruction, but, in tune with the ambivalent binarism inherent to this aesthetic system (Bakhtin, 1984: 126) as the stern affirmation of the continuance of life through the possibility of regeneration and re-elaboration. In this sense, the evident imperfection in the aged “creaking” and “swinging” Mrs. McNab, endowed with the only adornments of her outstanding witlessness and her inclination to drunkenness, becomes the pure emblem of the incompleteness and broad rejection of perfection that Ruskin considered as crucial within grotesque realism.

Indeed, in her inchoate, mutable, and chaotic nature, Mrs. McNab certainly embraces the pivotal features of what Ruskin considered the “elliptical structure” of the grotesque, in which those gaps or ellipses become “elements themselves” provided of a meaning which – in Ruskin’s words – “demands an active role from the beholder” in order to be deciphered. In consonance with this concept, Ruskin points out the essence of the grotesque as an ur-language, or semantic code beyond the possibilities of verbal language:

A fine grotesque is the expression, in a moment, by a series of symbols thrown together in bold and fearless connection of truths which it would have taken a long time to express in any verbal way, and in which the connection is left for the beholder to work out for himself; the gaps, left or overleaped by the haste of imagination, forming the grotesque character” (Ruskin, 5: 132 [in Cianci and Nicholls, 2001: 172]).

Significantly, Mrs. McNab stands an emblematic representative of this uncertain ur-language. Indeed, the “sound issu[ing] from [the] lips of the “rolling” and “swinging” figure of Mrs. McNab, clearly reminiscent of the song that bubbles out of the vagrant’s mouth in *Mrs. Dalloway*, suggests a form of pre-language or primeval voice which, as in the case of the May song tuned by the old beggar in the former novel, brings about the fertility and regeneration that fill the barren London cityscape (89-90).

Mrs. McNab’s turns, through her song, into the herald of the renewal and re-fertilization that are to come. It is precisely through the uncertainty and lack of an absolute truth or meaning

represented by this “voice of witlessness, humour, persistency itself, trodden down but springing up again” (194-5) that renovation will be enabled. Thus, like Anon, who “sang because spring has come; or winter is gone; because he loves; because he is hungry or lustful; or merry or because he adores some god”, Mrs. McNab sings without a definite reason, who, just like Anon, thus embodies “the common voice singing out of doors” (Berg, New York Public Library, 1-2 [in Moore, 1984: 173]):

Visions of joy there must have been at the wash-tub, say with her children [...], at the public-house, drinking; turning over scraps in her drawers. Some cleavage of the dark there must have been, some channel in the depths of obscurity through which light enough issued to twist her face grinning in the glass and make her [...] mumble out the old music hall song (195).

Hence, it is that incompleteness and “joyful relativity” (Bakhtin, 1984: 124) characterizing Mrs. McNab that makes her emerge as the inexhaustible force impelling the necessary regeneration. She represents the polarity involved by grotesque imagery, simultaneously encompassing both the old and the new, the rotten and decayed past and the splendidly fertile future which is to come. Thus, while “stiff” and “bowed down” with old age, and even though she acknowledges the bitterness and perishability of the world – “how long shall it endure?” (195) – she also “hobble[s] to her feet again” and continues her indefatigable removal of the corruption and decay, at the same time as she pairs the “long sorrow and trouble of the world” with her aimless smile. Powerfully descriptive of this duality, the mirror image of Mrs. McNab represents the rejection of a mimetic reflection, returning instead a single-bodied binarism, also accompanied by the twisted face and the hunched back characteristic of the deformities central to the grotesque aesthetics (1987: 173-4): “[Mrs. McNab] stood and gaped in the glass, as if [...] indeed there twined about her dirge some incorrigible hope”(195).

While the mirror motif recurs in the immediately following scene, its implication acquires a different sign. In this sense, whereas Mrs. McNab, who embodies herself the multiplicity and uncertainty of existence, obtains from the mirror the reflection of her own complexity, for the daydreaming visionaries and mystics naively attempting for finding an absolute, enclosing truth in the midst of the instability of a world utterly resisting definition, the mirror solely returns the “unendurable” reflection of its bare and broken glassiness.

In fact, this vindication for the acceptance and assimilation of the multifarious complexity of the world and the work of art, for both of which any attempts for closure or perfection become unattainable – if not even more absurd – accurately chimes in with Ruskin’s definition of the grotesque. Significantly, analysing Ruskin’s criticism, Nicholls employs the same image of the

mirror to describe the central aim in the Ruskinian conception of the grotesque work of art for a conscious separation from a straightforward mimetic reflection of reality, which represents the essence of its elliptical structure. Hence, according to Nicholls:

Ruskin sees elliptical structure as inhibiting the self-reflective movements which simply take the object as a mirror for the self, and at the same time he construes the 'imperfect' nature of the grotesque – its 'allegorical rudeness' – as the sign of the very constructedness of the art object (2001: 173).

In tune with this notion, the terrible 'eyelessness' of the flowers – “standing there, looking before them, looking up, yet beholding nothing, eyeless, and so terrible” (201) - in the description of the chaotic nightscape by the end of “Time Passes” denotes a similar frustration and collapse of whatever attempt for finding an answer in the passive contemplation of reality. On the contrary, this profoundly naïve desire for achieving a one-sided view returns instead the “unendurable” reflection of the crudeness of the terrible emptiness of there being “nothing to cling to”: “I have to give an empty house, no people’s characters, the passage of time, all *eyeless*^[2] and featureless with nothing to cling to” (*Diary IV*, 1926).

It is yet in the midst of this 'allegorical rudeness', clearly governed by a grotesque code in which the vindication of an orgiastic passing of time in which the elements “mounted one on top of another” that a new road towards regeneration will eventually open up. Moreover, in a world in which mysticism and philosophy have become “stuck in a bog” and definitely debased as utterly inefficient, a re-validation of foolery and as a form of decrowning the imposed reason, as well as a vehicle for the destruction of conventional models of proportion and representation, is vehemently claimed for:

Listening [...] from the upper rooms of the empty house only gigantic chaos streaked with lightning could have been heard tumbling and tossing, as the winds and waves disported themselves like the amorphous bulks of leviathans whose brows are pierced by no light of reason, and mounted one on top of another, and lunged and plunged in the darkness or the daylight (for night and day, month and year ran shapelessly together) in idiot games, until it seemed as if the universe were battling and tumbling, in brute confusion and wanton lust aimlessly by itself (200-01).

It is precisely in this vindication of the lower and imperfect that the skull, symbolically shawled by Mrs. Ramsay in an attempt for hiding its broad ugliness, becomes gradually exposed, at the same time as it accompanies the worn-out, toothless Mrs. McNab in their “swinging” and “swaying” dance to the rhythm of the distorted music hall song. Certainly, under the rule of this chaos and multifariousness, a form of fertility finally emerges in which a non-hierarchical mixture

of flowers and vegetables – “(p)oppies sowed themselves among the dahlias; [...] giant artichokes towered among roses; a fringed carnation flowered among the cabbages” - accounts for the equalitarian and democratic “insensibility of nature” (205), in fact in a process of erosion of any segregating barriers which becomes allegorical of the news of peace that start to arrive.

In sum, in the midst of a post-war collapse of a whole social system of values and beliefs, Woolf proposes the vital demolition of rotten structures and dramatically decayed preconceptions as the only means for permitting the longed-for regeneration. While those existing values and allegedly sheltering ideological code have shown their mouldiness and corruption, a new return to the earthly truth of human essence through the grotesque aesthetics as a form of self-validation, as well as a vehicle for the destruction of the alienating edifice of centralizing authority, provides the crucial reinvigoration for a society in desperate need of renewal.

[1] Emphasis added.

[2] Emphasis added.

6. Across Orlando: Crossing the Boundaries of Convention in
Woolf's Novel

6. Across Orlando: Crossing the Boundaries of Convention in Woolf's Novel

The truth is I expect I began it as a joke and went on with it seriously (1978, 31st May 1928, 128).

Along with *Between the Acts*, *Orlando* is probably one of the most patently carnivalesque novels. Indeed, taking as a starting point the unrestrained transference of the protagonist throughout different periods in English history – in a scope ranging from the sixteenth century to the present time – Orlando exhibits a merry transgression of the logical temporal barriers constraining the individual to a fixed chronological span. Simultaneously, along with this form of border-crossing arises, as well as a challenge to the traditional sexual identity as defined by the traditional bipolar dichotomy. Hereby, in his unconventional traversy across time, Orlando exerts a trespassing of gender boundaries, suddenly developing into his female counterpart. Of course, one of the fundamental pillars in Woolf's conception of *Orlando* is undoubtedly the subversion of sexual boundaries as a predefining label enclosing individual within the precincts of prescriptive patterns of behaviour. Certainly, in the earliest note about the novel she recorded in her *Diary*, Woolf had intended her work as primarily “a fantasy [... about] (t)wo women” suggestive of “(s)apphism” (1978: 108).

In fact, a novel whose main character was aimed as a fictional transposition of her lover, the also writer Vita Sackville-West, was to be closely dovetailed with her particular strive for the elimination of outmoded systems of sexual categorization. Hence, aware of the covert experience of sexuality in her days – “the things people don't say”, in Terence Hewet's terms – the narrator is determined to unmask the hypocrisies of patriarchal forms of definition. With this purpose, Woolf situates those conventionalisms within the axes of the carnivalistic paradigm, where traditional gender types become irrepressibly outdone.

In this respect, the nucleus of this sexual transgression – though not constitutive of an exclusive case – is represented by Orlando's awakening as a woman. Hence, submerged into a lethargic slumber, Orlando undergoes a transitory interruption of his self to re-emerge into his female equivalent. Allegorical of a form of second birth⁶⁰, Orlando's return to life occurs as a result of a mock re-enactment of the Creation. Indeed, in Woolf's god-like recreation of the myth, the original foundations of the canonical version, whereby the female springs up from a subsidiary fragment of man, become reverted. Thus, even though Lady Orlando chronologically follows her male namesake, it is only as a result of a complete transformation of the Prince into a woman that the latter comes to life.

⁶⁰ See chapter on *Between the Acts*

If a subversion of the Christian narration underlay Orlando's reappearance, no more canonical respect is showed by the narrator concerning myth-based conventions. In this regard, even though the inclusion of the three Ladies presiding over Orlando's change may seem to mock the triadic goddesses Woolf had employed in *The Voyage Out*, as a mockery of a blood-thirsty society, this is only partially true. Hence, to a certain extent, Woolf's parodical rendering of these goddesses echoes the subversive overtone she had already implied in the *Voyage Out*, where the figure of the jar-locked witch had served to effect a stagnant debunking of the still Victorian-imbued upper-class females. Certainly, as soon as she had begun to conceive her novel, Woolf had established the principle of transgression as a centripetal core, "writing *Orlando* [...] in a mock style very clear and plain, so that people will understand every word" (Woolf, 1978: 119).

Thereby, embodied as the lady of Chastity, Modesty, and Purity, these deities serve as the basis for a blunt ridiculization of Victorian morality, ironically presiding over as soon as the female is in sight. Indeed, through the figures of the trinitarian goddesses, the narrator surreptitiously unveils the hypocrisy of a society wherein – as she had denounced in *The Voyage Out* – truth and honest experience of sexuality is subordinated to the "Easy and Comfort" provided by illusory Purity:

Hereby, filtering through the same carnivalesque lens of exaggeration the rest of Victorian precepts, Modesty and Chastity cryptically reveal as the death-bringing harpies leading society to irrevocable destruction.

'Purity Avaunt! Begone Purity!'

Then OUR LADY OF CHASTITY speaks:

'I am she whose touch freezes and whose glance turns to stone. I have stayed the star in its dancing, and the wave as it falls. The highest Alps are my dwelling place; and when I walk, the lightnings flash in my hair; where my eyes fall, they kill. Rather than let Orlando wake, I will freeze him to the bone. Spare, O spare!' (66).

Moreover, it is precisely as a consequence of their repulsion of Truth – in fact, metonymic of the same feeling as a societal governing principle – that the infert and destruction emerge. Indeed, recurring to the same type of mythological subversion, Woolf had already employed in *Mrs. Dalloway* – where the waste of a society ruled over by the goddesses of Proportion and Conversion stands out – to deploy a sterile panorama marked by the worship to the deities of hypocrisy:

With gestures of grief and lamentation the three sisters now join hands and dance slowly, tossing their veils and singing as they go:

‘Truth come not out from your horrid den. Hide deeper, fearful Truth. For you flaunt in the brutal gaze of the sun things that were better unknown and undone; you unveil the shameful; the dark you make clear, Hide! Hide! Hide!’ (66).

At the same time, a dismantling of the nonsensical fixity of these principles – paradoxically led by female deities – is perpetrated, thereby unmasking a social reality who idolize these deities even “without knowing why”.

Portrayed as the sort of primitive community who – as in Maggie's hunting episode in *The Years*⁶¹ – brutally feast upon their victims, this adoring “still very numerous (Heaven be praised) tribe of the respectable” (67) virtually includes the majority of British society. Thus, revealed as a kind of satanic crew of darkness adorers, this tribe comprehends, along with the pretendedly uninitiated “virgins” and respectable “city men”, most contemporary doctors and intellectuals who, in the name of science and the compliance with natural laws had converted cross-sexuality into a form of aberrant pathological disorder. Indeed, if the homosexual Hirst in *The Voyage Out* encodedly revealed to Helen his condition – a matter which can only be discussed in the presence of doctors (*The Voyage Out*, 218) – Woolf now echoes the same narrowness of vision of a society sheltered behind a deforming obscurity.

‘For there, not here (all speak together joining hands and making gestures of farewell and despair towards the bed where Orlando lies sleeping) dwell still in nest and boudoir, office and lawcourt those who love us; those who honour us, virgins and city men; lawyers and doctors; those who prohibit; those who deny; those who reverence without knowing why; those who praise without understanding; the still very numerous (Heaven be praised) tribe of the respectable; who prefer to see not; desire to know not; love the darkness; those still worship us, and with reason; for we have given them Wealth, Prosperity, Comfort, Ease. To them we go, you we leave. Come, Sisters, come! This is no place for us here’ (66-7).

It is precisely through the rebirth of Orlando into his cross-dressed self that a radical carrying-out-of-conventions is perpetuated, at the same time as a triumph of truth over the deities is proclaimed. Thus, defiantly rejecting the symbolical veils of the goddesses, the newly-emerged Lady Orlando exhibits her naked reality, while a blunt mockery upon Victoria's Sisters heralds their utter defeat.

‘Truth come not out from your horrid den. Hide deeper, fearful Truth. For you flaunt in the brutal gaze of the sun things that were better unknown and undone; you unveil the shameful; the dark you make clear, Hide! Hide! Hide!’

Here they make as if to cover Orlando with their draperies. The trumpets, meanwhile, still blare forth,

⁶¹ For a further analysis on this scene, see chapter on *The Years*

‘The Truth and nothing but the Truth.’

At this the Sisters try to cast their veils over the mouths of the trumpets so as to muffle them, but in vain, for now all the trumpets blare forth together,

‘Horrid Sisters, go!’

The sisters become distracted and wail in unison, still circling and flinging their veils up and down.

‘It has not always been so! But men want us no longer; the women detest us. We go; we go. I (PURITY SAYS THIS) to the hen roost. I (CHASTITY SAYS THIS) to the still unravished heights of Surrey. I (MODESTY SAYS THIS) to any cosy nook where there are ivy and curtains in plenty’ (66).

In particular, Woolf aimed at debunking the regularizing attempts for contemporary authorities who, in the name of virtue and morality, favoured a faked experience of sexuality. In this sense, her creation of a Purity goddess directly satirized the Social Purity campaign fostered during the 1880s, whereupon transcendence of the purely biological instincts in benefit of civilization was urged by the encouragement towards sexual continence. At the same time, a straightaway form of attack is addressed against Victorian defence of 'decency' in detriment of free sexual behaviour. Hence, erecting themselves as the pivotal guardians of virtue and righteousness, as legal authorities under command of Queen Victoria had notably impeded the condemnation of homosexual practices since the passing in 1885 of these acts as constitutive of criminal offence. Paradoxically, this occurred at the same time as a visible increase in homosexuality was recorded – with representative cases among the intelligentsia and bachelorhood, such as Virginia's close friend Lytton Strachey. As a result, a profoundly hypocritical attitude had become inherent to this society, where clandestinity and pretence defined the totality of existence.

Along with Orlando's transformation, a categorical defilement of the despotic source of these commands is effected through the implication of the sexual depravity lodged under Queen Victoria's legs. Hence, standing on a grotesque pile of absurdly amalgamated objects, the Queen skirts the unusual combination of a wedding veil and the ragged piece of a policeman's trousers⁶².

Within this context of demonization of a free development of sexuality, Woolf decries the pseudo-scientific attempts that served as a basis to support legal claims against homosexuality. In this sense, achieving widespread diffusion among European intellectuals, Freud's postulates on sexuality undoubtedly constituted an influential source for the consideration of this same-sex attraction as a form of deviant behaviour. Hence, written between 1925 and 1933, Freud's essays on

⁶² Note the connection between the figure of the policeman here and the character of Budge, the purity guardian drunken officer in *Between the Acts*.

female sexuality traced the development of sexual identity in the woman as essentially marked by her inferiority complex. According to the psychologist, during her adolescent years the girl undergoes a kind of awakening, whereupon she comes to the realization of her irremediable lack with respect to the man. Accordingly, as a consequence of her coming to awareness, the girl becomes conscious of what Freud termed as her “threatened masculinity”, which she struggles to preserve by developing a “masculinity complex” – expressed in homosexuality. Resulting thus from a neurotic fear of loss, homosexual behaviour emerged as a patent form of abnormal conduct (1953-66: 229-30) – not free from the grotesque mark of hysteria Stallybrass and White identify in the body of carnival.

Significantly, as in Freud's hypotheses, Orlando's emergence as a woman occurs as a form of awakening. Indeed, in a notably Orlando-like manner, the physician had described this transition as “a change in her own sex” (1956-63: 229-30) for prior to this crucial shift “the girl is a little man” (1956-63: 118). Clearly allotting the woman to a subordinated position, insofar as femininity is achieved by specific repressions from which the male child is exempt, Freud's discourse was undeniably imbued with the patriarchal 'superiority complex' Woolf had indefatigably denounced. Thereby, whereas the psychologist's blossoming girl awakens to the delusory realization of her inferiority, for Orlando, on the contrary, his re-appearance entails the commencement of a free unhindered sexuality. Ironically, as this sexual liberation takes place, it becomes solely constrained by the patriarchal bases sustaining the socio-political structure, equiparating Orlando's recently acquired sex to a nullity of existence for the female.

No sooner had she returned to her home in Blackfriars than she was made aware by a succession of Bow Street runners and other grave emissaries from the Law Courts that she was a party to three major suits which had been preferred against her during her absence, as well as innumerable minor litigations, some arising out of, others depending on them. The chief charges against her were (1) that she was dead, and therefore could not hold any property whatsoever; (2) that she was a woman, which amounts to much the same thing; (3) that she was an English Duke who had married one Rosina Pepita, a dancer; and had had by her three sons, which sons now declaring that their father was deceased, claimed that all his property descended to them (82).

In fact, Orlando's transformation is only the antecedent for successive forms of cross-dressing in the novel. Hence, a representative episode of this unconstrained experience of homoeroticism is constituted by the second encounter between Lady Orlando and the “grotesque” Archduchess Harriet Griselda, of Finster-Aarhorn and Scand-op-Boom. Indeed, suggestive of boundary overflow through the very exaggeration of her pompous name, the Archduchess if from the first instant of her appearance endowed with the hysterical note of the carnivalesque body: “Then [...] she went on to say—but with such a cackle of nervous laughter, so much tee-heeing and

haw–hawing that Orlando thought she must have escaped from a lunatic asylum” (55). Similarly accounting for her grotesque nature – which Orlando explicitly remarks on her re-encounter with the Archduchess – a twofold form of duality underlies the depiction of Orlando's ambiguous partner. Accordingly, on the one hand, Harriet exhibits a composite nature as a hybrid combination of human and hare-like features:

For this lady resembled nothing so much as a hare; a hare startled, but obdurate; a hare whose timidity is overcome by an immense and foolish audacity; a hare that sits upright and glowers at its pursuer with great, bulging eyes; with ears erect but quivering, with nose pointed, but twitching. This hare, moreover, was six feet high and wore a head–dress into the bargain of some antiquated kind which made her look still taller. Thus confronted, she stared at Orlando with a stare in which timidity and audacity were most strangely combined (55).

Furthermore, special relevance is conferred to this animal image insofar as it entails a cryptic reference to Woolf's own homoerotic desire for Vita. Indeed, by means of her particular choice of the hare – an animal Virginia herself had turned into at a costume's party⁶³ – enters the narrative as a fictional embodiment at the side/level of her analogue, Vita-Orlando.

Along with her animal hybridization, Harriet's many-fold nature multiplies in tune with carnival politics, whereupon the feminine delicacy with which she had first appeared in front of Orlando develops on their later re-encounter a notable transformation. Thus, envisioned by the female Orlando as a “grotesque shadow”, Harriet's second emergence exhibits the disgusting quality Kayser had detected as central to grotesque imagery.

Interestingly, the Archduchess' metamorphosis occurs concurrently with the perspective from whence she is focused. Hereby, through the figure of the hare – an image Woolf herself had particularly associated with the patriarchal stereotype of the feminine – a profound subversion against male-implanted clichés is entailed. Hence, while to the eyes of the former Orlando the hare-like Harriet is perceived in conformity with those patriarchy-established patterns, a flagrant deconstruction of these prefigured categories is effected insofar as the Archduchess reveals to Lady Orlando in its blunt repulsiveness. In this respect, such a contraposition of negatives – also alluded in the chapter on *To the Lighthouse* – serves as a simultaneous decrying of the patriarchal vision of womanhood as indissolubly manacled to the 'angelical' mother and housewife⁶⁴ Woolf had so much deplored.

Thereby, accomplished the demolition of the neatly categorized patriarchal universe, a further transformation is experienced by the Archduchess in the midst of a whimsically entangled

⁶³ For further detail, see chapter on *The Years*

⁶⁴ See chapter on *The Years* for Woolf's detailed description of the 'Angel in the House'.

scene of dubbed cross-dressings. Hence, at the same time as the now Archduke Harry reveals his male nature, a momentary incursion into her opposite sex is undergone by Orlando – whose sex “she had completely forgotten”. Simultaneously, along with Orlando's new temporary cross-dressing, an additional implication of the Archduke's ambiguous sexuality is entailed by the latter's declaration of his initially falling in love with Orlando's male self.

The Archduchess (but she must in future be known as the Archduke) told his story—that he was a man and always had been one; that he had seen a portrait of Orlando and fallen hopelessly in love with him; that to compass his ends, he had dressed as a woman and lodged at the Baker's shop; that he was desolated when he fled to Turkey; that he had heard of her change and hastened to offer his services [...] (88).

Indeed, principally intended as a means of liberation from the typifying sexual mores – as M. Battista points out (1980: 140) – *Orlando's* centrality on the proclamation of an unrestrained overleaping of gender barriers was chiefly targeted towards the definitive transgression of these labels as normative precepts on the basis of the alienating artificiality of such categories as the product of a social construct. In this regard, rather a carnivalesque vision of sexual identity is distilled throughout the narrative, insofar as the former lies merely on the adoption of a specific – essentially external – disguise. Chiming in with this theory, as Gilbert and Gubar remark, female cross-dressing had certainly become a widespread practice at the turn of the century as a means of freeing from the enclosing imposition of restricting femininity.

While it would be exhaustingly reiterative to discuss on the novel's defence of androgyny as the final means of attaining both the social and the creative liberation – already a widely-known, as well as a massively argued issue – a generally obviated aspect is the particular characterization of such androgynous being. In this sense, a defiant form of mimicry of Plato's dual nature of love as a composite human being with four arms and legs, four ears, and two faces, Orlando construes a parallel description of this allegorical embodiment, yet outdoing the original's grotesqueness.

As a matter of fact, this carnivalesque indefiniteness and border-crossing aims to dissolve the pretended unidirectionality of sexual identity – as claimed by prudish contemporary voices – in favour of an open and unconstrained experience of sexual development. Thereby, whereas ridiculous attempts from both legal and medical authorities for regulate sexual practices increasingly spread, Orlando vindicates for the individual right of sexual option. In this respect, in a time when political and scientific pronouncements insistently counselled men to conserve vital health by avoiding masturbation, an overt opposition is implied by Orlando. Hence, challenging the view of this practice as conducive to health decrease – masturbators becoming consumptive and self-mutilating – the vigorous and robust Orlando enacts a real scene of masturbation. On the contrary,

solely does he appear ailed and enfeebled through contact with the encrusted and pretendedly virginal Queen Bess, as “a limb of her infirmity” (69).

On the other hand, whereas a bulky amount of criticism is addressed to sustaining of Woolf's uncritical defence of a complete form of androgyny – namely, M. Battista, or Lisa Rado, as some of the most salient cases – it is important to note that certain hints throughout the narrative point to a different direction. Thus, whereas it is true that the narrator conceives a form of coexistence of both male and female features – particularly concerning the creative mind – as attested in *Orlando*, Woolf is more preoccupied with the vindication of the unrestricted flow of sexual desire, whatever its direction or its tendency to nonlinear inconsistency throughout time.

Hence, in her portrayal of the nature of love – which B. A. Schlack identifies as a version from Plato's original description (1979: 87) – Woolf retrieves this ambivalently dual definition only as a means of defiant mimicry of Plato's immutably perfect balance. Therefore, if in his *Symposium* Plato had voiced through Aristophanes his conception of Love as an informe dualistic being, in fact parodies this hybrid being just to take it to its utmost grotesque bestialization.

Furthermore, the image of the sun, which at the opening of the narration serves as a debasing instrument against the patriarchal values represented by the former Orlando as will be discussed becomes endowed with crucial significance at a particularly revealing moment. Hence, though cryptically encoded, a conclusive affirmation of the female voice – muffled down yet by the diachronic persistence of patriarchal restrictions – is asserted by means of the sun, whose shape as incrustated into St. Paul's spire constitutes an iconic emergence of the female.

Likewise, anticipating the derisive rendering of Queen Elizabeth in later fiction – as it is the case of *Between the Acts*, or Woolf's essay on “*Royalty*”⁶⁵ – a patently grotesque Queen populates *Orlando*. Hereby, encroached by the rheumatic condition of other grotesque characters – such as St. John Hirst in *The Voyage Out* – the excessive adornment of her garments, the Queen exhibits the unfamiliarizing quality appears symbolically estranged. In the novel's determination to dismantle that hypocritical paraphernalia sustaining the patriarchy-rooted Victorian society, a virulent form of rioting is addressed against royalty. Hence, at the very opening of the narrative, Orlando is delusively portrayed as a God-appointed exceptional being, providentially chosen for monarchic succession.

Certainly, a thorough accomplishment of Bakhtin's dually crowning/decrowning process occurs from Orlando's initial presentation as a Prince. Indeed, even though suggestive of a kind of

⁶⁵ For a further comment on this essay, see chapter on *The Years*

birth-conferred divinity – his “face [...] was lit solely by the sun itself” (5-6) – a different reality comes to surface. Thus, his standing in the middle of a leopard's body, combined with certain butterfly-like features reveals in fact a grotesque dimension of his figure as a would-be king.

In the midst of this literal decrowning of royalty, particularly relevant becomes the inclusion, nearly at the very opening of the novel, of an actual carnival episode. Presented as a Great Frost suddenly coming over London, Woolf's carnival certainly retains considerable reverberations of Bakhtin's public market-place. Accordingly, like its Russian formulation, Orlando's carnival exhibits the characteristic mesalliance of high and low classes, particularly gathering together at the precise moment of Orlando's appearance. Indeed, as in Bakhtin's analysis of Rabelais' work, a prolijo enumerative style defines the passage, abundant in the description of the carnival multitude.

Aside from this evident feature, special relevance acquires the carnival episode insofar as it becomes a particularly fruitful site for the development of grotesque imagery. In this regard, from her human dimension. Nonetheless, rather than providing her with an enhanced majesty, this unfamiliarization allocates her, instead, closer to the animal kingdom – as implied by a turtle-like description. In tune with this, her jewels significantly accomplish the opposite end these are intendedly aimed at, thereupon coming to stress the Queen's grotesqueness.

Moreover, while downturned as utterly crippled creatures, further emphasis on the maimed nature of royal members is entailed by their presentation through some of their fragmented bodily parts. Thus, simultaneously a flagrant transgression of pre-established literary conventions, this form of reductionist focalization actually effects an dwindling action upon the portrayal of these royal members. Thereby, instead of the enhancement and fetishizing aimed by Renaissance literature – particularly as concerns the literary mode of blazons – the opposite effect of blunt ridiculization is attained. In this sense, whereas this enhancement is supposedly as indicative of a parallel quality in the whole person, the deceiving nature of such a fixed pattern will eventually stand out:

Moreover, thus deployed as a loose head, Orlando is cryptically associated with the Moor's decapitated head that epitomizes a tyrannical exercise of royal power. Hence, on the grounds of his prospective status as the inheritor of his father's despotic sovereignty, Orlando suffers the encoded form of beheading, representative of the carnivalesque scapegoatization of leaders. Chiming in with the grotesque caparisoning of the Queen – reminiscent of the inertia affecting some of the characters in *The Years* or *The Voyage Out* – a concurrent petrification of London occurs as a consequence of the Frost. Indeed, precisely that frozen aspect of the British panorama turns out

intentionally metaphorical of a time Woolf had envisioned as encrusted in its own paralysis, which engulfed even the formerly militantly rebellious Bloomsbury group. These, as Leonard Woolf himself had observed had soon become “established”. Indeed, noting the acquired conformism of these intellectuals, Leonard Woolf had particularly highlighted the case of Lytton Strachey, who had shifted from a position of mordant criticism to a celebratory picture of the age in his *Queen Victoria* (Woolf, L., 1975: 180).

Hereby, through the Frost Carnival, the predominantly “congealed or embalmed” quality of the landscape – as A. Fleishman defines it (1979: 143) – becomes allegorical of a static reality persistently haunted by the phantoms of the enduring past. Accordingly, by means of the grotesque combination of life and death present in the carnival scene, a rioting attack is targeted towards the post-Victorian anchorage of a society deeply imbued in outmoded traditions.

In consonance, royalty stands as the chief perpetrator of the situation of “objectification” and recessing paralysis whereas society is submitted, whatever its expense. In this sense, even a form of impiety characterizes the description of these tyrannical monarchs, as it is demonstrated by King James' macabre taste – particularly delighted by the pathetic sight of a half-dead “bumboat woman” (34). Significantly, this cruel preference in the monarch for “suspended animation” (ibid) provides a reliable testimony of the compulsive concern with the immutable permanence within the conventional axes of pre-establishment and unalterable order. Symptomatic of this encroaching is the ironic perdurability of this petrousness, throughout the centuries. Hence, even though external changes – such as those in clothes – become visibly evident a similarly sculptural permanence defines the Victorian landscape, which still exhibits the “marbl[e]”-like quality presided by the “vast mound [...] where Queen Victoria now stands” (135). Moreover, along with this kind of moral depravity, a clear implication of drunkenness in connection with royalty conforms to this decrowning portrayal.

Thereby, whereas Orlando himself is intoxicated by words which turned out for him like wine, King James, who additionally becomes an absurd ape-like being mechanically pelted on hazelnuts by his mistress, seldom went sober to bed. Simultaneously, also caricaturesque is the masculinized vision of the Virgin Queen. In this respect, along with the implicit connection with drink excess, this rendering points to the Queen as an ambiguously-sexed personage. Nevertheless, in opposition to Orlando, for whom cross-sexuality becomes a synonym of boundary transgression, a form of degrading virility is implied for the Queen, whose sexual ambiguity is yet masked as a pretendedly ideal feminine delicacy – as ornamented by her abundant jewels and adornments. Indeed, a dismantling of her faked sexuality is cryptically implied in her encounter with Orlando.

Hence, praiseful of the young Prince's qualities the Queen is stricken by a pang of envy of Orlando's "manly charm" – which she lacked. On the contrary, in her partial masculinity, she does embody the most negative aspects of the male, thereby turning out an authentic chaser, insidiously aiming to assault her victim and "pierce" the young Orlando.

Thus, through Orlando's whimsical transformation, a desperate claim for the transgression of constraining norms and conventions is voiced. In this sense, whereas as extralimitation of the patriarchal categories concerning the set of enclosing sexual roles becomes the most evident clamour in *Orlando*, a more profound decrying of any type of precepts restricting the individual within the narrow precincts of Victorian society constitutes the urgent vindication against the permanence of a deeply anachronic system.

7. 'A Little Figure with a Golden Teapot on his Head': The Role of
Carnival Fools and Objects in *The Waves*

Traditionally, *The Waves* has tended to be considered as a paean to the excellences of communal gathering, by virtue of its presentation of some of the collective experiences bringing together its seven main characters. Accordingly, while Avrom Fleishman envisions Bernard's soliloquy as a conception of the individual as moulded by his integration within "the rhythm of the community" (1977: 166), B. A. Schlack agrees on the collective concerns of the novel – particularly encapsulated by the encounter of the seven at Hampton Court (1979: 114). Of course, even though imbued with the same sense of cohesion as a form of integrating "communion" based on "some deep common emotion" that has been central to the discussion on *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Between the Acts*, the truth is that, in her juxtaposition of these seven individuals, the narrator was, indeed, no less concerned with the vindication for the plural nature of reality, as well as with the recognition of the multiplicity of points of view in a world wherein absolutizing perspectives turn out anachronistically unrealistic. Hence, even though not decrying the joy of interpersonal bonding, the narrator, perhaps more wholeheartedly than in other novels, warns against the pernicious side of community as particularly susceptible of allowing for mass control.

Certainly, as Tratner argues, throughout *The Waves*, the narrator had aimed to canal her vision of a "pluralist", "constantly shifting [and] fluid social structure" indefatigably struggling against the artificiality of a centralized, monolithic "group identity" governed by militaristic lusts. Instead, as the critic remarks, "in the multinational world after the dismantling of the capitalist empires, she imagined masses that would speak in many voices and move in many directions" (1995: 209). Similarly, also insisting upon the political implications of the novel, J. Berman agrees on its demise of a communal organization of social structures which, in the context of 1930s Britain, had become the most powerful weapon at the service of fascism. According to Berman:

Woolf's work runs determinedly counter to the outward rush of fascism, presenting an oppositional politics that resists the lure of the corporate state [...] The gathering stages of fascism may produce rhythms, intonations, and oceanic feelings that hide its hard-booted political identity – but the waves of Woolf's novel, by moving according to another logic, uncover its masculinist, violent danger (in Pawlowski, 2001: 121).

Indeed, the narrator's intention of precisely focusing on this transformation becomes epitomized by the metamorphosis of the seven-sided flower into "a six-sided [carnation], made of six lives [...]; a many-faceted flower" (129). In this respect, Woolf had remarked in her *Diary* the relevance of the symbolical presence of the plant as in fact a trope for the indefinite and polylogical nature of reality.

[...] – flower pot in the centre. The flower can always be changing [...] upright in the centre; a perpetual crumbling and renewing of the plant (1978: 141-2, 28th May 1929).

Recorded during the initial stage of her novel writing, this note encapsulates one of the central ideas around which the whole narrative revolves – the everchanging reality of an existence – as Bakhtin describes it – in a permanent process of formation. This dynamics of the ontological system, conceived as an incessant flow, the successive stages of destruction and renewal become the fundamental constituents of a life which, should these processes fail to be accomplished, would be heading for irremediable extinction.

Of course, while this incessant process of improvement and regeneration of life inexorably requires – tallying with carnival politics – a dissolution of boundaries and limitations, a permanent alertness against the danger of human annihilation through mass manipulation is maintained. Hence, along with the death of Percival, certain hints to their successive “meetings” and “partings” (99) are scattered throughout the narrative. In this regard, even though the group is momentarily reunited – with the exception, as it has been specified, of Percival – a further division is implied through the separation of Louis and Rhoda, who at a certain point in the narrative become “drawn apart” (157, 131). Moreover, another form of scission simultaneously separates them, insofar as they have turned – as Louis announces – “(f)or ever [...] divided” (131).

In any case, a certain – if partial, on the grounds of Percival's absence – type of final reunion is achieved by Bernard's summing up, whereby the carnivalesque principles of unrestraint and free fluidity of a multiple reality, non-liable definition or restricting categorization, are proclaimed. Nevertheless, whereas awareness with the threats of fascism – in its search for collective agglutination of society into a compact, undifferentiated block – was common to other Woolf's novels with evident concerns with unanimist postulates, particular relevance to this issue is provided for *The Waves*. Certainly, while a form of communal adherence is allowed in this novel, this is only in connection with Woolf's conception of her Outsiders' Society. Through this notion – already conceived in 1921 in its nearly homonymous “*A Society*”, Virginia Woolf buttressed for the creation of a form of female organization whose major aim was the subversion and defilement of the patriarchal establishment of gender roles. This should be possible by means of the practice of active and conscious non-involvement “as a strategy” – according to Marie-Luise Gätgens – “for hollowing out the gender system, pillar of family, and fatherland” (in Pawlowski, 2001: 22).

Even though essentially defined as resting on a political basis, the idea underneath Woolf's conception of the Outsiders' Society amounted instead to her construction of a dystopia which should act as a counterpart to the masculine state, yet deprived of the latter's eagerness for violence or domination. On the contrary, while the distinctive livery of that masculine territory had been defined by supremacy and hegemonic zeals, Woolf's badge was founded on resistance as the

operating principle of a “herland” in which marginality, rather than standing for a conformist attitude towards displacement, responds to a deliberate choice to assert a female space which defies masculine power. As she had defined it:

(T)he Society of Outsiders has the same ends as your society – freedom, equality, peace; but that it seeks to achieve them by the means that a different sex, a different tradition, a different education, and the different values which result from those differences have placed within our reach. [...] we, remaining outside, will experiment not with public means in public but with private means in private (1996: 234).

Indeed, what Woolf aimed to recreate in *The Waves* amounted to a collective of “infinitely abject” beings – as Neville describes them – whose position of outsidership in one or other sense, turns out an essential condition for the debunking of prefigured values and precepts as indispensable requisite previous to the coming of a renovated society.

At the same time, in consonance with this testimony of otherness, as soon as she began to conceive the initial plans for her novel, Woolf had contemplated her wholehearted decision to include the gross side of existence, whereby to convey the “perpetual crumbling and renewing of life”.

Of course, within the carnivalesque parameters wherethrough the narrative evolves, the presence of the earthly, literally downbringing element, turns out of the utmost importance. Indeed, self-described as having “close to the earth, with green-grass” (22) “eyes that look close to the ground and see insects in the grass” (7), Susan possesses the lower-stratum quality that characterizes carnival imagery. Moreover, in her earthliness, she becomes a kind of hybrid creature which gradually turns into the most physical manifestation of Nature itself, thus evolving into the patent embodiment of an earthly Great Mother. Transcending the allusiveness entailed by the description of the vagrant in *Mrs. Dalloway* – the singer of a “bubbling” song flowing from the “muddy” “hole in her mouth” (88-9) – Susan herself confirms her identity as an earthbound figure.

At this hour, this still early hour, I think I am the field, I am the barn, I am the trees; mine are the flocks of birds, and this young hare who leaps, at the last moment when I step almost on him. Mine is the heron that stretches its vast wings lazily; and the cow that creaks as it pushes one foot before another munching; and the wild, swooping swallow; and the faint red in the sky, and the green when the red fades; the silence and the bell; the call of the man fetching cart-horses from the fields – all are mine.

I cannot be divided, or kept apart. I was sent to school; I was sent to Switzerland to finish my education. I hate linoleum; I hate fir trees and mountains. Let me now fling myself on this flat ground under a pale sky where the clouds pace slowly. The cart grows gradually larger as it comes along the road. The sheep gather in the middle of the field. The birds gather in the middle of the road – they need not fly yet. The wood smoke rises. The

starkness of the dawn (53-4).

Thus, self recognized as an earthly womb, Susan becomes the site for the simultaneous encounter of the ontological poles of life and death, from whence everything arises and where everything is called to converge at death.

In consonance with this, Susan's ground-fixed body cracks open to yield the life of her children, for whom she conforms the protective cradle where the new-borns are to be lulled.

Sleep, I say, desiring sleep to fall like a blanket of down and cover these weak limbs; demanding that life shall sheathe its claws and gird its lightning and pass by, making of my own body a hollow, a warm shelter for my child to sleep in (96).

Moreover, on the basis of this ambivalence inherent to the character's personality, Susan explicitly mentions the topographical cosmogony acknowledged by Bakhtin in his account of carnival politics. Hereby, if the earthly stratum is signaled by the critic as connected with the series of debasements of literal processes of bringing down to earth that occur in the public market-place, Susan also admits a similar form of downturn connected with her regenerative function – “I shall be debased and hidebound by the bestial and beautiful passion of maternity” – just previous to her enhancement by virtue of the immeasurable richness of her inexhaustible reproductive power: “*I shall be lifted higher than any of you*”⁶⁶ on the backs of the seasons. I shall possess more than Jinny, more than Rhoda, by the time I die” (73).

Hence, in tune with this locational contiguity, the Earth-Mother figure in the novel turns into the site for the debasement of the social landscape. Thus, by virtue of her connection with the physical lower stratum, Susan's earth-like function of burial and destruction, whereby a literal process of bringing down to earth is effected, is dovetailed with the inversion resulting from the purely perpetrated descent of the conventionally superior.

Thus, consistently with her alter ego, Susan exerts an authentic burial of Madame Carlo, the unpleasant groaning teacher whom she has previously dwindled to an insignificant stone – “(t)his shiny pebble is Madame Carlo, and I will bury her deep because of her fawning and ingratiating manners, because of the sixpence she gave me for keeping my knuckles flat when I played my scales. I buried her sixpence”. This metaphorical interment of the ill-tempered lady is just the precedent to a whole symbolical act of burying a school stamped with the indelible mark of “the oily portraits” of its old patriarchal foundations.

I would bury the whole school: the gymnasium; the classroom; the dining-room that always smells of meat; and the chapel. I would bury the red-brown

⁶⁶ Emphasis added

tiles and the oily portraits of old men – benefactors, founders of schools. There are some trees I like; the cherry tree with lumps of clear gum on the bark; and one view from the attic towards some far hills. Save for these, I would bury it all as I bury these ugly stones that are always scattered about this briny coast, with its piers and its trippers (24).

Indeed, the womb-like ambivalence inherent to Susan remains all throughout the progress of the character's portrayal. Interestingly, on the recollection of her life at old age, Susan confirms the materiality of her surroundings – “I possess all I see”, as well as she emphasizes the regenerative potential of her “productive years”.

I have made ponds in which goldfish hide under the broad-leaved lilies. I have netted over strawberry beds and lettuce beds, and stitched the pears and the plums into white bags to keep them safe from the wasps. I have seen my sons and daughters, once netted over like fruit in their cots, break the meshes and walk with me, taller than I am, casting shadows on the grass.

'I am fenced in, planted here like one of my own trees (107).

Nonetheless, as is fitting to her carnivalistic dual function, both as life-provider and death-bringer, Susan proves evidence of the twofold nature of her uterine quality:

I also make wreaths of white flowers, twisting silver-leaved plants among them for the dead, attaching my card with sorrow for the dead shepherd, with sympathy for the wife of the dead carter; and sit by the beds of dying women, who murmur their last terrors, who clutch my hand; frequenting rooms intolerable except to one born as I was and early acquainted with the farmyard and the dung-heap and the hens straying in and out, and the mother with two rooms and growing children. I have seen the windows run with heat, I have smelt the sink (108).

Certainly, cryptically implying the dual ambivalence of carnival imagery, the picture of Susan lulling her little in her lap becomes associated with the future death of the child, “whose weak limbs” are to be covered and buried into the earthly hollow. Hence, at the same time as the rocking crackle, Susan's body becomes evocative of the resting grave: “I shall lie like a field bearing crops in rotation; in the summer heat will dance over me; in the winter I shall be cracked with the cold [...] heat and cold will follow each other”.

Such notion of the female as the quintessential source of regeneration of the world in need for replacement is additionally extended in the character of Jinny. Hence, if Susan incarnates the ambivalent system of destruction and regeneration that is inherent to carnival, Jinny heralds the celebration of triumphant dance whereby the victory over fixity and attempts for encapsulating reality within the limits of an established order is performed. Certainly, her victory in the game she plays as a child serves as the alibi whereby the carnivalistic triumph over any attempts for fixity and encapsulation of reality within a pre-configured order is proclaimed.

Everything in my body seems thinned out with running and triumph. My blood must be bright red, whipped up, slapping against my ribs. My soles tingle, as if wire rings opened and shut in my feet. I see every blade of grass very clear. But the pulse drums so in my forehead, behind my eyes, that everything dances – the net, the grass; your faces leap like butterflies; the trees seem to jump up and down. There is nothing staid, nothing settled, in this universe. All is rippling, all is dancing; all is quickness and triumph (24-5).

Even though no models of behaviour are intended by Woolf, whose decentralizing purpose clearly glimmers throughout *The Waves* – it is interestingly the sexually uninhibited Jinny that is appointed as the incarnation of the fertilizing dance that both buttresses and rejoices in the advent of prospective renewal. As M. Battista points out: “Jinny celebrates this carnal ecstasies of love, and so, when the drop of time falls, it merely fills her body with that fluid, Dionysian rhythm through which life endlessly recreates itself” (1980: 179).

Accordingly, in her perpetual dance, which simultaneously vindicates for that unrestricted flow of carnal desires, Jinny's own body allegorizes the ritual celebration of a carrying-out-the-death – whereby the inroads and decay of the old world are supplanted by the incoming of prosperity – is effected. Thus, incarnating the destructive fire that is to remove the waste, Jinny turns through her dancing into the renovating flames:

I leap like one of those flames that run between the cracks of the earth; I move, I dance; I never cease to move and to dance. I move like the leaf that moved in the hedge as a child and frightened me. I dance over these streaked, these impersonal, distempered walls with their yellow skirting as firelight dances over teapots (22).

Indeed, a continuance of Susan's devouring action, personifies the utter annihilation of the surrounding waste and decay through the destructive effect of fire. Hereby, her dancing turns into the consuming flames that are to enable the incoming of prosperity:

I leap like one of those flames that run between the cracks of the earth [...] I dance over these streaked, these impersonal, distempered walls with their yellow skirting as firelight dances over teapots (22)

As the scholar describes them, these rituals constituted a merry celebration of renewal that – buttressed through allegorical dances – was expected after the yearly removal of the old and decayed. If Harrison's formulation of these ritual festivals points to the indissoluble connection between the extreme poles of downlowering and triumphant celebrations, no different is in fact Woolf's paradigm for the renovation she wrestles for. Significantly, Jinny blatantly burns out the tenacious clinging to the past – as epitomized in this passage by the homesick Susan – thus rejoicing through her leaps – as it occurred in *The Voyage Out* – in the life that is forthcoming.

Not accidentally, in her construction of a female force capable of debunking life-impeding patriarchal norms, Woolf resorts to Harrison's pattern of carnival celebrations. In the midst of this form of ritual dancing, Jinny embodies the centripetal force around which the celebration is carried out. Hence, in resemblance to Harrison's description of these ancient carnivalistic festivals, the very embodiment of a Spring maypole is conveyed by the image of Jinny dancing at the same time as a ribbon spurts and curls around her neck. Here, in opposition to the employment of the same image in *Between the Acts*, where the symbol is intentionally subverted in order to portray the patent ridiculousness of the pretentious Streatfield, the maypole does preserve its full association with the coming renewal: "I bind my hair with a white ribbon, so that when I leap across the court the ribbon will stream out in a flash [...] curl round my neck [...]" (23).

Thereby, as in her admired friend's anthropological writings, an essential form of interconnection is implied between the earth-like Susan and the merry dancer of carnival celebrations. Hence, while reiterating the already mentioned ambivalence of Jinny's ritual performance, the image straightaway reflects Woolf's type of female battle for the sheer destruction of the wasteland provoked by patriarchal oppression.

'Take this guinea and with it burn the college to the ground. Set fire to the old hypocrisies. Let the light of the burning building scare the nightingales and incarnadine the willows. And let the daughters of educated men dance round the fire and heap armful upon armful of dead leaves upon the flames. And let their mothers lean from the upper windows and cry "Let it blaze! Let it blaze! For we have done with this 'education'!"' (146).

Indeed, in "*A Society*", Woolf had already claimed for the necessity of the aiding forth the action of a female force capable of promoting a renovation of societal values as the vital condition to save them from "perish[ing] beneath the fruits of [men's] unbridled activity" (1993: 21). Likewise, as early as 1916, Woolf had begun to conceive of this form of women initiative that should debunk patriarchal impositions, which she had expressed in a letter to the feminist Margaret Llewellyn Davies:

I become steadily more feminist [...] and wonder how this preposterous masculine fiction keeps going a day longer – without some vigorous young woman pulling us [...] and marching through it (*Letters II*, 76, 23rd January 1916).

Of course, one of the premises at the core of Woolf's society was the elimination of categories ascribed to gender roles. In this sense, particular significance is entailed by the image of Jinny's dance over the allegorical open earth of Susan's body as a defiant aggression of sexual boundaries, and the masculine impossibility of conceiving a form of female homosexual bonding. Certainly, by means of this assertion of a lesbian relationship between Susan and Jinny, a female,

carnally-dimensioned “*Sappho*” is affirmed in broad opposition to its prescriptively chaste male-created analogue: “it's well known that Sappho was the somewhat lewd invention of Professor Hobkin” (1993: 17). Hence, while Annette Oxindine insists upon the lesbian implications of this scene, the truth is that it simultaneously refers us back to a parallel image of Clarissa Dalloway's homosexual relation with Sally. Indeed, Mrs. Dalloway recalls the incendiary nature of her passion – a moment of “rapture, which splits its thin skin and gushed and poured with *an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores!*⁶⁷ [...] a match burning in a crocus” (*Mrs. Dalloway*, 35).

Accordingly, during the first meeting at Hampton Court – on the characters' middle adulthood – a new encounter is implied between Jinny and Susan, who – as Rhoda observes – merge into a form of homosexual dissolution: “Susan and Jinny change bodies and faces” (68). Moreover, in tune with this form of unhampered conception and experience of sexuality as previous to a regenerated world, it is precisely through an implicitly homoerotic fusion of the complementary poles of praise and abuse – as allegorized by Jinny and Susan, respectively – that this hoped-for renewal can be announced.

On the other hand, along with the six speakers, a seventh unvoiced character enters the narrative through the inclusion of Percival. Endowed with a grandiose name resounding of the pomposity suggested by the name of Septimus, Percival is yet provided with a clearer allusion to the enhancing myth of Arthurian legends. Certainly, while such a name's choice may refutably have resulted from pure randomness, considering the symbolical burden traditionally carried by many of Woolf's characters⁶⁸. Indeed, one of the central moments in *The Waves* revolves around the encounter of the seven characters at a place symbolically called Hampton Court, where a dinner is to be celebrated as a homage to the departing Percival, who is about to set off to accomplish his mission in India. As on other occasions in Woolf's narrative, a ritual character pervades the dinner, apparently permeated with the solemn tone of an Eucharistic congregation around a seemingly communal saviour. Indeed, as envisioned by Bernard, who turns out the fictional bard singing the knight's excellences, Percival appears an actual hero “risen to the category of a god. Certainly, while before his arrival, chaos and hostility” reign over the scene, Neville desires expectantly for the time when Percival's body will be there – the time when “an extraordinary transformation” is due to occur. Hence, in the midst of the presiding unreality and sense of absence, Neville laments the unfamiliarized quality of an existence wherein “(t)he normal is abolished”.

Here, incredible as it seems, will be his actual body. This table, these chairs,

⁶⁷ Emphasis added

⁶⁸ For a taxonomy of the symbology entailed by some of Woolf's most commonly used names, see Hafley, *The Glass Roof*

this metal vase with its three red flowers are about to undergo an extraordinary transformation [...] Things quiver as if not yet in being. The blankness of the white table-cloth glares. The hostility, the indifference of other people dining here is oppressive. We look at each other; see that we do not know each other, stare, and go off. Such looks are lashes. I feel the whole cruelty and indifference of the world in them. If he should not come I could not bear it [...] And every moment he seems to pump into this room this prickly light, this intensity of being, so that things have lost their normal uses – this knife-blade is only a flash of light, not a thing to cut with. The normal is abolished (66).

In opposition to this governing disorder, Neville celebrates the solidity Percival is to bring forth into what he affirms as “our festival”. Hereby, as Percival makes his entrance, the former experiences the re-fertilization that is proper to the arrival of a new god:

'Now', said Neville, 'my tree flowers. My heart rises. All oppression is relieved. All impediment is removed. The reign of chaos is over. He has imposed order. Knives cut again (68).

The singer of Percival's adventures and the one to declare him a hero – as it had been anticipated – Bernard praises the actions of a knight capable of returning the order and sense of self-definition they all so vehemently hope. Moreover, while Bernard assumes the rhythmical cadences and style of romance, as attested by the opposed repetition of the syntactical construction “(w)e who...”, it should be noted that, not accidentally, a symbolically “Miss Bard” – reminiscent of the legend's context – enters the narration, along with the sacrifice-allusive “Miss Lamb[-]ert” and “Miss Cutting” (69). Within this view, it would be tempting to yield to Percival's identification with the generation of solar gods who bring forth the renewal into the wasteland. Indeed, considerable relevance is allowed for the evolution of the sun throughout the italicized interludes between the different sections of the novel, which – as Leaska suggests – provides a trope for the chronological development of the characters (1977: 166).

In this sense, L. Ruotolo has pointed out the divine dimension of the character – a quality which provokes the envy of the other characters, desirous to become like their “hero” (153). To support this view, Ruotolo does not hesitate to identify Percival with an Osiris-figure – or solar deity. Nonetheless, while a certain parallel with the anthropological nature of the myth is to be drawn insofar as the character retains the scapegoat dimension of the god, – as it will be discussed – it would be mistaking to establish an equation to its utmost consequence between the god and Woolf's character, insofar as crucial difference inexorably separates both figures. Indeed, symptomatic of this is the deliberate disruption of the mythological structure in the novel, whereby the hero is denied a glorified status. Hence, in contrast with the god, whose death coincides with the

setting of the sun, Percival precisely dies at the moment when – as indicated in the interlude preceding section five – the aster is in its full height (82).

Hereby, as it occurs in the other cases throughout Woolf's fiction – an instance of which is constituted by the divinized Lucy – amounts in fact to the decrowning purpose underlying Percival's construction. Thus, it is actually by means of this deliberately intended identification of Percival with a heroic figure in the novel, that the narrator attains a more rotund emphasis on the epiphanic revelation of the opposite truth. Indeed, in order to achieve this exalting effect, a displacement technique is employed throughout the narrative, thus deviating the focus of attention onto the alleged hero. Certainly, even when he is the only unvoiced character, Percival is portrayed as both the physical and emotional centripetal force around which the rest of characters' lives revolve. As Bernard remembers after Percival's death, “he sat there in the centre [...] Oh, yes, I can assure you, men in felt hats and women carrying baskets – you have lost [...] a leader” (85). Moreover, Percival is similarly a convergence point for one of the two meetings of the group at Hampton Court.

Hence, while the first of these encounters is summoned up in order to farewell the departing Percival, about to set off for India, a central topic in the second one is the remembrance of the hero after his death. Indeed, denied the god-like status of an Osiris figure, the deity embodying the setting sun – Percival's death in fact coincides with the moment when the sun is in its full height as quoted above – the hero is paradoxically connected with an absurd and unsolemnized “god of decency”. In this sense, despite the inclusion of these elements of heroic romance and the mythological enhancement of a redeeming god, a different reality is revealed through the narrative, which covertly portrays Percival as the mock king of a carnivalesque celebration. Indeed, occupying the seat that has been chosen for him – a parallel of the gift empty chair in Arthur's legend, as well as a recurring motif in the novel – Percival undergoes the investment for which, significantly, “the occasion is crowned”.

Moreover, Bernard's remembrance of his heroism renders a non-heroic image of Percival who, rather than the leader of a powerful army, does not transcend his adventures as allegedly commanding a troop of children who imitate him. Not even through the allusion to his childhood is he more exalted. Thus, this depiction of the hero becomes evocative of Woolf's undermining of war as the nonsensical display of male vanities, yet no more mature than a schoolboys' game. As she herself expressed it.

In addition, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus employs the same image in order to demeanour this issue, thereby referring to the European War as “that little shindy of schoolboys with gunpowder” (105). Aside from this, whereas superficially seeming to praise Percival's qualities as a leader, the troop of children who follow and imitate Percival become in truth closer to the “a maimed file of lunatics” (*Mrs. Dalloway*, 98) assaulting the decrowned soldier in the above mentioned novel. Likewise, equally ridiculous is the grotesque animalization of the six speakers, accounting for the desolation that invades them on the absence of their leader. Hereby, the hyperbolic description of Percival's magical taming action on the group, “who yelped like jackals” before his arrival, entails, in fact, the ambivalent debasing effect inherent to the carnivalesque principle of exaggeration: “(w)e who yelped like jackals biting at each other's heels now assume the sober and confident air of soldiers in the presence of their captain” (68).

Analysing the novel in terms of its critique to the imperialist eagerness for dominance, M. Tratner similarly points to the debasing effect of the presentation of a leader whose triumph amounts to an animalistic taming of his crew. Intended – according to Tratner – as a form of downturn of the colonialist greediness, Percival's domestication of the group accounts, in the critics view, for the subjugating methods of imperial worship (1995: 225). In this sense, focusing on this aspect, Tratner has signalled that Woolf's description of the sun's progress throughout the nine interludes the novel contains as a trope for the decline of the British Empire. Hence, as the latter has remarked, this solar metaphor has particular relevance in the context of an Empire ironically labeled as the inexhaustibly powerless territory where “the sun never sets” (1995: 223).

This in fact obeys to the displacement technique employed virtually throughout the whole narrative in order to deviate attention onto the apparent hero of Woolf's story. Furthermore, thus initiated Percival's decrowning portrayal, a definitive confirmation of his debased position comes with Bernard's oracular narrative of the hero's death and existence.

'I see India,' said Bernard. 'I see the low, long shore; I see the tortuous lanes of stamped mud that lead in and out among ramshackle pagodas; I see the gilt and crenellated buildings which have an air of fragility and decay as if they were temporarily run up buildings in some Oriental exhibition. I see a pair of bullocks who drag a low cart along the sun-baked road. The cart sways incompetently from side to side. Now one wheel sticks in the rut, and at once innumerable natives in loin-cloths swarm round it, chattering excitedly. But they do nothing. Time seems endless, ambition vain. Over all broods a sense of the uselessness of human exertion. There are strange sour smells. An old man in a ditch continues to chew betel and to contemplate his navel. But now, behold, Percival advances; Percival rides a flea-bitten mare, and wears a sun-

helmet (75).

Hence, riding a “flea-bitten mare”, and armoured with a teapot – as we later learn – simultaneously serving as a sun-helmet, Percival actually becomes the very portrayal of Don Quixote. Indeed, as he was beginning to conceive the plans for her novel, which should “include nonsense, fact, sordidity”, Woolf determined to find inspiration in Shakespeare (1978: 138, 28th November, 1928), an author whose capacity of recreation of the Fool's figure she had praised in “*Reading*” an immensely valuable personage whose author, as Woolf complained, had “dismissed [...] callously enough” (*The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays*, 1950: 163).

Similarly Quixotic is the stark contrast between the grandeur with which Percival undertakes an enterprise such as solving the “Oriental problem” and the ridiculous procedure of his task, which amounts to righting the wheel of his bullock-cart by resorting to the rudest and improper manners that – notwithstanding his alleged aura of divinity – are “natural to him”.

By applying the standards of the West, by using the violent language that is natural to him, the bullock-cart is righted in less than five minutes. The Oriental problem is solved. He rides on; the multitude cluster round him, regarding him as if he were – what indeed he is – a God' (75).

In fact, while – as it has been pointed out – Percival's name creates in the reader *a priori* expectations of Arthurian-related grandeur and knightly values, a closer insight into the myth brings to surface certain crucial revelations concerning the progress in the hero's characterization. Accordingly, in Malory's Grail's story a rather anti-heroic version of the knight is provided through Parsifal. Indeed, ignorant and maladroit, the unachieving hero fails in his enterprise to attain the Grail owing to his inability to ask the right question at the right time. Like his namesake, Woolf's Percival – who displays a similar rudeness and “violent” manners – turns out an utterly senseless being. Hence, though initially acclaimed by the masses, Percival becomes a hollow idol whose life and death are pointlessly dissolved throughout the narrative, thereby turning his whole existence into the grotesque void epitomized by his empty chair.

Indeed, ironically enhanced as an acclaimed “god” of the masses, Percival turns out a grotesque divinity redolent of the type of undignified pathetic god Neville – who paradoxically idolizes him – had contemplated as a child. Precisely, Neville's account of this unsettling procession of “cadaverous” figures constitutes a real instance of carnivalesque parade. Hence, located at Rome – the birthplace of the Saturnalias, or primitive forms of carnival, according to Frazer – these parades of gross personages become an enactment of the “trembling” and collapse of a religious authority Neville now “gibes and mocks”.

'I gibe and mock at this sad religion, at these tremulous, grief-stricken figures advancing, cadaverous and wounded, down a white road shadowed by fig trees where boys sprawl in the dust – naked boys; and goatskins distended with wine hang at the tavern door. I was in Rome travelling with my father at Easter; and the trembling figure of Christ's mother was borne niddle-nodding along the streets; there went by also the stricken figure of Christ in a glass case (19).

In fact, as he recounts the privileged presence of hanging “goatskins distended with wine”, as well as of the attentive “naked boys” in this grotesque performance, Neville directly points to a type of ancient celebration in Italy observed by Frazer. Indeed, in his rendering of the ancient worship of Dionysus, one of the embodiments of these vegetation deities, Frazer refers the celebration of a yearly “carnival in the villages round Viza, an old Thracian capital”, where significantly “mummers” and “masqueraders” dressed in goatskins perform a wild dancing, which include the enactment of an “obscene pantomime” – a clear symptom, for both Frazer and Bakhtin, of the dual ambivalence of carnival acts.

(C)ertain animals stood to the ancient deities of vegetation, Dionysus, Demeter, Adonis, Attis, and Osiris [...] To begin with Dionysus. We have seen that he was represented sometimes as a goat and sometimes as a bull. As a goat he can hardly be separated from the minor divinities, the Pans, Satyrs, and Silenuses, all of whom are closely associated with him and are represented more or less completely in the form of goats. Thus, Pan was regularly portrayed in sculpture and painting with the face and legs of a goat. The Satyrs were depicted with pointed goat-ears, and sometimes with sprouting horns and short tails. They were sometimes spoken of simply as goats; and in the drama their parts were played by men dressed in goatskins (Frazer, *Part V*, vol. I, 1900: 24-34).

Simultaneously, symptomatic of the insubstantiality of the pillars sustaining characteristic religious beliefs, the quavering movement of these worshiped idols becomes as well the distinctive mark of the officiating school's priest. Hence, growling with drunkenness, the unworthy minister “lurches back to his seat like a drunken sailor”. Even though a lamentable spectacle, the intoxicated performance of the priest elicits the attempted mimicry of the other masters:

It is on action that all the other masters will try to imitate; but, being flimsy, being floppy, wearing grey trousers, that will only succeed in making themselves ridiculous. I do not despise them. Their antics seem pitiable in my eyes (19).

In resemblance to these quivering deities the allegedly god-like Percival is carried on a cart that “sways incompetently from side to side” in the midst of an Indian panorama plagued by a sense of unreality and “decay”:

'I see India,' said Bernard. 'I see the low, long shore; I see the tortuous lanes of

stamped mud that lead in and out among ramshackle pagodas; I see the gilt and crenellated buildings which have an air of fragility and decay as if they were temporarily run up buildings in some Oriental exhibition (75).

Moreover, while paradoxically revered by the clamorous crowd, Percival is patently deprived from a divine status, which, rather than confirmed, is subversively questioned by the deceitfully exalting voice of Bernard. Indeed, it is only by the deliberate parenthetical comment that Bernard seems to accept with dubious conviction the hero's artificial divinity: “(h)e rides on; the multitude cluster round him, regarding him *as if he were* – what indeed he is – *a god*⁶⁹” (75).

Furthermore, it is on the grounds of the absolute and pathetic grotesqueness of their mock leader is endowed solely with exclusive uniqueness. Hence, as Bernard portrays him, Old Crane possesses ugliness and protrusions of grotesque body:

'Behold, the Headmaster. Alas, that he should excite my ridicule. He is too sleek, he is altogether too shiny and black, like some statue in a public garden. And on the left side of his waistcoat, his taut, his drum-like waistcoat, hangs a crucifix.'

'Old Crane,' said Bernard, 'now rises to address us. Old Crane, the Headmaster, has a nose like a mountain at sunset, and a blue cleft in his chin, like a wooded ravine, which some tripper has fired; like a wooded ravine seen from the train window. He sways slightly, mouthing out his tremendous and sonorous words. I love tremendous and sonorous words. But his words are too hearty to be true. Yet he is by this time convinced of their truth. And when he leaves the room, lurching rather heavily from side to side, and hurls his way through the swing-doors, all the masters, lurching rather heavily from side to side, hurl themselves also through the swing-doors [...] (75).

On the other hand, if this attempt for imitation of the grotesque personage is frustrated due to the blunt foolery of this figure, a significant parallel with Percival is implicitly suggested. Indeed, it is not merely random coincidence that twice throughout the novel will trials for mimicking the hero occur, and even though doomed to fail. Hence, Neville remarks the unsuccessful pretensions of the schoolboys mocking the child Percival. Likewise, the same quality remains during his adolescence, when Percival's particular gesture of handling his neck cannot be reiterated by any of his peers:

' [...] But look – he flicks his hand to the back of his neck. For such gestures one falls hopelessly in love for a lifetime. Dalton, Jones, Edgar and Bateman flick their hands to the back of their necks likewise. But they do not succeed' (19).

On top of that, Percival's assimilation to the grotesque gods in Neville's narration is further confirmed by his portrayal as a “remote” idol ferreously guarding the sacred edifice of contemporary conventions. Indeed, stonily immobile on a church pillar, from whence he jealously

⁶⁹ Emphasis added

watches society through his “inexpressive”, “fixed” eyes, Percival becomes redolent of the empty deities in the Roman processions described by Neville. Moreover, worshipped by the masses, these figures share with the other contemporary authorities not only this acceptance, but even the implicit stamp of a despotic exertion of their power. In tune with this, it is precisely the same dictatorial quality defining the petrous Percival, placed at an outstanding position “upright among the smaller fry”, who “should have a bridle and beat little boys for their demeanours” that condemns him inexorably to his irremediable decrowning.

Certainly, even though apparently an object of reverence, the mishearing and unseeing statuesque Percival becomes a purely carnivalesque stage prop whose ridiculousness turns increasingly evident.

There he sits, upright among the smaller fry. He breathes through his straight nose rather heavily. His blue and oddly inexpressive eyes are fixed with pagan indifference upon the pillar opposite. He would make an admirable churchwarden. He should have a birch and beat little boys for misdemeanours. He is allied with the Latin phrases on the memorial brasses. He sees nothing; he hears nothing. He is remote from us all in a pagan universe (19).

Hence, thus deploying his beloved Percival, Neville cryptically anticipates the hero's fatal stumbling and subsequent fall. In this sense, his description of how he “lean[s] sideways” to see Percival simultaneously implies Neville's oracular foreseeing of Percival's final swaying – an ambiguity created by the unspecified meaning of “so” in its respective uses as both a purpose subjunct or as a manner adverbial of anaphoric reference: “Now I lean sideways as if to scratch my thigh. *So*⁷⁰ I shall see Percival” (19). Simultaneously, in this portrayal, wherein some reminiscences of the gargoyle-like description of the corrupting inertia in other Woolf's characters resound, Percival becomes attached not only to the Latin inscriptions in pillars, but also to the immutability of a society decaying as a consequence of the burden of unalterable tradition. In this regard, it is precisely the “conventionality” of this alleged hero that solidly glues him to the meaningless immobility where Percival – as an stereotypical product of the socio-political system – has been allocated. Indeed, Bernard's later remembrance reveals the unexceptional vulgarity of Percival, whose uncritical absorption of the doctrines and ideas administered by the educational system conjugate with the plain conventionality of the hero. Ironically, deprived of any salient virtues – “he was not in the least precocious” – and endowed with a rough “kind of beauty”, his only outstanding feature amounts to an insignificant “way of flicking his hand to the back of his neck”.

⁷⁰ Emphasis added

Thus debunked, the ultimate confirmation of his grotesque absurdity comes with Bernard's final recollections of his friends, whereby Percival's status as a fallen King of Fools "is proclaimed". Moreover, turned into a Quixotic "little figure with a golden teapot on his head", Percival is allied to the entire dynasty of kings and queens in Woolf's fiction, of which the gross Queen Bess in *Between the Acts*, or the grotesque collage into which Queen Alexandra is transformed in *The Years* constitute representative examples.

'It is true, and I know for a fact,' said Bernard, 'as we walk down this avenue, that a King, riding, fell over a molehill here. But how strange it seems to set against the whirling abysses of infinite space a little figure with a golden teapot on his head. Soon one recovers belief in figures: but not at once in what they put on their heads. Our English past – one inch of light. Then people put teapots on their heads and say, "I am a King!" (128).

Significantly, Bernard's final summing up acts as the disintegrating force that corrupts monistic forms of authority to utter destruction. Chiming in with this decentralizing purpose, Percival becomes an epitome for the dissolution of these monarchic figures of power, as well as the whole paraphernalia sustaining them. Hereby, while Bernard's narrative accomplishes the dissolution of the hero into a complete blank, a similar effect is exerted upon these leaders. Already crowned as patent carnival Fools, those Kings, as well as the symbols where-through their dominion is executed are deprived of the fallacy of permanence on which the pillars of their power rests. Thus, by means of the affirmation of the fluidity of existence, conceived as an incessant process of transformation, a defiant disparage of the immutable fixity of authority is thus proclaimed. Accordingly, subverting the self-attributed solidity of royalty as a source of dominance and oppression, these monarchs are unmasked in their inexorable subjection to transience and change. Hence, in tune with the grotesque reversal of monolithic stability, these kings are hurled "to set against the whirling abysses of infinite space", where they become confined to inevitable dissolution, whereas their palaces become ephemeral clouds, irremediably condemned to vanish away:

This palace seems light as a cloud set for a moment on the sky. It is a trick of the mind – to put Kings on their thrones, one following another, with crowns on their heads. And we ourselves, walking six abreast, what do we oppose, with this random flicker of light in us that we call brain and feeling, how can we do battle against this flood; what has permanence? Our lives too stream away, down the unlighted avenues, past the strip of time, unidentified (128).

Certainly, it is this illusion of solidity – which Neville incessantly pursues – that collapses when confronted with the actual transitoriness of existence which acts erasing whatever sort of boundaries. Hereby, disrupting the fallacy of the immutability of power, the aloofness of these monarchs doomed to fall turns out a trope of the destabilization of their earthly authority. Indeed, in

consonance with aerial representation as a form of defiance and “active vanishing” of imposed patterns – as M. Russo has noted (1995: 48) –, the loss of substantiality and subsequent disintegration of monarchy enacts the impossible confinement of existence within the limits of conventional barriers. Closely associated with Percival's role, Rhoda indeed provides the quintessential clues to unveil the functional implications of his inclusion within the narrative.

Thrown by separation from conventional reality by a certain strain of hysteria – a mark, as remarked by Stallybrass and White of the grotesque body – that derives in her suicidal drives, Rhoda becomes one of the most salient embodiments in the novel of Bakhtin's abject hero of Carnival Fool. As it pertains to this personage, persistently remaining as an outsider to the strife of communal life, Rhoda is portrayed in a perpetual situation of otherness, to which she is banished even since her childhood – “(u)p here Bernard, Neville, Jinny and Susan (but not Rhoda) skim the flower-beds with their nets” (6). In fact, this scene of the children's butterfly-hunting provides one of the central clues of the novel, insofar as it serves to decode the meaning underlying both the characters and their particular interrelationships. Certainly, considering the original title for the novel was intended to be *The Moths*, Woolf's later change of mind did not alter the initial patterns, which, even though undergoing some later changes concerning the external structure, still continued to include the symbolic presence of the moths:

Six weeks in bed would make a masterpiece of *Moths*. But that won't be the name. Moths, I suddenly remember, don't fly by day [...] (T)he shape of the book wants considering (Woolf, 1978: 144, Sept 10th 1929).

Thereupon, the episode reveals the hunter-role of the first four characters with respect to Rhoda, who significantly has “shoulder-blades [that] meet across her back like the wings of a small butterfly” (11). Extending Bakhtin's notion of the abject, Kristeva – as M. Grande has pointed out – rewrites the critic's carnival theory, insofar as she begins from a concept of marginality as the essential precondition for the rupture with closed definition and monadic perspectives (1994: 122). Hence, by means of the validation of alterity as the vehicle for the entrance into the fluid and ever-changing reality of human life, the abject vindicates for the consolidation of an ontological approach liberated from absolutizing points of view.

Focusing her theory on the social construction of the female body as condemnatory to that position of ostracism and isolation by virtue of its conception as Other, Kristeva comes upon a definition of the abject as “opposed to *I*”. Certainly, recurrently throughout the whole narrative, Rhoda envisions herself as symbolically faceless, and therefore, deprived from any definite – at the same time as defining – identity. Indeed, she states:

(H)ere I am nobody. I have no face [...] I am not here. I have no face. Other people have faces; Susan and Jinny have faces; they are here. Their world is the real world. The things they lift are heavy. They say Yes, they say No; whereas I shift and change and am seen through in a second (18, 23).

It is in opposition to those attached, by means of their face, to the world of the perfectly measured and delimited, that Rhoda can affirm her open nature and hereby proclaim the infinite possibilities of her evershifting identity. Certainly, according to Kristeva, the recognition of the abject inexorably leads to the establishment of a binomial system, where the Other and outsider enters into a direct opposition to the I and insider, the latter of whom Kristeva coins as *deject*. Concerned with differing as much as possible from the abject – whom he takes as the expiatory Other – the deject seeks to escape from the indefiniteness and dissolution of the abject self, thereby proclaiming himself as “one”, “homogeneous”, and “totalizable”. In that struggle for self-delimitation, the deject becomes a “deviser of territories, languages, works, [...] never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines”.

Connected with his desperate fixation for absolute delimitation, the deject despises his abjected other, as Bakhtin had remarked, to the extent of rotund scorn and destructive harassment. Accordingly, as it is fitting with the abject, Rhoda experiences the vexations of her torturers: “I leap high to excite their admiration. At night, in bed, I excite their complete wonder. I often die pierced with arrows to win their tears” (23). Aware of her scapegoat status, which requires the “penance” of exposure to the community reunited at Hampton Court, Rhoda explicitly acknowledges her function as the carrier of collective evils: “I must go through the antics of the individual. I must start when you pluck at me with your children, your poems, your chilblains or whatever it is what you do and suffer” (126).

If Septimus' crowning with the chant of the chorus had marked his descent as a societal expiatory figure, a very similar episode is experienced by one of his most patent analogues. Here, accompanied by the discordant chorus of the street sounds reminiscent of the birds' song mentioned above – “ ' [...] I hear through it far off, far away, faint and far, the chorus beginning; wheels; dogs; men shouting; church bells; the chorus beginning.' ” (14) –. Rhoda commences her “fall” onto a simultaneous underworld of “darkness” and death by water.

' [...] Now I spread my body on this frail mattress and hang suspended. I am above the earth now. I am no longer upright, to be knocked against and damaged. All is soft, and bending. Walls and cupboards whiten and bend their yellow squares on top of which a pale glass gleams. Out of me now my mind can pour. I can think of my Armadas sailing on the high waves. I am relieved of hard contacts and collisions. I sail on alone under the white cliffs. Oh, but I sink, I fall! That is the corner of the cupboard; that is the nursery looking-glass. But they stretch, they elongate. I sink down on the black plumes of sleep; its thick wings are pressed to my eyes [...] Let me pull myself out of

these waters. But they heap themselves on me; they sweep me between their great shoulders; I am turned; I am tumbled; I am stretched, among these long lights, these long waves, these endless paths, with people pursuing, pursuing' (14).

Significantly, this martyrdom of derisive exposure is accentuated as Rhoda reaches her adolescence. Hence, sitting at an eating-house, the novel's female victim experiences the anguish of the derogation inflicted upon her, while she momentarily dreams of a prospective land of “treasures” and prosperity.

The door opens; the tiger leaps. The door opens; terror rushes in; terror upon terror, pursuing me. Let me visit furtively the treasures I have laid apart. Pools lie on the other side of the world reflecting marble columns. The swallow dips her wing in dark pools. But here the door opens and people come; they come towards me. Throwing faint smiles to mask their cruelty, their indifference, they seize me (58).

Not accidentally, this terror of exposure is linked to the conventionally arranged pattern designed by the patriarchal foundations of Victorian society, whereby adolescent girls were compelled to necessarily undergo a social coming out onto the spheres of the upper class collective – a fact, by the way, which was not unfamiliar for the narrator herself. Indeed, in “Sketch of the Past” Virginia Woolf recalls her own sufferings at the painstaking obligation to attend social parties. In particular, she recounts her preparations for her “c[oming] into being” within “upper middle class Victorian society” at adolescence, whereby she became exposed to the stagnant inquisition of her half-brother, George Duckworth.

Down I came one winter's evening about 1900 in my green dress; apprehensive, yet, for a new dress excites even the unskilled, elated. All the light were turned up in the drawing room; and the blazing fire George sat, in dinner jacket and black tie, cuddling the dachshund, Schuster, on his knee. He at once fixed on me that extraordinarily observant scrutiny with which he always inspected our clothes. He looked me up and down for a moment as if I were a horse brought into the show ring. Then the sullen look came into his eyes; the look which expressed not simply aesthetic disapproval; but something that went deeper. It was the look of moral, of social, disapproval, as if he scented some kind of insurrection, of defiance of his accepted standards. I knew myself condemned from more points of view than I could then analyse. As I stood there I was conscious of fear; of shame; of something like anguish – a feeling, like so many, out of all proportion to its surface cause. He said at last: “Go and tear it up.” he spoke in a curiously tart, rasping, peevish voice; the voice of the enraged male; the voice which expressed his serious displeasure at this infringement of a code that meant more to him than he could admit (2002: 157).

Furthermore, in connection with this form of judgmental exposure, Rhoda is terrified by the pressure upon her due to her socially institutionalized duty to marriage, in compliance with the rules imposed by the patriarchal structures of society:

I must take his hand; I must answer. But what answer shall I give? I am thrust back to stand burning in this clumsy, this ill-fitting body, to receive the shafts of his indifference and his scorn [...] But I am fixed here to listen. An immense pressure is on me. I cannot move without dislodging the weight of centuries. A million arrows pierce me. Scorn and ridicule pierce me. I, who could beat my breast against the storm and let the hail choke me joyfully, am pinned down here; am exposed. The tiger leaps. Tongues with their whips are upon me. Mobile, incessant, they flicker over me. I must prevaricate and fence them off with lies” (58).

Whereas the deject – as it had been discussed – aims at solidly cementing his differences from the despicable outsider, the latter, in turn, re-asserts his absolute separation from the totalizing one-sidedness of the subject-ed faced ego. It is precisely that egocentric confidence of the tyrannical artifices of patriarchy that Rhoda unmasks as conspicuously distorted and absurd, by virtue of the nonsensicality of their categorizing attempts for closed definition:

The human face is hideous [...], deformed, indifferent [...] – faces and faces, served out like soup-plates by scullions; coarse, greedy, casual; looking in at shop-windows with pendent parcels; ogling, brushing, destroying everything, leaving even our love impure, touched now by their dirty fingers (88-9).

In fact, assuming the buffoonery that is fitting to the carnival paradigm, a reversion of roles is implied, whereby Rhoda in fact comes to simultaneously ridiculize and scorn her executors. Accordingly, associated with the actual grotesque deformity of the officially right and predominant I, Rhoda perceives the stain and corruptness Kristeva highlights as characteristic of the subjectal perception of the abject. Hence, while a central quality of the condition of abjection is its belonging to what Bakhtin called “the lower stratum”, comprising the most scatological side of reality, as well as whatever transcends the limits of the pure and sacred – in M. Douglas' terms – a reversal is operated through Rhoda's perception of these repulsive beings whose touch becomes contaminating.

Through this logics of inversion, the sacredness of the subject's alleged superiority is implied as radically opposed to its subordinated ejected Other. This subject, in the particular context of the 1930s Britain, when the novel was published, has a clear referent in the agentive male, whose real possibility of action either in politics, education, and the organization of societal roles ascribed to gender stands as a counterpart to a female Other, generally bereft of the capacity of active decision, in socio-political life. Interestingly, in her conceptualization of her 'Society of Outsiders', whose ends, she notes, amount to “freedom, equality, peace; but [...] seeks to achieve them by means that a different sex, a different tradition, a different education, and the different values which result from those differences have placed within our reach” (1996: 234). Woolf actually expresses her striving for precisely subverting this order. Hereby, whereas aiming to attain his “freedom, equality, peace”, the Society of Outsiders was to “achieve them by the means that a different sex, a different tradition, a different education, and the different values which result from those

differences have placed within our reach”.

At the same time, on the grounds of the novel's strong implications in connection with the imperialist setting of post-colonial Britain, the narrative alludes to a colonizing subject – which corresponds to the same patriarchal agent – as Woolf had remarked in *Three Guineas* – whose coinage of otherness represents its most powerful weapon for the cleavage and exertion of his dominance. As H. K. Bhabha has noted in this respect:

“(M)imicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (1994: 85-92).

On the other hand, an additional meaning is entailed by this polysemic ego, linked to narrative itself. Hence, as her contemporary Modernist authors, Woolf had wrestled against the hegemony of omniscience as a narrative mode in favour of the adoption of the recognition of the fluid and multidirectional nature of reality. Thus, against that monadic conception of the Cartesian ego that had – as Levinas has observed – constituted “the permanent presupposition of the philosophical tradition of the West” (1981: 132), Woolf advocated for the introduction into fiction of the Bakhtinian polyphony, more in tune with the plural reality of existence. Thus, by allowing for the entrance of different perspectives and points of view, a decentralization of the tyranny represented by the absolute authority of the narrative voice was proclaimed. As she complained in “*Modern Fiction*”:

(W)e go on perseveringly, conscientiously, constructing our two and thirty chapters [...] The writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, and an air of probability [...] The tyrant is obeyed; the novel is done to a turn [...] But any deductions we may draw [...] flood us with a view of the infinite possibilities of the art and remind us that there is no limit to the horizon, and that nothing – no 'method', no experiment, even of the wildest – is forbidden, but only falsity and pretence. 'The proper stuff of fiction does not exist'; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought [...] no perception comes amiss (1919 [1993: 7-12]).

In her shot back at the society which so much vexes her, Rhoda effects a burlesque of the pretences of these deformed egos. Hence, like the mockingly converted into a troop commander Miss La Trobe, whose cross-dressing empowerment simultaneously turns her into a parodical *doppelgänger* of male imperialist tyrants, Rhoda is recurrently portrayed as the leader of ship armadas. Nevertheless, it is precisely this assumption of the dictatorial position of leadership that becomes doomed to its own decrowning and final disintegration. Accordingly, in both of the two occurrences of this image throughout the novel, the figure of the tyrant appears inexorably doomed

to failure and death. Hence, while in the first scene, during Rhoda's childhood, the figure of the preposterous commander ends up “I can think of my armadas sailing on the high waves [...] I sail on alone under white cliffs. Oh, but I sink, I fall!” (13).

A more radical form of destruction is suggested later, when Rhoda, envisioning herself as the “ministers of [other] fleet of ships” is immediately “broken into separate pieces [...] no longer one” (58).

In this regard, Rhoda's reversal of the blatant opposition to the despotic centrality of the subjected ego anticipates Bakhtin's postulates on narratorial alterity. Indeed, in “*Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity*”, Bakhtin would also carry out a similar process of decentralization of the *I*. Hence, through his notion of *vnenakhodimost* – a term Todorov has translated as 'exotopy', or 'outsiderness' (Todorov, 1984: 99) – Bakhtin articulates a de-dejected position of the narrative voice:

My own axiological relationship to myself is completely unproductive aesthetically: for myself, I am aesthetically unreal. I can be only the bearer of the task of artistic forming and consummating, not its object – not the hero (1990: 200).

By means of his formulation of exotopy – as in Woolf's conception of the 'Society of Outsiders' – Todorov aimed to defile the conventional Cartesian foundations of Western philosophy. Yet, whereas in his articulation of the demeaned *I*, Bakhtin admits to the impossibility of completely relinquishing the authorial entity by virtue of aesthetic necessities, at the same time as he does vindicate for a re-location of the self, whereby a revision of the relation between author and hero results in the de-hierarchicalization of both terms. Accordingly, as Bakhtin notes in his chapter “*The Hero in Dostoevsky's Art*”, through the deflating allocation of this interaction, “the author retains for himself no essential “surplus” of meaning and enters on an equal footing [into] the great dialogue of the novel as a whole” (1984a: 75). As he specifies:

The closer the image to the zone I-for-myself, the less there is of the object-like and finalized in it, the more it becomes an image of personality, free and open-ended [...] the fundamental distinction between character and personality [...] is determined not by qualitative (objectified) indicators, but by the *position* of the image (whatever it may be, according to its characterological features) in the system of coordinates '*I-for-myself* and *another person*⁷¹ (in all its varieties)' (1984a: 297).

At the same time as a radical downturn of the traditional hierarchy established between I-Other, with a view to debunking the above defined polysemic subject of authorial narrative, Rhoda's assumption of the commander's identity represents a form of derisive mimesis of this authority. As

⁷¹ Emphasis as in the original.

in other images of empowered women – including Miss La Trobe, in *Between the Acts*, the pilot-unfolded Miss Thornbury, in *The Voyage Out* – this cross-dressed recreation of patriarchal power turns out a subversive form of validation of female alterity by means of the resort to mimetic reproduction taken to excess as a resisting discourse. Particularly symptomatic of that excessive reproduction of this hegemonic subject is Rhoda's self-adoption of the narrative authorial preponderance. Hereby, through a passage plagued with the absolute dominance – both typographical and structural – of the *I*, Rhoda effects what M. Hajdukowski-Ahmed has described as the “disrupt[ion] and debase[ment of] the voice of authority which “take[s] on a new meaning” (1993: 191). Indeed, through her blunt declaration of her resolute “walking up straight” to the others, “instead of circling round”, Rhoda affirms her determination towards a broad reversal of the power structures, thereby appropriating the *I* with the sole aim of carrying it to a terrain of meaninglessness and grotesque excess. Nonetheless, at the same time as perpetrating this subversive rioting of the subject, Rhoda still vindicates for a form of Otherness exempt from enclosing categorization.

'There were lamp-posts,' said Rhoda, 'and trees that had not yet shed their leaves on the way from the station. The leaves might have hidden me still. But *I* did not hide behind them. *I* walked straight up to you instead of circling round to avoid the shock of sensation as *I* used. But it is only that *I* have taught my body to do a certain trick. Inwardly *I* am not taught; *I* fear, *I* hate, *I* love, *I* envy and despise you, but *I* never join you happily. Coming up from the station, refusing to accept the shadow of the trees and the pillar-boxes, *I* perceived, from your coats and umbrellas, even at a distance, how you stand embedded in a substance made of repeated moments run together; are committed, have an attitude, with children, authority, fame, love, society; where *I* have nothing. *I* have no face (126).

Certainly, Rhoda struggles to preserve the qualities encompassed by the Other-self, characterized by its multiplicity and everchanging nature, completely alien to grotesque boundaries or restrictions. Furthermore, it is precisely against this petrousness of “a world immune from change” – presided over by the symbolical presence of the authoritarian policeman, in charge for “guarding respectability, and prosperity, and the purity of Victoria's land” (*Between the Acts*, 154) – that Rhoda arises as the expiatory *pharmakos* that sacrifices her life so as to enable the entrance of regeneration into a world almost bereft of hope. Of course, only by rotundly breaking the monolithic self-closure of the present conceptions of both ego and reality can the longed-for renewal be buttressed. Hence, in tune with her scapegoat role, Rhoda announces the dismemberment and fragmentation of her own self in the midst of a multitude of grotesque “twitching faces” that condemn her to a life enduring harassment and derision.

There is, then, a world immune from change. When *I* have passed through this drawing-room flickering with tongues that cut me like knives, making me

stammer, making me lie [...] The policeman stands sentinel at the corner. A man passes. There is, then, a world immune from change [...] What I say is perpetually contradicted. Each time the door opens I am interrupted. I am not yet twenty-one. I am to be broken. I am to be derided all my life. I am to be cast up and down among these men and women, with their twitching faces, with their lying tongues, like a cork on a rough sea. Like a ribbon of weed I am flung far every time the door opens (58-9).

Submitted to sacrificial dismemberment, Rhoda thus undergoes the carnivalesque scission of the expiatory victim as a vehicle for societal salvation. Indeed, in his typology of literary modes and genres, N. Frye accounts for this division of the hero – or *sparagmos* – which he envisions as symptomatic of the futility of heroism in a decayed society wherein grandiosity and leadership have proved their collapse.

In this sense, opposing the indivisibility of the still tradition-confined system Susan – restricted to a patriarchy-moulded married life – Rhoda enacts the very image of the subversive rendering of the mutilated carnival body: “I am broken into separate pieces. I am no longer alone” (58). In tune with this transgressing purpose, M. Battista has also envisioned the fragmentation of the hero's body as a trope of the anarchy ruling over the compositional structure of *The Waves* (1980: 172). It is precisely the moment of her death that becomes the most patent means of disruption of the oppressive monologism of conventional perspectives. Moreover, in consonance with her sacrificial identity, Rhoda conceives her death as initially an unaddressed offer. Retaining considerable parallels with Septimus – as well suicidally flung from a window – Rhoda shares with the ex-combatant a similar scorn for the deformed/deforming society that is constantly battering her. Hence, like Septimus who blatantly manifests his rejection of the suffocating restraint of present society, Rhoda expresses her repulse towards the perniciously corrupting existence that performs her victimage:

'Oh, life, how I have dreaded you,' said Rhoda, 'oh, human beings, how I have hated you! How you have nudged, how you have interrupted, how hideous you have looked in Oxford Street, how squalid sitting opposite each other staring in the Tube! Now as I climb this mountain, from the top of which I shall see Africa, my mind is printed with brown-paper parcels and your faces. I have been stained by you and corrupted. You smelt so unpleasant too, lining up outside doors to buy tickets. All were dressed in indeterminate shades of grey and brown, never even a blue feather pinned to a hat. None had the courage to be one thing rather than another. What dissolution of the soul you demanded in order to get through one day, what lies, bowings, scrapings, fluency and servility! How you chained me to one spot, one hour, one chair, and sat yourselves down opposite! How you snatched from me the white spaces that lie between hour and hour and rolled them into dirty pellets and tossed them into the waste-paper basket with your greasy paws. Yet those were my life (115).

In that desire for disrupting the conventional unidirectionality of the centralizing monadism,

Rhoda echoes Septimus' declaration of his death as an offer which, addressed to an unidentified recipient – “I made [...] a garland and gave them – Oh, to whom?” – is intended as a means conducive to the longed-for regeneration. Nevertheless, while the expiatory victim in *Mrs. Dalloway* will not explicitly appoint the direct addresser of his sacrifice – which is later inferred, with Clarissa as its most immediate herald of his message – Rhoda intentionally designs a specific target for her sacrificial yielding. It is interestingly as Rhoda contemplates the grotesque deformity of society – as well as the hideousness of the human face that masks its destructive hypocrisy – that she announces her offer of violets to Percival, at the same time as she will look at “the flowering branch [that] has fallen”.

In this regard, Rhoda's gift to her friend is, though, in return for a “hostile” landscape of waste and hopelessness lodging the grotesque deformity of a world “shelter[ed] under the wing of beauty from truth”. Consequently, in this world, the death of the alleged hero turns out an absurd symbol devoid of any meaning:

On the bare ground I will pick violets and bind them together and offer them to Percival, something given him by me. Look now at what Percival has given me. Look at the street now that Percival is dead. The houses are lightly founded to be puffed over by a breath of air. Reckless and random the cars race and roar and hunt us to death like bloodhounds. I am alone in a hostile world [...] There are [...] alcoves of silence where we can shelter under the wing of beauty from truth which I desire. Pain is suspended as a girl silently slides open a drawer. And then, she speaks; her voice wakes me. I shoot to the bottom among the weeds and see envy, jealousy, hatred and spite scuttle like crabs over the sand as she speaks. These are our companions (88-9).

Accordingly, chiming with the decentralizing purpose of her plunge, Rhoda's offer becomes epitomized by the mockingly unsolemnized tribute she pays to the fallen male hero she additionally ends up condemning to oblivion – the bunch of “withered violets, blackened violets” in resemblance of which her death is envisioned:

(L)et there be rose leaves, let there be vine leaves—I covered the whole street, Oxford Street, Piccadilly Circus, with the blaze and ripple of my mind, with vine leaves and rose leaves [...] I threw my bunch into the spreading wave. I said, “Consume me, carry me to the furthest limit.” The wave has broken; the bunch is withered (115-6).

Moreover, along with the ripened flowers, whose flinging into the air serves as an allegory for the fragmentary dissolution of Rhoda's self, further emphasis in the glorification of Rhoda's homage to the patriarchal leader is made by the utterly gross circumstance surrounding her death, attended by a horse-faced woman and the presence of the cowbind.

The good woman with a face like a white horse at the end of the bed makes a

valedictory movement and turns to go. Who then comes with me? Flowers only, the cowbind and the moonlight-coloured May. Gathering them loosely in a sheaf I made of them a garland and gave them—Oh, to whom? [...] I touch nothing. I see nothing [...] Everything falls in a tremendous shower, dissolving me (116).

Indeed, while no hope is brought about by Percival – whose masculine rhetorics of self-aggrandisement ultimately unfit to attain the necessary regeneration – Rhoda arises as the inexhaustible source of renovating power. Accordingly, whereas Percival's unheroic death, as he falls from his improperly fixed bullock cart, epitomizes the futility of his boastful aims, a significant contraposition is represented by Rhoda. Certainly, symbolizing that renewing potential, Rhoda becomes the herald of hope since her childhood, when she announces through her oracular dream her escape from a present life of suffocating oppression, from which it is precisely a cart that constitutes the instrument of her entrance into freedom: “(t)ravelling through darkness I see the stretched flower-beds, and Mrs. Constable runs from behind the corner of the pampas-grass to say my aunt has come to fetch me in a carriage. I mount; I escape;” (14).

Furthermore, whereas Percival vanishes away after his death never to reappear again – except in the “grotesque” memories of his friends (65) – Rhoda's reemergence little after her suicide ultimately confirms Woolf's impinged faith in the immeasurable reach of female capacities to prompt forth the advent of a new, unrestrained society evolving around the principles of freedom and equality. Hence, if in *Three Guineas* Woolf anticipated the upraising of women, who, demeanoured by patriarchal dominance, possessed through the potential for creating a new, unconstrained order (1996: 202) a literal reemergence is accomplished by Rhoda. Thus, no sooner has she touched the ground than she starts raising back in her “gingerly” stepping towards a new life.

[...] We launch out now over the precipice [...]

'Yet that tree has bristling branches; that is the hard line of a cottage roof. Those bladder shapes painted red and yellow are faces. Putting my foot to the ground I step gingerly and press my hand against the hard door of a Spanish inn' (116).

As in *Mrs. Dalloway*, a dyadic unfolding of the expiatory victim is implicit in *The Waves*. Yet, if in the former, the parts of this dyad never coincide physically, Louis and her *doppelgänger*, Rhoda, who have known each other since childhood, end up being lovers. Laughed at by the others, Louis reveals from the very beginning his status as a scapegoat figure. Indeed, realizing the outsidership conferred by his difference, Louis becomes aware of the battering martyrdom the others inflict upon him, who “bind themselves into a thong with which to lash [Louis]. They laugh at my neatness, at my Australian accent [...]:

My father is a banker in Brisbane and I speak with an Australian accent. I will wait and copy Bernard. He is English. They are all English. Susan's father is a clergyman. Rhoda has no father. Bernard and Neville are the sons of gentlemen. Jinny lives with her grandmother in London. Now they suck their pens. Now they twist their copy-books, and, looking sideways at Miss Hudson, count the purple buttons on her bodice. Bernard has a chip in his hair. Susan has a red look in her eyes. Both are flushed. But I am pale; I am neat, and my knickerbockers are drawn together by a belt with a brass snake. I know the lesson by heart. I know more than they will ever know. I knew my cases and my genders; I could know everything in the world if I wished [...] Jinny and Susan, Bernard and Neville bind themselves into a thong with which to lash me. They laugh at my neatness, at my Australian accent (10).

In fact, the scorn and derision he suffers as a child will remain throughout his whole life. Hence, absorbed by his overwhelming desire for entering the societally accepted standards that would place him in a respected position, Louis becomes doomed to an annihilating spiral of self-destruction which, provides him with temporary admittance within a paradoxically engulfing social system which alienates him from his own being, arising in consequence his own self-despite.

'I, however,' said Louis, 'losing sight of you, sat in my office and tore the date from the calendar, and announced to the world of ship-brokers, corn-chandlers and actuaries that Friday the tenth, or Tuesday the eighteenth, had dawned on the city of London' [...]

'[...] But while I admire Susan and Percival, I hate the others, because it is for them that I do these antics, smoothing my hair, concealing my accent [...]' (70-1).

In this domineering social system, which corresponds to the type of socio-economic organization described by Marcuse (1964: 31), the individual becomes disempowered in benefit of capitalist interests, and thereby estranged from a full realization of his own self. Indeed, Woolf had explicitly disclaimed the socioeconomic structures of her time as essentially self-absorbing and biased towards the promotion of fascist objectives. At the same time, in her depiction of the bureaucratized society which exerts a pulverizing effect upon the individual, Woolf implicitly communes with the contemporary theories of Weber. Indeed, the portrayal of the increasingly mechanized Louis comes to echo Weber's notion of bureaucratized society as an "iron cage". By the coinage of this term, the sociologist envisaged this type of social organization as a powerfully alienating factor, insofar as it condemns individuals to a form of annihilating slavery whereby relationships between individuals become less and less conditioned by personal empathy or emotion, but more in terms of bureaucratic roles the socio-economic norms have imposed upon them. In this regard, Weber's concept describes the enclosure to which the individual within bureaucracy, subordinated to the set of rules dictated by this system, is enforced.

'But now I have not a moment to spare. There is no respite here, no shadow made of quivering leaves, or alcove to which one can retreat from the sun, to sit, with a lover, in the cool of the evening. The weight of the world is on our

shoulders; its vision is through our eyes; if we blink or look aside, or turn back to finger what Plato said or remember Napoleon and his conquests, we inflict on the world the injury of some obliquity. This is life; Mr. Prentice at four; Mr. Eyres at four-thirty. I like to hear the soft rush of the lift and the thud with which it stops on my landing and the heavy male tread of responsible feet down the corridors. So by dint of our united exertions we send ships to the remotest parts of the globe; replete with lavatories and gymnasiums. The weight of the world is on our shoulders. This is life. If I press on, I shall inherit a chair and a rug; a place in Surrey with glass houses, and some rare conifer, melon or flowering tree which other merchants will envy (94).

Hence, while self-possessed by this reductionist view, Louis manifests his absolute scorn of what he envisions as a distressing mass of beastly individuals aimlessly “div[ing] and plung[ing] like guillemots whose feathers are slippery with oil”. In particular, on the sight of the fluid nature of reality, as evidenced by the ebb and flow of London life, Louis is overwhelmed by the disgust caused on him by the unrestraintable stream of “disorder” and “multiplicity” – synonymous, for Louis, of vital “annihilation and despair” (51).

If Rhoda's embodiment of the commander's identity had served to reinforce her affirmation of a plural and boundless form of existence – inasmuch as it was linked to the presentation of a fragmentary, multi-folded being – in the case of Louis, this incarnation is, on the contrary, connected with the opposite. Accordingly, deployed as a soldier in his very childhood wearing “grey flannels with a belt fastened with a brass snake” (5) – Louis embodies the figure Woolf had derided in *Three Guineas* as synonymous of the destructive consequences of the absurd masculine boastfulness of bellicism:

What connection is there between the sartorial splendours of the educated man and the photograph of ruined houses and dead bodies? Obviously the connection between dress and war is not far to seek; your finest clothes are those that you wear as soldiers (1996: 129).

Interestingly, this figure of a soldier, which M. L. Gätterns envisions as “connected to the image of the uniformed fascist” in *Three Guineas* becomes as well redolent of the portrayal Woolf provides of these tyrants, similar to “dangerous”, “ugly” caterpillars (1996: 166). Hence, Louis's association with the snake intentionally reverberates of the similarly creeping creature which serves the narrative of *Three Guineas* to convey the seeds of despotic evil.

At the same time – considering the image of the military combatant was frequently associated during the I World War with the martyrdom of Christ – as Peach remarks (2000: 161) – particular significance is involved by the presence of the snake. In this regard, it is precisely in this attire that the masked carrier of lurking evil Louis “become[s] a figure” in the procession of “cadaverous and wounded figures” described by Neville. Indeed, like these “tremulous figure”,

Louis's mind rejoices “tremulous” and “agitated”, at the same time as he contemplates with reverence the concurrently “lurching” representative of ecclesiastical authority.

'Now we march, two by two,' said Louis, 'orderly, processional, into chapel. I like the dimness that falls as we enter the sacred building. I like the orderly progress. We file in; we seat ourselves. We put off our distinctions as we enter. I like it now, when, lurching slightly, but only from his momentum, Dr Crane mounts the pulpit and reads the lesson from a Bible spread on the back of the brass eagle. I rejoice; my heart expands in his bulk, in his authority. He lays the whirling dust clouds in my tremulous, my ignominiously agitated mind [...] Now all is laid by his authority, his crucifix [...]' (18-9).

Furthermore, in his strenuous effort for compartmentalizing the unbounded flow of life within the rigid cases of order and pre-definition, the dictatorial declaration of his redeeming mission: “Yes; I will reduce you to order [...] I will reduce you to order” (52). Certainly, his self-assumption of the task of transforming the ebb and flow of life into a monolithic easily apprehensible block, Louis reverberates some of the fascist theories arising during the thirties. Indeed, in 1931 – the year *The Waves* was published – the fascist leader of the New Party, Oswald Mosley, had undertaken a similar enterprise through his idea of creating a controlled monadic corporate state, based upon the reinforcement of British barriers under the direction of a central authority granted with virtually unlimited power. As a result, Mosley announced the attainment of a heroic end, which he termed as the ultimate creation of 'Greater Britain' (1932: 34).

Of course, if Woolf enables the entrance of this Mosley-figure into her narrative it is solely with the purpose of dismantling the actual feebleness and insignificance of tyrants. Hereby, self-proclaimed as a reincarnation of the highest political authorities throughout history, Louis embodies the figure of a dictator whose power is based on a pure display of masculine vanity:

Since the red and the gold, the brass and the feathers are discarded upon active service, it is plain that their expensive and not, one might suppose, hygienic splendour is invented partly in order to impress the beholder with the majesty of the military office, partly in order through their vanity to induce young men to become soldiers. Here, then, our influence and our difference might have some effect; we, who are forbidden to wear such clothes ourselves, can express the opinion that the wearer is not to us a pleasing or an impressive spectacle. He is on the contrary a ridiculous, a barbarous, a displeasing spectacle (1996: 129).

Similarly, self encumbered as a mighty Egyptian authority – mourned by the weeping women by the Nile and in whose honour a pyramid had been erected – Louis is irrevocably doomed to his derisive decrowning. Hereby, overwhelmed by the sense of belatedness and delusion Bakhtin had observed for the abject hero as Bakhtin notes, Louis admits to his failure at the same time as the image of “the pyramid [...] pressed on [his] ribs all the years” yields a deliberately unsolemnized version of the revered leader.

'My task, my burden, has always been greater than other people's. A pyramid has been set on my shoulders. I have tried to do a colossal labour. I have driven a violent, an unruly, a vicious team [...] As a boy I dreamt of the Nile, was reluctant to awake, yet brought down my fist on the grained oak door. It would have been happier to have been born without a destiny, like Susan, like Percival, whom I most admire [...] 'What has my destiny been, the sharp-pointed pyramid that has pressed on my ribs all these years? That I remember the Nile and the women carrying pitchers on their heads; that I feel myself woven in and out of the long summers and winters that have made the corn flow and have frozen the streams. I am not a single and passing being. My life is not a moment's bright spark like that on the surface of a diamond. I go beneath ground tortuously, as if a warder carried a lamp from cell to cell. My destiny has been that I remember and must weave together, must plait into one cable the many threads, the thin, the thick, the broken, the enduring of our long history, of our tumultuous and varied day. There is always more to be understood; a discord to be listened for; a falsity to be reprimanded. Broken and soot-stained are these roofs with their chimney cowls, their loose slates, their slinking cats and attic windows. I pick my way over broken glass, among blistered tiles, and see only vile and famished faces' (113-4).

Ironically, though believing himself “superior” to Percival (10), Louis turns out a similarly frustrated Messianic entrepreneur as his predecessor. Indeed, if an absurdly meaningless death awaited the former, a no less deflating realization lies in wait for the latter. Indeed, Louis' grandiose dreams bump into “the terrible affair” of a life Louis has struggled to lock off and which now shoots him back with the mockery of his failure.

I have tried to draw from the living flesh the stone lodged at the centre. I have known little natural happiness, thought I chose my mistress in order that, with her cockney accent, she might make me feel at my ease. But she only tumbled the floor with dirty under- linen, and the charwoman and the shop-boys called after me a dozen times a day, mocking my prim and supercilious gait (113).

Moreover, if Percival ends up unmasked as the ridiculous negative of a hero – comparable to one of the tinsel-crowned clownish monarchs mocked throughout Bernard's soliloquy, the tyrannous Louis – pretentiously exhibiting his masculine despotism by means of his processional display, as it has been suggested – ultimately turns out a grotesque fish at the end of the narrative: “(h)is life, though, was not happy. But look – his eye turn white as he lies in the palm of my hand” (138). Indeed, submitted to the same type of carnivalesque dissolution of his power as the off-floating dictators, Louis is to be disposed of by his being snarled onto the identity-blurring pool. Hence, only once he has undergone the de-dejection of the ego, epitomized by the image of the fish, which, as Leigh C. Harris observes, becomes redolent of Woolf's own sense of being “nobody”, an “undulating fish” with “no name, no calling, no background” (in Pawlowski, 2001: 78-79), proclaimed by Rhoda – his female double – does renewal become enabled.

In tune with the debunking of leadership and centralizing views, one of the most violent

underminings of this uniforming attempts for social control is exerted by Neville. Indeed, through his view of different types of processions, Neville perpetrates a determinedly parodical reproduction of the pageant as a synonym of the fascist manipulation of a herd-constructed society. Accordingly, analyzing the particular features of the crowd, Gustave Le Bon had pointed out the high degree of suggestibility of these mass formations, which he deploys as especially liable to submissive obedience to dictatorial commands.

When defining crowds [...] one of their general characteristics [is] an excessive suggestibility, and we have shown to what an extent suggestions are contagious in every human agglomeration [...] However, indifferent it may be supposed, a crowd, as a rule, is in a state of expectant attention, which renders suggestion easy [...] Dictatorialness and intolerance are common to all categories of crowds, but they are met within a varying degree of intensity [...] Authoritativeness and intolerance are sentiments of which crowds have a very clear notion, which they easily conceive and which they entertain as readily as they put them in practice when once they are imposed upon them. Crowds exhibit a docile respect for force, and are but slightly impressed by kindness, which for them is scarcely other than a form of weakness. Their sympathies have never been bestowed on easy-going masters, but on tyrants who vigorously oppressed them [...] The type of hero dear to crowds will always have the semblance of a Caesar. His insignia attracts them, his authority overawes them, and his sword instils them with fear (1896: 39-40, 53-55).

Likewise, Wysocki highlights the same aspect as Le Bon, thereby concluding on an “authoritarian, despotic” nature of public processions. In this sense, insofar as their structure follows a definite logics of arrangement, based on a politics of order and alignment, Wysocki envisions this formational principles of processions as masking the rhetorics of war (1982: 99). Chiming with this view, in opposition to Louis's passive admiration of the authority inlaid by Dr. Crane, Neville becomes the repulsed spectator of the grotesque spectacle constituted by the procession of the “cadaverous”, “trembling” figures of the religious parade Neville had seen in Rome. Moreover, repelled by the corrosive oppression effected by ecclesiastical authorities at the boys' school, Neville transposes the pathetic grotesqueness of these processions onto the formations led by the scholarly friars. In this sense, recognizing in these parades the germ of fascist dominance, Neville situates the monk at the very side of the tyrannical “brute[s]” coercing people's liberties. Thus, it is precisely the crucifix that – as a symbol of their corrupt doctrine – becomes for Neville a powerfully poisonous weapon at the service of mass manipulation.

'The brute menaces my liberty,' said Neville, 'when he prays. Unwarmed by imagination, his words fall cold on my head like paving-stones, while the gilt cross heaves on his waistcoat. The words of authority are corrupted by those who speak them (19).

Indeed, in *Three Guineas*, the procession serves as an instrument for derisive demeanour of the figure of the despotic male, the source of his power be of a religious, political, or scholarly

nature.

Now [...] we must fix our eyes upon the procession—the procession of the sons of educated men.

‘There they go, our brothers who have been educated at public schools and universities, mounting those steps, passing in and out of those doors, ascending those pulpits, preaching, teaching, administering justice, practising medicine, transacting business, making money. It is a solemn sight always—a procession, like a caravanserai crossing a desert. Great-grandfathers, grandfathers, fathers, uncles—they all went that way, wearing their gowns, wearing their wigs, some with ribbons across their breasts, others without. One was a bishop. Another a judge. One was an admiral. Another a general. One was a professor. Another a doctor. And some left the procession and were last heard of doing nothing in Tasmania; were seen, rather shabbily dressed, selling newspapers at Charing Cross. But most of them kept in step, walked according to rule, and by hook or by crook made enough to keep the family house, somewhere, roughly speaking, in the West End, supplied with beef and mutton for all, and with education for Arthur. It is a solemn sight, this procession (1996: 174-5).

Hereby, provided these converge in a sole agent of tyrannical oppression, a patently subversive mockery of the religious founder of the boys' school is effected through Neville's presentation of the statue erected in the former's honour. Hence, crowning his head with an apparently saintly aura, their incessant floundering around their white bodies, the doves surrounding the scholar's head simultaneously serve for his own decrowning.

Certainly, in view of Neville's ridiculous portrayal of the Doctor in his “pompous mummery and faked emotions”, an ambiguous reading is to be inferred from the crowning of the scholar. Hence, concerning the “whitening” effect of the birds on the statue, a powerful debasement of the fry's position is thus perpetrated.

I cannot endure the Doctor's pompous mummery and faked emotions [...] There, for the last time, I see the statue of our pious founder with the doves about his head. They will wheel for ever about his head, whitening it, while the organ moans in the chapel. (32-3).

Imbued with the transgressing spirit of carnivalesque acts, this image, in fact, reverberates of the hitherto mentioned episode in Rabelais *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, where a shower of urine rain serves to bring down any hierarchies or conventions. Furthermore, resorting to the insect metamorphosis which had been central in *Jacob's Room* or *The Years*, a final step towards an absolute defilement of authority is thereby implied, as Neville concomitantly envisions these ridiculous masts of both ecclesiastical and intelligent dominance as repulsive “maggots”. Additionally, at the same time as a leveling of these scholars with the disgusting sort of creeping creatures dictators turn out to be – as it has been discussed – this image unmasks the meaninglessness of their topsy-turvy activity, which amounts, as in the case of the maggots, to

aimlessly wandering in and out of a decayed reality: “It would be better to breed horses and live in one of those red villas than to run in and out of the skulls of Sophocles and Euripides like a maggot” (38).

Even more patently, this connection between the pernicious dominance of religious ministers and the figure of the tyrannical dictator is particularly brought to the fore through Neville's epiphanic underground trip. Hence, embarked on a Tube journey, Neville experiences an entrance into a momentary death that unveils for him some essential revelations. Significantly, by means of his symbolical descent in a voyage which literally brings him down to the very entrails of the earth, Neville undergoes a concurrently vexatious lowering which unveils upon him some crucial revelations. Accordingly, it is through this descent that the “waste and deformity” of a world aimlessly revolving around itself come to surface. Hence, in this system where we incessantly “spin round”, Neville warns as well against the perilous threat involved by masses. Indeed, an instrument of this perpetual involution of society as a result of the dictatorial control over it, Neville realizes the degradation of a society corrupted by “crowds eddying round and round disgorged and trampling”. Moreover, in her depiction of these formations, the author curiously resorts to rather grotesque images in order to portray the engulfing, as well as perniciously annihilating effect of processions.

It gathers its members under the primer of complicity. They are soldiers and fathers. The procession devours bodies [...] It absorbs, it possesses. At the end, this big agglutinating machine spits out deformed bodies⁷² (1982: 97 ó 27).

Moreover, it is precisely by the figure of the despotic leader that the most dangerous action is accomplished, insofar as they turn out the perpetrators of this “wrapping” system coercing individual liberties – “(h)ere we are centred. *Here we can be silent, or speak without raising our voices*⁷³” (99).

Hereby, through the juxtaposed presentation of military and religious authorities, Neville brings to the fore the powerfully menacing danger represented by the deforming action of both covertly undifferentiated types of masses manipulators:

I hate men who wear crucifixes on the left side of their waistcoats. I hate ceremonies and lamentations and the sad figure of Christ trembling beside another trembling and sad figure. Also the pomp and the indifference and the emphasis, always on the wrong place, of people holding forth under chandeliers in full evening dress, wearing stars and decorations (100).

In this debunking of the tyrannical leader, Neville implicitly confirms the connection

⁷² My translation

⁷³ Emphasis added

between Percival – the god-hero worshiped by the multitudes – and the deity presiding the gross procession the former contemplates in distress. Accordingly, Neville's description of “the sad figure of Christ trembling” turns out deliberately redolent of the formerly crowned Percival, whose quixotic reality is hereby confirmed by its assimilation to a referent significantly resounding of the Sad Countenance Knight. Furthermore, in his underground journey, Neville internalizes into the heart of a vacuousness governed by “the hollow wind that seemed to roar down there over desert boulders” which haunts an empty room “scooped out of the eternal night” (99). It is precisely this absolute nothingness that emerges as the real trope for the empty meaninglessness of absurdly grotesque leaders. In this regard, first enhanced as a mythological hero – “Alcibiades, Ajax, Hector, and Percival are also you” – the latter actually proves his absolute void identity, whereby Neville concludes “(b)ut you are not Ajax or Percival” (101). At the same time, this indefinite identity with which the figure of the leader manifests the transitoriness, as well as the replaceability of these alleged heroes whose existence, like Percival's, is finally reduced to the shadow of a faint memory (99).

In tune with the carnivalesque pattern of destruction and regeneration, Neville's lowering down to earth represents a crematory removal of a conventional, high-positioned self into a renovated being, no longer governed by rule measure. Indeed, an unconditionally venerator of exactitude and neat compartmentalizations – “there is an order in this world; there are distinctions” (10) – Neville had stood as even a more obsessive perfectionist than Louis in his attempt to reduce the world to a set of falsely controllable narrow dimensions: “One must slip paper- knives, even, exactly through the pages of novels, and tie up packets of letters neatly with green silk, and brush up the cinders with a hearth broom. Everything must be done to rebuke the horror of deformity” (100).

As he returns from his underground descent with “the silent army of the dead”, a renewed Neville emerges. Certainly, deprived of his old sense of glory as the summit of perfection and regularity – which he had tried to implant by means of his intellectual activity – Neville is able to affirm the necessity of focusing life through “myriad eyes” as the only chance to apprehend the truth of multiple existence wherein knife-cut pages and exact words have been replaced by the fluid, earth-bound sublimity of the “mud-stained” page.

Certainly, one cannot read this poem without effort. The page is often corrupt and mud- stained, and torn and stuck together with faded leaves, with scraps of verbena or geranium. To read this poem one must have myriad eyes, [...] (112).

Indeed, as a fundamental part of the advent of a renewed reality, Woolf also conceived the

elimination of conventions and precepts in favour of what male-founded literary she had termed as her “philosophy of anonymity” (*Diary IV*. 186, 29th October 1933).

In her decision to adopt a style flagrantly opposed to male constraints and egocentrism, Woolf had advocated for decentralization, as a means of enabling the free flow of the unconscious self, while, at the same time, her comply with those rules aims to avoid the deceptive illusion of the male concept of greatness.

Hereby, in his return from his epiphanic journey, Neville accurately impersonates Woolf's proclamation of a renewed and unrestrained fiction that should reflect the limitless multifariousness of existence. Indeed, if in 1919 Woolf had resorted to the flowing, unconstrained possibilities of carnival imagery in order to define the streaming nature of the renovated female writing, it is now the newly born Neville that celebrates the grounded, imprecise quality of this emerging style. As Woolf herself had expressed this limitless nature of fiction.

Moreover, like Neville, Woolf had envisaged this fiction as endowed with a living dimension, whose continuance and refertilization depended, as carnival proclaims, on a constant process of harassment and subsequent renewal:

And if we can imagine the art of fiction come alive and standing in our midst, she would undoubtedly bid us break her and bully her, [...] for so her youth is renewed and her sovereignty assured (1993: 12).

Similarly, Neville vindicates for a literature which, free from “jealousies” and “antipathies”, should not be obstaculized by rules of any nature, thereby allowing for the multiple-sighted “monster” to come to surface:

To read this poem one must have myriad eyes, like one of those lamps that turn on slabs of racing water at midnight in the Atlantic, when perhaps only a spray of seaweed pricks the surface, or suddenly the waves gape and up shoulders a monster. One must put aside antipathies and jealousies and not interrupt. One must have patience and infinite care and let the light sound, whether of spiders' delicate feet on a leaf or the chuckle of water in some irrelevant drain-pipe, unfold too. Nothing is to be rejected in fear or horror. The poet who has written this page (what I read with people talking) has withdrawn. There are no commas or semi-colons. The lines do not run in convenient lengths. Much is sheer nonsense. One must be sceptical, but throw caution to the winds and when the door opens accept absolutely. Also sometimes weep; also cut away ruthlessly with a slice of the blade soot, bark, hard accretions of all sorts. And so (while they talk) let down one's net deeper and deeper and gently draw in and bring to the surface what he said and she said and make poetry (112).

Chiming with this disposal of traditional conventions, Neville witnesses a Dantesque vision of Hell, a significant scene of bare life, where the sordidity of “the damned”, syphilis-plagued

“noseless men”⁷⁴ turns out the genuine poetry. Unlike the Shakespearean plays from whence Neville has retrieved Cleopatra sitting in “a burnished throne” (*Anthony and Cleopatra*, 2-2, 196-7) this theatre of life possesses the same carnivalesque quality as the pageant in *Between the Acts*. Hereby, enacted by real everyday people, no differentiation among them, who turn out the improvised actors in Neville's spontaneous drama, is applied. Furthermore, it is through this sudden vision of flames that the renewed Neville symbolically attends the destruction by fire of the fool, at the same time as he disclaims the belief in hierarchical structures on which privileges of male dominance rest. Indeed, as Woolf would later do in *Three Guineas*, Neville dispossess of their authority the literally self-encumbered males who “mount pulpits”:

We are not judges. We are not called upon to torture our fellows with thumb-screws and irons; we are not called upon to mount pulpits and lecture them on pale Sunday afternoons. It is better to look at a rose, or to read Shakespeare as I read him here in Shaftesbury Avenue. Here's the fool, here's the villain, here in a car comes Cleopatra, burning on her barge. Here are figures of the damned too, noseless men by the police-court wall, standing with their feet in fire, howling. This is poetry if we do not write it. They act their parts infallibly, [...] (110-111).

In this sense, Neville's function throughout the narrative relates – to a certain extent – to some of the central intentions underlying the inclusion of Bernard. Hence, while Bernard's principal role is that of providing a final summing up – which involves, as well, a reflection of Percival's fall – it is Neville that announces the death of his beloved hero, which he metaphorically attends in his momentary descent to Hell. Indeed, in his particular reference to the burning out of the Shakespearean Fool, Neville anticipates Bernard's final moment of epiphany, when the latter comes to the realization that he is able to understand “what Shakespeare knew” (128). Certainly, this instant of awareness encapsulates most of the essential meaning responding to the purpose of the narrator's characterization of Bernard. Thus, initially a convinced seeker of linearity and order – even if not so ferrous as Louis – Bernard still shares with Neville a firm believe in the possibility of reducing the chaotic nature of life to a neat structure by means of the definitory, boundarizing quality of language:

I must make phrases and phrases and so interpose something hard between myself and the stare of housemaids, the stare of clocks, staring faces, indifferent faces, or I shall cry (16).

As Bernard initially understands it, life is liable of exact categorization within the compartments determined by the rigid concreteness of his notebook. Through this allegedly life-encompassing book whereby even people, Neville complains, turn out into “phrases in Bernard's story” (37) – Bernard is able to develop his own illusion of stability and definiteness, in opposition

⁷⁴ For further comment on noselessness, see chapter on *The Years*.

to the distressing thought of a fluid existence:

' [...] I require the concrete in everything. It is so only that I lay hands upon the world. A good phrase, however, seems to me to have an independent existence. [...] Here is the jolly old boy who collects tickets. I had one—I had one certainly. But it does not matter. Either I shall find it, or I shall not find it. I examine my note-case. I look in all my pockets. These are the things that for ever interrupt the process upon which I am eternally engaged of finding some perfect phrase that fits this very moment exactly' (37).

Nonetheless, as he evolves through experience, Bernard realizes the deceptiveness of his attempt, on the grounds of the impossibility of restraining the incessant flow of life by means of the narrowing demands of language. Hereby, as he himself notices on attempting to provide a precise account of this polylogicality of existence: “Life is not susceptible perhaps to the treatment we give it when we try to tell it” (151). In view of this, at the end of his life, Bernard is able to conclude on the fallacious basis of the strict observance of order and precision – actually, a preceptive principle for both Louis and Neville during most of their life. Accordingly, tallying in with Neville's defilement of patriarchy-rooted linear narrative, Bernard clamours his debasing disclaimer of this illusory sense of exact limits and absolute definition.

Furthermore, once liberated from those patriarchal rules, Bernard vindicates for the resort to the free fluidity of a form of ur-language, as the type of interrupted, streaming form of pre-conceptual code found in child's language or oneiric episodes. Significantly, this new mode, which chimes in with Kristeva's notion of the semiotic phase, emerges through Bernard's description as particularly linked to female writing.

But it is a mistake, this extreme precision, this orderly and military progress; a convenience, a lie. There is always deep below it, even when we arrive punctually at the appointed time with our white waistcoats and polite formalities, a rushing stream of broken dreams, nursery rhymes, street cries, half-finished sentences and sights—elm trees, willow trees, gardeners sweeping, women writing—that rise and sink even as we hand a lady down to dinner (144).

Throughout Bernard's final recapitulation, a definitive confirmation of Percival's role as a patent Fool emerges. Accordingly, in tune with the debasing testimony Louis provides of the futility of authority, associated with the hollow truth of hegemonic power, Bernard offers the ultimate step in the decrowning of Percival as the most explicit instance of this identity as a mock monarch. Hence, while he mentions the name of the other five and himself, a veiled reference to Percival as a King of Fools is entailed through the depiction of King William as “an unreal monarch and his crown mere tinsel” (157). Indeed, chiming in with the fictionalization of his surroundings, Bernard's narration of Percival's story provides a clear testimony of the progressive debasement of the hero. Certainly, like Rhoda – whose tribute to the dead Percival is as non-dignifying as a bunch of

withered violets – Bernard represents a similar decentralizing attempt by his refusal to sing in praise for the leader.

Oh yes, I can assure you, men in felt hats and women carrying baskets [...] You have lost a leader whom you would have followed; [...] “But this is better than one had dared to hope.” I say, addressing what is abstract, facing me eyeless at the end of the avenue, in the sky, “Is this the utmost you can do?” Then we have triumphed. You have done your utmost, I say, addressing that blank and brutal face (for he was twenty-five and should have lived to be eighty) without avail. I am not going to lie down and weep away a life of care. (An entry to be made in my pocket-book; contempt for those who inflict meaningless death.) Further, this is important; that I should be able to place him in trifling and ridiculous situations, so that he may not feel himself absurd, perched on a great horse. I must be able to say, “Percival, a ridiculous name.” At the same time let me tell you, men and women, hurrying to the tube station, you would have had to respect him. You would have had to form up and follow behind him. How strange to oar one's way through crowds seeing life through hollow eyes, burning eyes (85-6).

In tune with the carnivalistic ambivalence of both rejoicing and lamenting death, even though afflicted by the loss of his old friend, Bernard surreptitiously celebrates as well the annihilation of a would-be tyrant – as marked by his revealingly “brutal face”. Accordingly, though first announced as “something that would have been very valuable to people”, Percival is later unmasked as only so on the grounds of his standing as the self-appointed representative of a social environment accustomed to such a hegemonic form of political organization.

Certainly, as Bernard implicitly signals, Percival's death released its possible subjects from his dictatorial influence – “you would have had to respect him. You would have had to form up and follow behind him”. Likewise, a similar debunking of different types of male leaders is channeled through Bernard's narrative, whereby these patriarchal figures of authority are naked in their patent nonsensicality. Thus, as Bernard remarks, once deprived from the artificial auras of the “magnificent equanimity” and of their manners, dictators become exposed in their blunt flimsiness. Nevertheless, it is precisely this fallacy of a rigid encasement of life within the precincts of dictatorial dominance that brings about the inexorable fall of centralizing power. Simultaneously, in consonance with the defilement of tyrannical manipulation, Bernard announces the inevitable advent of unexpected forces pushing forth the downfall of oppressive despots.

Similarly, in a *Diary* entry during her holiday in Rome – when Hitler's campaigns were at their height – Woolf indignantly observes the display of “unmitigated masculinity” she had despised in *A Room of One's Own* (96), at the same time as she anticipates a new form of fight against tyranny from a more active and determined “womans angle”:

(W)hy do I always fight sly of my contemporaries? Why is basically the

womans angle? [...] Mussolini, Hitler, MacDonald. All these people incessantly arriving at Croydon, arriving at Berlin, Moscow, Rome [...] – while Stephen [Spender] and I think how to improve the world” (*Diary IV*, 303, 20th April 1935).

Chiming with the demeaning portrayal of Percival, Bernard thus perpetrates a similar downbringing of patriarchal representatives of power. Significantly, conforming to the pattern of the grotesque rendering of the diminished hero as a clear exponent of these male-based structures thriving for both imperial dominance and socio-political control, Percival is further reduced to a phallic embodiment of patriarchy, whereby his fall is brought to a derisive concurrency with the tumbling of pillars. Simultaneously, the illusion of enclosing solidity and attempted monolithicalization of society on the part of masculinist powers is exhibited in its absolute collapse, in the midst of a carnivalesque panorama of falling leaders and “floating” Doctors.

What is startling, what is unexpected, what we cannot account for, what turns symmetry to nonsense—that comes suddenly to my mind, thinking of him. The little apparatus of observation is unhinged. Pillars go down; the Doctor floats off; some sudden exaltation possesses me. He was thrown, riding in a race, [...] (138).

Paradoxically, this order has remained even at the expense of the ascent to power of such hollow leaders as the blank-faced Percival. As Bernard remarks, it is precisely his thirst for dominance and outstandingness that in fact highlights the patent absurdity and foolery of the mock hero. In this sense, despite his absolute shallowness, Percival is portrayed as ambitiously “oar[ing his] way through crowds seeing life through hollow, burning eyes” (86). Moreover, thus executed Percival's decrowning, a final blow to his megalomaniac illusions as a leader, is debunked by Bernard's deflating question – “(i)s this the utmost you can do?”. Indeed, by means of these pretensions for leadership and recognition, Percival echoes Woolf's very image of Hitler's ranting public appearances. Like Percival, who is depicted throughout the narrative as the accurate embodiment of ideal male beauty, according to classical canons, Hitler incarnated for Woolf the loathsome prototype of the Victorian tyrannical patriarch. Interestingly, in *Three Guineas* Woolf describes this icon of the dictator, whose eyes significantly share with Percival's a similar quality.

Thus, in her account of one of these growling speeches by Hitler, Woolf is horrified for this public support of the tyrannical leader – a feature Percival had demonstrated by means of his violent manners and his rudeness of speech at solving the “Oriental problem”. As she would some years later note in her *Diary*, after her attendance to one of Hitler's haranguing speeches, Virginia Woolf felt particular contempt for the acceptance and even hypnotic form of fascination with the doctrines administered by fascist leaders in their instigation of popular masses towards uncritical combat.

Affected by the same repulsion against onesidedness and despotic control, Bernard indeed

carries out a global debunking of the symbols of authority. Thence, during his visit to the National Gallery, Bernard mocks the meaninglessness of the “blue”, “cold madonnas” which, devoid of any real referent in an allegedly Supreme Being, turn into mere props absurdly standing on the phallic pillars of a patriarchal society, reminiscent – for Bernard – of Percival's shallow beauty.

Here are pictures. Here are cold madonnas among their pillars. [...] Here are [...] saints and blue madonnas. Mercifully these pictures make no reference; they do not nudge; they do not point. Thus they expand my consciousness of him and bring him back to me differently. I remember his beauty. “Look, where he comes,” I said (85-6).

Thus debunked the hero, Bernard blatantly affirms himself as his dignified “opposite”. Hence, while apparently highlighting Percival's leadership in contrast with his “own infirmity”, Bernard covertly brings to the fore Percival's inability to realize his ridiculously vain pretensions of grandiosity, which combines with the latter's looming naivety and absolute “indifference” about the world:

Being naturally truthful, he did not see the point of these exaggerations, and was borne on by a natural sense of the fitting, was indeed a great master of the art of living so that he seems to have lived long, and to have spread calm round him, indifference one might almost say, certainly to his own advancement, save that he had also great compassion. A child playing (87).

In view of this, B. A. Schlack has defined Bernard as “the perfect foil” of Percival. Hereby, as she remarks, while Percival is dumb all throughout the story, it is Bernard that undertakes the narrative enterprise in the novel. Certainly, an *a priori* form of complementary opposition is allowed for them, on the grounds of which Bernard raises as Percival's successor. In this sense, a significant juxtaposition of the extreme poles of life and death – suggestive of the appointment of the young carnival king on the harassment and death of the worn-out old monarch – is enabled through Bernard, whose child raises as the evident announcement of renewal – (m)y son is born; Percival is dead” (85). Moreover, a reduplication of a previous scene described by Neville – whereby he contrasts Percival's fall with the parallel continuation of a boy's life, the overlapping of life and death acquires further complexity. Accordingly, at the same time as he observes this intersected coincidence of ontological extremes – the boy's “leap[ing up] on the bus”, Percival's fall (84) – Neville significantly points to the Bakhtinian carnivalesque premise of the bicephalous nature, as indissolubly linked to its opposite pole.

Indeed, if in 1929 Bakhtin had concluded that “a decrowning glimmers...” (1984a: 124), Neville concurrently remarks on a similar duality, insofar as he states: “Now I say there is a grinning, there is a subterfuge. There is something sneering behind our backs. That boy almost lost his footing as he leapt on the bus. Percival fell;” (84).

Bearing this in mind, Bernard's assumption of his position as a counterpart of the patent Fool figure is thereby unveiled in its deceiving illusoriness. Hence, in consonance with this carnivalesque paradigm of subversion against hegemonic attempts for self-encumberment only through the corresponding defilement of Bernard's outstandingness will renewal be enabled. Thereby, formerly a wholehearted champion of linear narrative and close-bound stories, Bernard ultimately admits to the nonsensicality of his restricting attempt on his realization of the unaccountable multiplicity of a polylogical reality. Significantly, in his quest for a new type of unconstrained expression, which comprehends – as it has been pointed out – the adoption of the type of unconstrained expression inherent to children's pre-formational language, Bakhtin points to the above mentioned ambivalence, on the grounds of which, he has “beg(u)n to seek some design more in accordance with *those moments of humiliation and triumph that come now and then*⁷⁵ undeniable” (135). In this incessant flow of life, any attempts for close definition become foiled as pure illusions bereft of any substantiality. As a result, once these enclosing drives for figuring life as a “solid”, globe-shaped reality merely fade away, the inconclusive fragmentariness of existence stands out, as allegorized by the composite nature of its discordant language:

One leaps out of bed, throws up the window; with what a whirr the birds rise!
You know that sudden rush of wings, that exclamation, carol, and confusion;
the riot and babble of voices; and all the drops are sparkling, trembling, as if
the garden were a splintered mosaic, vanishing, twinkling; not yet formed into
one whole; and a bird sings close to the window. I heard those songs (140).

Hence, once his decrowning has become patent through the collapse of patriarchal linearity and bordering categorization, Bernard is significantly revealed as the target of Rhoda's mockery. Indeed, if she had proclaimed the exhaustion of subject positions – which Rhoda derisively takes to utmost exaggeration – Bernard is now unmasked as the attempted successor to leadership. Hence, boastfully dreaming of his role as “the continuer” and “inheritor” of the world's rule, Bernard is forced to humbly recognize his final de-dejection – to use Kristeva's terms:

I, I, I, tired as *I* am, spent as *I*⁷⁶ am, and almost worn out with all this rubbing
of my nose along the surfaces of things, even *I*, an elderly man who is getting
rather heavy and dislikes exertion, must take myself off and catch some last
train (167).

Adding to the motif of the fall, Percival's downbringing of the patriarchy-based tentatives for dominance by both Percival and his self-appointed heir are replicated by the symbolical dropping of the book “stuffed with phrases” Bernard had been treasuring. Indeed, along with the fall of the would-be heroes, a parallel lowering down of male language as a major instrument of patriarchal categorization is powerfully effected through this dropping and literal sweeping up with the litter of

⁷⁵ Emphasis added

⁷⁶ Emphasis added

Bernard's phrase book (166). Furthermore, concurrently with his book, it is Bernard himself that is swe[pt] over by the storm, at the same time as he comes across his final revelation of the impossibility of restraining life within the deceitful frames of fixity or neat structures:

I need a howl; a cry. When the storm crosses the marsh and sweeps over me where I lie in the ditch unregarded I need no words. Nothing neat. Nothing that comes down with all its feet on the floor. None of those resonances and lovely echoes that break and chime from nerve to nerve in our breasts, making wild music, false phrases. I have done with phrases (166).

Certainly, as Woolf herself claims in her announcement of a forthcoming towerless, classless generation as a result of the homogenization of both societal structures and literary creation – though exclusively on the indispensable condition of definitely transgressing conventional constraints:

Consequently, only through Bernard's dethroning as the succeeding hero does regeneration become plausible. Hence, at the same time as he affirms the debunking of those leaders emerged throughout the narrative, Bernard is likewise compelled to his own downbringing, whereby he has to admit to his own decay.

I, who had been thinking myself so vast, a temple, a church, a whole universe, unconfined and capable of being everywhere on the verge of things and here too, am now nothing but what you see—an elderly man, rather heavy, grey above the ears, who (I see myself in the glass) leans one elbow on the table, and holds in his left hand a glass of old brandy. That is the blow you have dealt me. I have walked bang into the pillar-box. I reel from side to side. I put my hands to my head. My hat is off—I have dropped my stick. I *have made* an awful ass of myself and am *justly laughed at by any passer-by*⁷⁷ (164-5).

If his portrayal of Percival reflects the grotesque picture of a patently quixotic hero, no higher position is though allowed for Bernard. Indeed, particularly in view of Bernard's final soliloquy, A. Fox has found in the latter certain reminiscences of King Lear – a character Bakhtin mentions as a central instance of literary Carnival Kings. Interestingly, Fox observes a considerable degree of parallel between both characters, who, as she remarks, share a similar sense of irremediable self-eclosion and defeat on approaching death (135-6). Moreover, formerly self-appointed as Percival's grandiose inheritor, Bernard ultimately comes to identify himself as in fact the accurate embodiment of Don Quixote's squire. Certainly, like Cervantes' mocked character, Bernard announces his own impulse “to be thrown up and down on the roar of other people's voices [...]; to be tossed up and down on the roar of almost senseless merriment, sentiment, triumph, desire” (157).

Thereby asserting his own grotesque reality, Bernard additionally possesses – as it is fitting with the carnival paradigm – the multiple identity that accounts for the absolute dissolution of

⁷⁷ Emphasis added

limiting boundaries. Hence, as he celebrates the openness of his being – continually “made and remade” (74) – Bernard blatantly affirms this “eternal flux” of existence through the polymorphical indeterminacy of his own identity: “(f)or I changed and changed; was Hamlet, was Shelley, was the hero, whose name I now forget, of a novel by Dostoevsky; was for a whole term, incredibly, Napoleon; [...] was Byron” (141).

Moreover, by virtue of this identification with Dostoevski's hero – a fact Woolf herself had associated with the “strange contradictions and anomalies which make a man at once divine and bestial” (1993: 86) – Bernard admits to the unlimited multiplicity of his being, whereby the mask of pretended civilization collapses as the enclosing monadism prevailing in Victorian ideology is brought to explode. Accordingly, in opposition to Louis, permanently constrained by the imminent emergence of the stamping beast threatening to burst out to surface, Bernard rejoices in its final raise. Furthermore, insofar as he opts for the imprecise indefiniteness of the monster, Bernard recognizes his own condition of abjection as an extra-limitation of the constraining boundaries of pre-figured selfhood.

Bearing this in mind, through Bernard's epiphanic soliloquy, a form of second birth – a motif particularly relevant in *Between the Acts* – is experienced by the final speaker, who had certainly acknowledged this “second severance from the mother's body” (69). Indeed, once the fall of Percival – representative of the standard ideals of dominance and hegemonic masculinity prevailing in patriarchal society – has been accomplished, a concurrent dissolution of subjectal tyranny occurs through the evaporation of Bernard's *I* into a misty unsubstantiality.

I formed; a drop fell; *I* fell—that is, from some completed experience *I* had emerged.

I rose and walked away—*I, I, I*; not Byron, Shelley, Dostoevsky, but *I*, Bernard. [...]. *I* went, (143).

Simultaneously, it is precisely in accordance with that fall that Kristeva envisions the coming into existence and subsequent positioning of the abject. Hence, inasmuch as it “behold(s) the breaking down of a world that had erased its borders” (1982: 26), the fall constitutes a blunt reenactment of the very process of expulsion – or abjection – of the subjectal self. As Kristeva summarizes it, through the fall, “(i)t is no longer I who expel. “I” is expelled” (1982: 27). Symptomatic of that revulsion of the *I* is Bernard's choice of a type of guttural voice which constitutes the ur-language Kristeva associates with the abject's dismissal of the closed as well as rigidly definitory – or symbolic – laws of the father. As she describes this process: “(e)ven before things for [the abject] *are*⁷⁸ – hence before they are signifiable – he drives them out. [...] What he

⁷⁸ Emphasis as in the original

has [...] is an emptiness, or rather a maternal hatred without a word for the words of the father” (1982: *ibid*).

Hence, continuing Neville's blunt downbringing of a religion as a source of dictatorial control, Bernard retrospectively partakes in the same type of mockery. Hereby, while Neville had symbolically become a grotesque figure in the procession as a form of irreverent reproduction, Bernard now turns into one of the mocking birds disrespectfully fluttering around “some curious gargoyle” – reminiscent of a similar image concerning the would-be tyrannical Percival. At the same time, the not accidentally chosen “battered nose” or “absurd tombstone” point to a patent debunking of institutionalized leaders, not unlinked from the suggestion of sexual depravation cryptically implied by the particular focus on noselessness.

Moreover, this derisive treatment occurs, in fact, in the midst of an absurdly waste religion that turns out broadly meaningless beyond the shallow paraphernalia it relies on. Thus, through Bernard's portrayal of the light and sound effects at church – reverberant of Miss Kilman's experience in *Mrs. Dalloway* – provides the atmosphere wherein his blasphemous “scoff[ing] at death and resurrection” stands as a direct debunking of normative standards for the manipulation of the individual.

This panorama of blunt scorn and derision of authority, essentially perpetrated through a profound disclaimer of Christian principles constitutes the scenario wherein an actual form of *parodia sacra* whereby the complete demolition of these dictatorial powers is to be accomplished. Hereby, in tune with the desacralization of institutional control, a determinedly blasphemous celebration emerges as presided over by the unsaintly humorous dove – an irreverent parodical version of the conventional representation of the Holy Ghost, at the same time as its link with the lineage of mocking birds in Woolf's narrative lets an allowance for certain obscene associations. Moreover, in this unsolemnized ritual, a new form of the procession is suggested, yet as alien to the transcendental atmosphere as a file of casual sightseers, carrying for sacred books their own Baedekers⁷⁹.

Indeed, having come upon the revelation of an “imperfect” reality, a world “that [...] fades, [...] undergoes a gradual transformation” (160), Bernard straightaway rejects the covetousness of absolutizing views. Thus, in its artificial pretence of providential wholeness and perfection, the sonorous voice of the religious chant is unmasked as purely a grotesque “elephantine triumph”. Certainly, if *The Waves* was above signalled as a novel just superficially praising the benefits of collective agglutination, a final confirmation is channelled through Bernard's redemption act, on the

⁷⁹ Guidebook series, published by Karl B.

grounds of his experiencing a similar fragmentation as the sacrificial Rhoda.

A rotund affirmation of the annihilation of the subject Bernard performs his own de-selving process – “how describe the world seen without a self?” (162) – at the same time as he executes the expiatory severing of his being in the midst of an implicitly sacramental dinner, “ 'Now the meal is finished; we are surrounded by peelings and breadcrumbs [...]' ” (162). Of course, in consonance with the carnival parameters wherein this ritualistic act evolves, no aura of solemnity is permitted. Accordingly, an atmosphere of “(d)isorder, sordidity and corruption” reigns over the sacrificial meal, while – precedent to forthcoming renewal – acquires thereby a cannibalistic overtone.

'Lord, how unutterably disgusting life is! [...] Here we are among the breadcrumbs and the stained napkins again. That knife is already congealing with grease. Disorder, sordidity and corruption surround us. We have been taking into our mouths the bodies of dead birds. It is with these greasy crumbs, slobbered over napkins, and little corpses that we have to build. [...]' (165).

Furthermore, once his slavery to a hegemonic self, Bernard is enabled to momentarily possess the sacrificial Rhoda. Thereby, accomplished the disintegration of his self, Bernard is able to re-enact Rhoda's sacrificial act through a form of momentary possession whereby the soliloquist envisions himself as a dissolving bunch of flowers.

Chiming with that melting away of hegemonic positions conveyed by Bernard's dismemberment, his offer is as well a blatant assertion of relativity and uncertainty – two of the chief principles around which the entire carnivalistic universe evolves – as the epistemological bases to apprehend a reality characterized by the open quality of “an unfinished phrase” (160):

I have tried to break off this bunch and hand it you; but whether there is substance or truth in it I do not know. Nor do I know exactly where we are. What city does that stretch of sky look down upon? Is it Paris, is it London where we sit, or some southern city of pink-washed houses lying under cypresses, under high mountains, where eagles soar? I do not at this moment feel certain.

'I begin now to forget; I begin to doubt the fixity of tables, the reality of here and now, to tap my knuckles smartly upon the edges of apparently solid objects and say, “Are you hard?” [...] And now I ask, “Who am I?” (162).

In this regard, once questioned and debunked the outstandingness of the I-self, a new form of existence – unbound from the static definition of selfhood – comes to surface with the emergence of Bernard's beast. Indeed, a looming threat “stamping” inside – as Louis envisions it – the idiotic monster comes hand to hand with the carnivalesque notion of the uncanny as synonymous of a selfhood unconstrained by normative precepts.

There is the old brute, too, the savage, the hairy man who dabbles his fingers in ropes of entrails; and gobbles and belches; whose speech is guttural, visceral—well, he is here. He squats in me. To-night he has been feasted on quails, salad, and sweetbread. He now holds a glass of fine old brandy in his paw. He bristles, purrs and shoots warm thrills all down my spine as I sip. It is true, he washes his hands before dinner, but they are still hairy. He buttons on trousers and waistcoats, but they contain the same organs. He jibs if I keep him waiting for dinner. He mops and mows perpetually, pointing with his half-idiot gestures of greed and covetousness at what he desires (163).

Significantly, it is precisely through the grotesque indefinable quality of the monster – which Louis so vehemently fears – that Bernard may conclude his summing up with the triumphant dance announcing the promise of renewal. “Oh, he has tossed his torch high! He has led me wild dances!” (163).

Furthermore, not randomly, the performer of this ritual dance – clearly redolent of the type of ancient celebration targeted to the incoming of fertility observed by Harrison – is an utterly unidentifiable beast. External to any type of categorization, this only half-human king incarnates – as D. Summers notes on tracing the etymological origins of the word – a form of existence which overflows itself, “so that it is a sigh of things to come” (in F. Connelly, 2003: 29). Certainly, it is precisely after the emergence of the unboundarized self – alien to whatever sort of conventional barriers and hierarchy – that Bernard can assert his Shelleyan conclusion “(t)he World's great age begins anew”. Hereby, as the “spent” and debased old self approaches his inexorable death, a general realization of “eternal renewal” definitely confirms the cyclical pattern of destruction/regeneration of a world, in Neville's terms, “infinitely abject”.

‘Again I see before me the usual street. The canopy of civilization is burnt out. The sky is dark as polished whalebone. But there is a kindling in the sky whether of lamplight or of dawn. There is a stir of some sort—sparrows on plane trees somewhere chirping. There is a sense of the break of day [...] What is dawn in the city to an elderly man standing in the street looking up rather dizzily at the sky? Dawn is some sort of whitening of the sky; some sort of renewal. Another day; another Friday; another twentieth of March, January, or September. Another general awakening. The stars draw back and are extinguished. The bars deepen themselves between the waves. The film of mist thickens on the fields. A redness gathers on the roses, even on the pale rose that hangs by the bedroom window. A bird chirps. Cottagers light their early candles. Yes, this is the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again⁸⁰ (167).

Probably one of the most drastically iconoclast novels by Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* situates the societal panorama within the ideological paradigm of carnival as an alarum against institutionalized oppression. Hereby, conforming to the principle of debunking and renewal inherent to carnival philosophy, a twofold process is implied throughout the narrative. Accordingly, while a

⁸⁰ Note the syntactic emphasis on cyclicity conferred by the reiterated presence of the adverb “again”, both at the beginning and closure of the paragraph.

profound concern with the demolition of tyrannical-patriarchal powers of dominance and control pervades the entire narration, a concomitant promise and final accomplishment of the corresponding renewal is eventually proclaimed. On the other hand, opposing some of the traditional views of *The Waves* as a wholehearted apology of communal benefits, a different analysis comes to surface, insofar as Woolf's wrest against dictatorial forces embraces an alarm concerning herd-like gatherings.

8. 'We Are All Deformed': Dismemberment, Hybridization and
Deformity in *The Years*

Gross, obese, shapeless, they looked like [...] a parody, a travesty, an excrescence that had overgrown the form within, the fire within (*The Years*, 278).

Even though the final version of *The Years* left the blunt didacticism of the manuscript for the later *Three Guineas*, a powerful attack against the present corruption and banality of post-Victorian patriarchal society is still vigorously latent beneath the subsidiary passing of the years in the Pargiters' story. Indeed, a radical debasement of the present status confers the pre-*bellum* scenario which constitutes the context of the novel-writing – as well as the setting of the “Present Day” chapter – the upside-down quality typical of a carnivalesque world, where the norms and traditions, along with the conventionally accepted order, come to be subverted by means of a thorough inversion of its constitutive terms.

In particular, the narrator was concerned with destroying the Fascist apparatus of tyrannical impositions as one of the most powerfully harmful weapons against the creation of a free egalitarian society. In this sense, Fascist leaders strived for implementing a strict, artificially rigid homogeneity upon society, so as to transform this into a lifeless though easily manipulated monolithic block. Offering thereby a certain form of mass identity, Fascist politics, in fact, created a force in the service of war through the production of an indissoluble composite of individuals who become thus deprived of an autonomous sense of will. Profoundly aware of this reality of a world pervaded by the growing rise of fascism, simultaneous to a lurking conflict threatening to burst out, Woolf strived to present a patently subversive panorama in *The Years*. Indeed, this view opposes traditional readings of the novel tending to analyse *The Years* as a de-polemicized narrative, utterly released from any controversial load to offer a basically plain account of the Pargiters' story. According to this interpretation, Jeri Johnson, in the Introduction to her 1998 edition of the novel, considers that: “(b)etween the manuscript and *The Years*, didacticism and polemicism have been jettisoned entirely. They find their place instead in *Three Guineas*” (1998: xix).

After the publication of *The Years*, a sector of the critic, contemporary to Woolf, dismissed the novel as an inconsistent work, a product of the sentimental-ridden mind. Hence, W. H. Mellers even questions the narrator intellectual capacity, which he considers as “oddly disproportionate to, and immature compared with her sensitiveness”, arguing that “if she ventures outside the narrow range imposed on her by her sensuousness, she becomes a child” (MacLaurin, 1975: 395). The same sign characterized Edwin Muir's review, for whom *The Years* amounted to the mere accumulation of facts throughout the passage of time, at the same time as a deep psychological construction of its characters, which Muir affirms – “do not become real, they only become old”,

(MacLaurin, 1975: 387) while they drift along a pattern which “strikes one as cold and artificial, and mainly external”. Indeed, the latter seemed to provoke a deeper impact on Virginia, who regrets in her *Diary* how Muir, along with Scott James, come to corroborate the opinion of her friend E. M. Forster, which subsumed her into a profound depression: “I was so damnably depressed and smacked on the cheek by Edwin Muir in the *Listener* [...]: Edwin Muir says *The Years* is dead and disappointing [...] – so I’m found out and that odious rice pudding of a book is what I thought it – a dank failure. No life in it” (1953: 280). Even in the seventies, a similar trend still endured. Hence, A. Fleishman accused the narrator of having “made little attempt to move beyond the form of the family chronicle novel” in a purpose for presenting a rather linear and simplified process of personal formation (1972: 245).

It becomes paradoxical that these critiques are met by an extraordinarily complex novel as is *The Years*. Certainly, intended to entail a harsher attack against the decay of a fractured world of *entre-guerre*, as ruled over by the obsolete foundations of a patriarchal system, *The Pargiters*. – the original title of the manuscript version – constituted a patently more controversial and didactic variety of narration, situated between the novel form and the essay. Indeed, profoundly concerned with surpassing the limitations imposed upon the society of her time, and especially upon women in a post-Victorian scenario, Woolf was of course determined to go beyond the simple narrative of a family saga. Much in tune with this, she presents in *The Years* a world of two-folded identities, through which the Pargiters, as well as those who come in contact with them, partake of the universe of double-sidedness and ambiguity by undergoing a process of animal hybridization consistent with grotesque imagery. Indeed, these forms defy the conventional order through a reversal of its ontological and conceptual organizing principles by validating a new reality which destabilizes the previous solidity of officialdom. In this sense, the characters are frequently viewed through a masquerade optics that reveals them as a kind of hybrids between humans and different types of animals.

Accordingly, one of the most evident examples is represented by Miss Craddock, Kitty Malone’s “owl-like” teacher that J. Marcus (1987: 48) identifies with Janet Case, Woolf’s admired Greek teacher. Indeed, from her first appearance, Lucy Craddock, whose umbrella “was not like other umbrellas; it had a parrot’s head for a handle” (46) reveals to the reader her bird-like qualities: “there was something owl-like about the eyes, round which there was a sallow, hollow depression”, while her “holding her pen suspended” might reinforce the image of a bird holding a branch.

Also from the beginning, Lucy Craddock is introduced as an outsider from a masculine-oriented society. Despite her excellent qualities,

‘You’re reading history with Lucy Craddock?’

‘Yes’, [Kitty] said. She liked the way [Mr. Robson] said Lucy Craddock, as if he respected her [.] (50),

Lucy’s dismissal from the Oxbridge world – “(s)o many of the Dons sneered at her” (50) – confer her with a kind of scapegoat quality. Indeed, marked with the red nose which is typical of carnivalesque personages – resulting from her essay-marking with red ink (47) – Miss Craddock lives as well outside the boundaries defined for her sex, sharing with Kitty, her pupil, a homoerotic mutual feeling (46).

(A)s it was in one of these cheap red villas that Miss Craddock lived, Kitty saw them haloed with romance. Her heart beat faster as she turned the corner by the new chapel and saw the steps of the house where Miss Craddock lived. Lucy...

‘She’s coming!’ thought Miss Craddock, holding her pen suspended [...]. ‘She’s coming!’ she thought with a little catch of her breath, laying down the pen. [...].

Certainly, while Kitty romanticizes about the encounter with Miss Craddock, the teacher’s holding up and down of her pen while she catches her breath suggest a form of orgasmic reaction, corroborated by Kitty’s repeated “blushing bright red with pleasure” (47). Even when integrated within the carnivalistic system of hybridity, Miss Craddock’s dyadic nature involves a form of transgressing the boundaries of gender imposed by a patriarchal oligarchy in a simultaneously twofold manner. Hence, by demonstrating her attraction for Kitty, the teacher thus subverts the role associated with traditional female sexuality, especially as concerns the strict Victorian precepts. Thereby, Lucy voices the determination – common to many contemporary women’s collectivities – to refuse the kind submission that may derive from masculine fondness.

Second, even when her scapegoat nature is evident, the narrator’s choice of Lucy’s characterization as an owl – the bird that symbolizes Athena, the wise goddess – constitutes a vehicle for the dignification of a woman for whom – as well as for Janet Case – Woolf felt profound sympathy and admiration. As expressed in an anonymous review in “*The Times*” the year of the novel’s publication, Lucy Craddock becomes, “in this regard, a noble Athena” who broke down “the tradition that only men acted in the Greek play” (1937: 16). Certainly, often had the author expressed her admiration for such bright-minded women who, like J. Harrison, had been publicly excluded from a male-centred educational system.

and then on the terrace, as if popping out to breathe the air, to glance at the garden, came a bent figure, formidable yet humble, with her great forehead and her shabby dress – could it be the famous scholar, could it be J – H – herself? (Woolf, 1966: 16)

In contrast, the dons that typically victimize these women appear in *The Years* as grotesque characters. Within those bird metamorphoses, the also owl-like Mr. Robson turns out though, the absurd picture of a grown-up schoolboy, yet risibly downsized to dwarf-like dimensions. Indeed, in his Eton-like jacket and his “very thick watch-chain [...], like a schoolboy’s” (50), Mr. Robson becomes the genuine example of those educated boys who – spoiling their sister’s possibilities of graduating as well – remain yet unevolved and incapable of exploiting any further the formation received.

As Woolf would later illustrate it in *Three Guineas*:

Let us then ask someone else – it is Mary Kingsley – to speak for us. ‘I don’t know if I ever revealed to you the fact that being allowed to learn German was all the paid-for education I ever had. Two thousand pounds was spent on my brother’s, I still hope not in vain.’ Mary Kingsley is not speaking for herself alone; she speaking, still, for many of the daughters of educated men. [...] From the Pastons to the Pendennises, all educated families from the thirteenth century to the present moment have paid money into that account. It is a voracious receptacle. Where there were many sons to educate it required a great effort on the part of the family to keep it full. For your education was not merely in book-learning; games educated your body; friends taught you more than books or games. Talk with them broadened your outlook and enriched your mind. In the holidays you travelled; acquired a taste for art; a knowledge of foreign politics; and then, before you could earn your own living, your father made you an allowance upon which it was possible for you to live while you learnt the profession which now entitles you to add the letters K.C. to your name. All this came out of Arthur’s Education Fund. And to this, your sisters, as Mary Kingsley indicates, made their contribution. Not only did their own education, save for such sums as paid the German teacher, go into it; but many of those luxuries and trimmings which are, after all, an essential part of education – travel, society, solitude, a lodging apart from the family house – they were paid into it too. It was a voracious receptacle, a solid fact – Arthur’s Education Fund – a fact so solid indeed that it cast a shadow over the entire landscape. And the result is that though we look at the same things, we see them differently. What is that congregation of buildings there, a semi-monastic look, with chapels and halls and green playing-fields? To you it is your old school; Eton of Harrow; your old university, Oxford or Cambridge; the source of memories and of traditions innumerable. But to us, who see it through the shadow of Arthur’s Education Fund, it is a schoolroom table; an omnibus going to a class; a little woman with a red nose who is not well educated herself but has an invalid mother to support; an allowance of £50 a year with which to buy clothes, give presents and take journeys on coming to maturity [...] (1996: 68).

Hence, if in *Three Guineas*, Woolf would denounce the lack of opportunities provided for the daughter of the educated men, it is precisely by contrast with Lucy Craddock, one of those red-nosed women, that Sam Robson’s ridiculousness becomes dazzlingly revealed:

Next moment in trotted a little man, who was so short that he looked as if his jacket should have been an Eton jacket, and his collar a round the collar. He wore, too, a very thick watch-chain, made of silver, like a schoolboy’s. but his

eyes were keen and fierce, his moustache bristly, and he spoke with a curious accent (50).

Actually, Mr. Robson – in his grotesque depiction as the reunion of both childhood and mature age – seems the frozen-throughout-time version of one of those schoolboys, though directly transferred into a present life which reveals no less meaningless and banal. Certainly, it is precisely Mr. Robson, one of those dons that tend to scorn women out from Oxford and Cambridge, that becomes here the object of mockery of both Kitty and the narrative voice. Nevertheless, Miss Malone's reaction, even when predominantly burlesque, entails the carnivalistic ambivalence of benevolence simultaneously intermixed with derisive laughter. Hence, noticing Sam Robson's Yorkshire accent, she imitates his speech when she wonders: "What sort of wur-r-rk had Mrs. Robson done?" Truly, a carnivalesque tone pervades the entire episode as the mockery becomes extensive to the whole of the Robson family, who are grotesquely downsized to the extent that Kitty needs to re-focus her eyes "to suit the smallness of the Robson(s)" (51). This dwindling of the characters, which comes, in fact, to invalidate the grandeur of their behaviour, forgives Jo, the Robson's son, who appears to Kitty as "a handsome young man", uncorrupted by the pomposity of his family. However, Jo is not free from another form of caricaturization, as his markedly coarse and rustic features – he brushes as wood shaving off his hair in front of her, as he has been busy repairing the hen-coops – immediately remind Kitty of "Alf, the farm hand up at Carter's". Furthermore, this memory – which is completed by the picture of Carter leading a bull with a ring through its nose – settles the context of a circus in which the whole Robson family become inexplicably placed. Indeed, Kitty's thoughts on knowing about the Robsons' story significantly irrupt into an immediate association with the circus:

'My life was a cook, Miss Malone, before we married', he said. Again he increased his accent as if he were proud of it. I had a great-uncle who rode in a circus, he felt inclined to say [...] (51).

Significantly, while Kitty's imagination flows in that direction, the image of an animal led by a ring through its nose is paralleled by the description of Siegfried's scene at the opera into the "1910" chapter. On this occasion, Kitty, now Lady Lasswade, attends "Siegfried", not accidentally "her favourite opera" – when, as soon as the curtain rises, a dwarf – clearly an overtly grotesque embodiment of Sam Robson – appears on stage, while the "(h)ammer, hammer, hammer" sound – which already accompanied her visit to the Robsons – is heard. Certainly, hardly has she been able to remember what such a scene reminds her of when she becomes attracted by the handsome boy whose look "mak(es) him seem almost stern" (135). Similarly, Siegfried's description portrays him as an overtly grotesque character, mainly defined by the exaggeratedness of his features:

But here was Siegfried. She leant forward. Dressed in leopard – skins, very

fat, with nut-brown thighs, leading a bear – here he was [...] the fat bouncing young man in his flaxen wig [...] (135).

Actually, Siegfried's rendering corroborates his association with the Robsons, whose fealty and theatrical manners are not alien to the opera's hero. Hence, their inauthenticity is no lower than that of the silver salver Mrs. Robson boasts of, while exhibiting "a gesture that was exactly like Mrs. Malone's when she pointed to the Gainsborough that was not certainly a Gainsborough" (52). A similar sense of unreality characterizes Sam's attitude, who, in order to avoid being discovered when his wife attempts to show Kitty a framed document – presumably an undeserved degree – suddenly interrupts her to attract her attention, instead, towards a picture of his mother, while displaying his utterly insincere airs of pretension:

But here Sam, who stood in the background fiddling with his watch-chain, stepped forward and indicated with his stubby forefinger the picture of an old woman, looking rather over life size in the photographer's chair (52).

This, in fact, along with the exaggeratedness of Sam's manners – who mechanically emits an "old little chuckle" while pointing to the picture "with his stubby forefinger" (52) – reinforces the ridiculousness pervading the description of the Robsons. Hence, the mother's picture distils the same fealty and absurd pose, a point emphasized by Kitty's sharply ironical comment 'You're very like her, Mr. Robson' ”.

'Your mother?', Kitty repeated, stooping to look. The unwieldy old lady, pose in all the stiffness of her best clothes, was plain in the extreme [...]

'You're very like her, Mr. Robson', was all she could find to say (53).

Nevertheless, if it was noted how this view possessed the ambivalence typical of a carnival sense of the world, apart from that obvious mockery, a note of sympathy is felt in Kitty's attitude towards the Robsons.

She looked at [Sam] standing there with his heavy watch-chain, like a schoolboy's. you are the nicest man I have ever met, she thought [...]

Did they know how much she admired them? (53).

Paradoxically, while the Robsons embody the stereotypical example of the agents of scorn and rejection towards the numerous 'Miss Craddocks', thus impeding their access to education, the absurdity with which they are presented clearly constitutes a twofold act of carnivalesque decrowning and hierarchical inversion of the social scale. Indeed, turned into a bunch of petty figures, the pretentious Robsons became the very image of grotesquery and ridiculousness in front of Kitty, who, even though not a brilliant student, clearly stands over their stupidity. Certainly, as if by the craft of a magic wand, emphasis is made on a certain form of Kitty's oversizing the Robsons,

who appear to her as extraordinarily small. Actually, while through such a sudden conversion of Kitty into Alice, Lewis Carroll's fantasy-riddled girl, the narrator resorts to a patently carnivalesque setting to carry out her inversion of conventionally accepted stereotypes.

It was evident that Woolf admired this author and, in particular, the sort of liberation that entailed his *Alice*, especially after 1930, when the tale served as inspiration for a costume party in which Virginia Woolf herself also played a part. In a letter dated from 1932, Woolf enthusiastically describes the course of the party, with her as the March Hare and Roger Fry dressed as the White Knight in Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* (*Letters V*: 50).

In fact, these ideas had had considerable circulation around Bloomsbury. In another letter from 1906, Woolf comments on the affinity existing between her close friend Roger Fry and Margery, his wife, remarking the incessant quality and the illogical course of their childish chattering during a trip with them – a fact H. Marder has signalled as resembling the relations between Carroll's characters: "They hum and buzz like two boiling pots [...] I've never heard people, after the age of 6, talk so incessantly" (*Letters V*: 56 [2000: 97]).

If all this attests for Woolf's sympathy towards the world of Wonderland, what becomes particularly interesting is that her admiration for Alice's story immersed the narrator in *The Years* into a typically grotesque-carnivalesque universe in which this pattern becomes the rule for the decentralization of authoritarian modes and beliefs. Indeed, Carroll's particular resort to fantasy as a form of estrangement from the prescriptive world has been considered by Kayser as within the grotesque paradigm, insofar as such an "alienation of familiar forms [...] creates that mysterious and terrifying connection between the fantastic and the real world which is so essential for the grotesque" (1957: 122). Similarly, Harpham also mentions Lewis Carroll as the case of those authors who prompt the mind into a grotesque perception of the world, on the grounds of their defamiliarization of the commonly accepted" (1982: 68).

Within this view, in an essay published in 1939, Woolf would praise Carroll's ability to transport us into the more permissive prejudice-free world of childhood, emphasizing precisely this entrance into a kind of anarchic microcosm. Moreover, it is through this praise on Carroll's freedom of creation that Woolf manifests her profound belief in the vindicative power of the premises of carnival in order to promote a new form of free and uncorrupted social organization.

[...] it does not matter how old, how important, or how insignificant you are, you become a child again. To become a child is to be very literal; to find everything so strange that nothing is surprising; to be heartless, to be ruthless, yet to be so passionate that a snub or a shadow drapes the world in gloom. It is to be Alice in Wonderland.

It is also to be Alice Through the Looking Glass. It is to see the world upside down^[1] as a child sees it, and has made us laugh as children laugh, irresponsibly.” (1947: 71).

In this sense, carried into the particular land of the Robsons, headed by the tiny, schoolboy-looking Sam, Kitty’s sudden size mutation responds to a radical downturn of the Oxbridge-based scale of values. Hereby, this new order, which symbolically places Kitty above the stereotypical dons, at the same time as the educated male, alone with his surroundings, become reduced *ad absurdum* and broadly unmasked in their ridiculous inadequacy.

Furthermore, by avoiding the restriction of this grotesqueness to the Robson’s home, Woolf aims to emphasize the real dimensions of the limitations imposed by a patriarchy-rooted educational system. In tune with such perception of difference, Kitty’s plunge into the streets represents an epiphanic moment towards the culmination of her process of recognition and profound dismissal of the bases of a system rooted according to what now reveals for her as the ridiculously anachronistic law of the father. Thus, symbolically situated at a crossing, Kitty experiences the sudden alienation provoked by the unfamiliarity the street inspires for her – a realization J. Marcus attributes to the restrictions imposed upon the freedom of movement for women around the urban space as a result of male authority: “The Pargiter’s [women] could not go for a walk alone except in the streets right around their house, and then only during the daylight hours. Expeditions to other parts of London were impossible unless they had a brother or a matron to chaperon them” (1981: 220).

In fact, the resource of placing a character in the middle of a crossroad while being tossed into an unfamiliar environment was not alien to other contemporary authors, concerned with the implications of the urban experience as a consequence of the metropolitan era. Hence, in a short story by the American O. Henry, Sam Fowles, the provincial, undergoes a very similar circumstance on first leaving his country surroundings to travel to New York. Curiously, the protagonist, who also comes to be placed at a crossing, realizes the estrangement from his world experienced when surprisingly tossed by a gust of wind that transports him, like Kitty, into a kind of void that makes him lose the perspective of his own setting.

Sam Folwell stood where two great, rectangular arteries of the city cross. He looked four ways, and saw the world curled from its orbit and reduced by spirit level and tape to an edged and cornered plane. All life moved on tracks, in grooves, according to system, within boundaries, by rote (1993: 140).

Certainly, both passages retain significant similarities, considering the degree of familiarization experienced by both characters:

As she stood still for a second at a crossing she too seemed tossed aloft out of her usual surroundings. She forgot where she was. The sky, blown into a blue

open space, seemed to be looking down not here upon streets and houses, but upon open country, where the wind brushed the moors, and sheep, with grey fleeces ruffled, sheltered under stone walls. She could almost see the moors brighten and darken as the clouds passed over them (54).

Paradoxically, the inclusion of such a momentary instant of alienation for Kitty in the city stresses her awareness of the undesired familiarity that such a panorama involves for her – in fact, the realization of an “obsolete, frivolous, inane” social system:

But then in two strides the unfamiliar street became the street she had always known. Here she was again in the paved alley; there were the old curiosity shops with their blue china and their brass warming-pans; and next moment she was out in the famous crooked street with all the domes and steeples. The sun lay in broad stripes across it. There were the cabs and the awnings and the book-shops; the old men in black gowns billowing; the young women in pink and blue dresses flowing; and the young men in straw hats carrying cushions under their arms. But for a moment all seemed to her obsolete, frivolous, inane. The usual undergraduate in cap and gown with books under his arm looked silly. And the portentous old men with their exaggerated features, looked like gargoyles, carved, medieval, unreal. They were all like people dressed up and acting parts, she thought. Now she stood at her own door and waited for Hiscock, the butler, to take his feet off the fender and waddle upstairs. Why can't you talk like a human being? She thought, as he took her umbrella and mumbled his usual remark about the weather. (54).

Of course, this realization results from the new perspective Kitty has been forced to adopt at the Robsons' carnivalesque 'wonderland'. Indeed, Carroll's unfamiliarization of the conventional organizing principles of the socio-political structures tallies with Ruskin's concept of the perception of grotesque forms. According to the critic, the particular act of mental labour that is required on contemplating grotesque art provokes a kind of disorientation in the subject. As a consequence, he is obliged to carry out a reorganization of his mental patterns, thereby rejecting any previous truths or absolute notions of reality accepted as such. As L. Smith has expressed in his study of grotesque photography:

Hence, what is implied in Ruskin's [...] function of the grotesque [...] represents a fundamental desire to expose a disruption in optical agency and visual discourse which in turn frustrates the dualism of the empirical and transcendental within Victorian culture (1995: 68 [in Colin, Trodd et al, 1999: 83])

Thus accustomed to this grotesque perspective, Kitty is now enabled to recognize the absurd superficiality – not only within the Robson's land – but even dominating the entire patriarchal society ruling over the earlier decades of the twentieth century. In particular, Ruskin devoted special attention to gargoyles as part of the ornament partaking in the chaotic amalgam of chiaroscuro and visual disparateness that impresses the subject on contemplating a work of religious architecture. Of course, his analysis arises from the basis of his distinction between the two types of grotesque, whereby Ruskin praised the freedom of thoughts expressed by the artist of the noble – endowed

with a subversive intention from its creator.

A fine grotesque is the expression, in a moment, by a series of symbols thrown together in bold and fearless connection, of truths which it would have taken a long time to express in any verbal way, and of which the connection is left for the beholder to work out for himself; the gaps, left or overleaped by the haste of the imagination formed by the grotesque character (Works, x: 88).

Like Ruskin, Woolf underlines the presence of gargoyles in order to account for the grotesqueness of the patriarchal edifice of Victorian society. In this sense, while this panorama of course includes the banal presence of “the young women in pink and blue dresses”, particular attention deserve the male characters. Hence, embodying the different generations, these men distil the most profound non-authenticity and lack of individualism that derives from the apparatus they themselves have created, thus merely becoming a set of grotesque props. Accordingly, “(t)he usual undergraduate in cap and gown [...] looks silly”, while “the portentous old men with their exaggerated features, looked like gargoyles, carved, medieval, unreal” (54).

In this panorama, where the older generation of the patriarchal colossus reveals the grotesque ugliness and outmoded reality of gargoyles, the dehumanization ruling over the higher social spheres – derived from obsolete norms of behaviour – becomes one of the most urgent evils to be eradicated. Thus, a different version is constituted by the butler at the Malones’. Indeed, Kitty’s wondering – “Why can’t you talk like a human being?” she thought, as he took her umbrella and mumbled his usual remark about the weather” (54) – significantly points to an issue Woolf would develop further in her subsequent *Three Guineas*. Hence, in her denunciation of the cruel atrocities of the war, the narrator points to the mechanization of both cultural and economic production as one of the main causes leading to the fake quality that characterizes society at the turn of the century. By way of this lack of humanity, she warns against the dehumanization provoked by “a ritualistic politics based on mechanical reproduction [...] used for influencing mass opinion and collective action” in the name of “Victorian imperialistic ideas of liberalism, social stability, and culture”. (Sarker, [Caughie, 2000: 49]). Indeed, Woolf comments on the absurdity of such repetitiveness and insubstantiality regarding the example for the young men who, like the silly undergraduate Kitty comes across, are “sent to Cambridge and stuffed with chopped hay, and sent out to parade Bloomsbury like dummies [...] they seem to me only half alive, and rigid with conceit, and self-assertive, and positive, and opinionated, and ugly, and snobbish, and brainy, and unaesthetic.” (*Letters III*, 1989: 206 Letter to Raymond Mortimer, 27th April 1926).

In this sense, like the estrangement that derives from the inertia and exaggeration in the old man, the frigid immutability of the butler obeys to a form of defamiliarization that defines the

grotesque as the violation of our standing categories, concepts or common expectations of the natural and ontological order (Nöel Carroll [F.Connelly, 2003: 296]). Hereby, the logically unexpected robotic behaviour of the butler becomes another variety of grotesqueness, at the same level as the decadent paralysis and unnatural non-authenticity of the old gargoyle-men.

Certainly, through this alienated appearance of Hiscock, the butler – whose name simultaneously partakes of the bird-like hybridity discussed above – the narrator denounces the callousness and stupidity of a class-structured society where the flow of emotion and the individual sense of selfhood are restrained at the service of the maintenance of aristocratic hegemony. As A. D. Moody has pointed out, such a system is ruled over by an “impulse to turn away from the disturbing depths of feeling, and towards a conventional pleasantness or sentimentality or frivolousness” (1962: 69). In this sense, Zwerdling remarks the particular impact of this fact on the relations between the upper class and the service. According to the critic, the “sense of living a cocoon which protects the class from disturbing facts and feelings is reiterated in the treatment of its relation with its servants [...] Service is assumed to be part of the natural order by the governing class, dependable in its regular rhythms, creating an environment of basic security by maintaining a predictable daily routine. The fact that the entire system is based on the power and wealth of one class and the drudgery of another is ignored by master and servant alike in an unending ritual of self-deception” (Beja, 1985: 137).

Indeed, as many other intellectuals during the 1920s and 1930s, Woolf had also begun to conceive of the sudden explosion of certain forces leading to mass politics by the side of a collectivization of society, which soon would represent a double-edged weapon. Hence, on the one hand, the phenomenon of masses was undeniably linked to the improvement of those marginal parts of the political system – particularly, workers and women. In this sense, Woolf had praised the change that had occurred concerning human relations as a consequence of the rise of the Labour Party to government in 1924. Indeed, in her essay “*Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown*”, an essay she wrote the same year, she celebrates the transformation of personal relationships in the light of the new socio-political background:

All human relations have shifted – those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature (185).

Certainly, as Tratner has pointed out, Virginia Woolf, like many other of her contemporary, was “seeking to break with the whole idea of leadership, of ruling classes, or individuals”. Hereby, through her writings, she constantly validated her advocacy for a way out of oppression and self-

realization.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, she was, of course, aware of the proliferation within this context of a system of mass production in which mechanic inventions and new technologies were experiencing a rapid expansion. Thereby, in a time in which the spurting rise of the masses is hand in hand with the emergence of a technological era, or as Walter Benjamin remarks, “mass reproduction is aided especially by the reproduction of masses” (1969b: 251, [Caughie, 2000: 38]), Woolf retains an ambivalent position. Hence, while she does not occupy the romantic position of the determined dismissal of technology as a Pandorean source of evil and decay, she does still prevent against the loss of the human. In this sense, her decision – according to Sonita Sarker – is that of remaining as an “incorporated intellectual” (2000: 39), adopting an attitude of a “negotiated nostalgia”.

Hereby, precisely with a view to that purpose, she introduces this technology at the service of her claim for the retrieval of the individual’s fleshly body. Bearing this in mind, Woolf’s portrayal of the butler at the Malones’ as a robotic, dehumanized being anticipates, indeed, a form of grotesque representation Noël Carroll – in his analysis of the grotesque today – has pointed out with his inclusion of the cyborg within the catalogue of contemporary horror fiction. According to Carroll, the grotesque nature in these creatures obeys to their impure condition as ambiguous beings situated within the boundary between human and machine. As Carroll has observed, these “very popular cyborg monsters of contemporary horror fiction [...] mix flesh and machine”, thus attesting to their unsettling contradictoriness. Certainly – Carroll adds – “(m)aybe part of what is so creepy about monster robots in general is that they are ambiguously animate and inanimate, mind and metal” (Carroll, [Connelly, 2003: 301]).

In his rendering of the mental processes accompanying the perception of grotesque forms, Ruskin alluded to composite natures resulting from the indistinct intermingling of human, animal, and plant fragments alike. Accordingly, his description of the façade of St. Mark, one of the most remarkable examples of grotesque architecture, for Ruskin, the critic brings to the fore this composite nature of the grotesque:

A multitude of pillars and white domes, clustered into a long low pyramid of coloured light; a treasure-heap, it seems, partly of gold, and partly of mother-of-pearl, hollowed beneath into five great vaulted porches [...] and beset with sculpture of alabaster [...], [...] fantastic [...], of palm leaves and lilies, and grapes and pomegranates, and birds clinging and fluttering among the branches [...], and in the midst of it, the solemn forms of angels, sceptred, and robed to the feet [...] And round the walls of the porches there are sets of pillars of variegated stones, jasper and porphyry, and deep-green serpentine spotted with flakes of snow, and marbles that half refuse and half yield to the

sunshine [...]; their capitals rich with interwoven tracery, rooted knots herbage [...], and mystical signs, all beginning and ending with the Cross” (*Works*, x: 82-3).

Similarly, a more modern vision of grotesque interminglings is provided by B. McElroy, who summarizes these possibilities of hybridization in modern fiction by mentioning a number of likely mixtures: “animalistic or humanoid plants, the combination of animal devices with animal forms [...]; combinations of machines and humans, some robots [...], or gruesome machines that take on a life of their own” (1989: 12). Likewise, the twofold creatures described so far in Woolf’s novel – from the owl-like Robsons and Miss Craddock to the gargoyle-man or the robotised butler Kitty comes across – responded to a similar process of hybridization, as has been pointed out.

The subversive potential encapsulated within this blunt transgression of the logical laws of nature through the intermixing of different realities [which could not possibly be otherwise thus fused] was viewed, in the particular context of the 1920s and 1930s, as a decisive vehicle for the radical opposition to the prescriptive order imposed by the oppressive socio-political system. Especially, artists of Surrealism were interested in the unmeasured potential of grotesque hybrids as a means of representing the arid reality of an *entre-guerre* period. Hence, in her study of the grotesque in photography, Kirsten A. Hoving interprets hybridity as one of the constitutive elements of grotesque aesthetics – as a reality that “exists in opposition to things that have clear identities, set places in the world, comprehensible boundaries.” Bearing this in mind, Hoving explains that, through hybridization, “(s)pecific bounded identities are confused in the mix”, whereby “(t)he human can become part plant, part beast, part object, or part machine” (Hoving, [Connelly, 2003: 230]).

Likewise, commenting upon the pragmatic value of such images, Barbara M. Stafford remarks upon the radical challenge to convention involved by the upstart power of hybrids to disconcert and flaunt “unsuitable, dissonant, and unconnected *actual*^[2] mixtures” (2003: 67). Like Ruskin, Stafford recognizes in reactions to grotesque forms in this century two different connotations. Hence, if the former critic distinguishes what he calls “a noble grotesque” – intentionally loaded with an ultra-pictorial meaning of challenge to socio-political and cultural conventions from “an ignoble grotesque” – or, as he envisions it, a purposeless rendering of ugliness and disgust, deprived from any – at least conscious – end beyond its representational dimension, Stafford’s typification will be based on very similar premises. Accordingly, she defines a kind of farcical grotesque, which aims at defying former categories of reality and representation. Derived from Horace’s description in his *Art of Poetry* and *Epistle to Pisos*, this form conjures up “figures [...] maladroitly constructed out of a man’s head, horse’s neck, bird’s wing, and fish’s tail” (2003: 67).

Consequently, the contemplation of such sort of compounds creates a new reality which compels the beholder to enter a new relation with the objects – now brought into unexpected contiguities or similarities – at the same time as she is brought to attend the birth of what has not existed before.

On the one hand, along with the recognition of the immeasurably unsettling power of these images, Stafford observes another connotation of the grotesque especially disclaimed by the most conservative sections of socio-political life in the eighteenth century. In this sense, as perceived by the leading figures of the Enlightenment, the grotesque turned out to be an unacceptable deviation from both expressive and ideological standards, intimately dovetailed with the brutality and terribleness of savage amorphousness. Indeed, eighteenth-century intellectuals were concerned with the threat that the grotesque represented for their countless norms of correctness and the social obligation to have “a good bodily grace”. Nicolas Andry declared in *L’Orthopédie* what was certainly the leitmotif of social duty in this period:

We are born for one another; we must avoid possessing anything shocking, and even if one were alone in the world, it would not be proper to neglect one’s body to the point of allowing it to become deformed; this would be going against the very intention of the Creator (cf. 2003: 24)

Nevertheless, for twentieth century mentalities, even though bodily decorum was essential, the crucial focus was on the praxis that could derive from the propagation of these forms of representation, insofar as they evidently turned on the machine for the debasement of, and mutiny against the bedrock of imperialist fascism. Numerous artists in this period opted for grotesque forms of hybrid compounds in order to accomplish their particular attack against dictatorship, as well as their protest against the terrible massacres committed during the war.

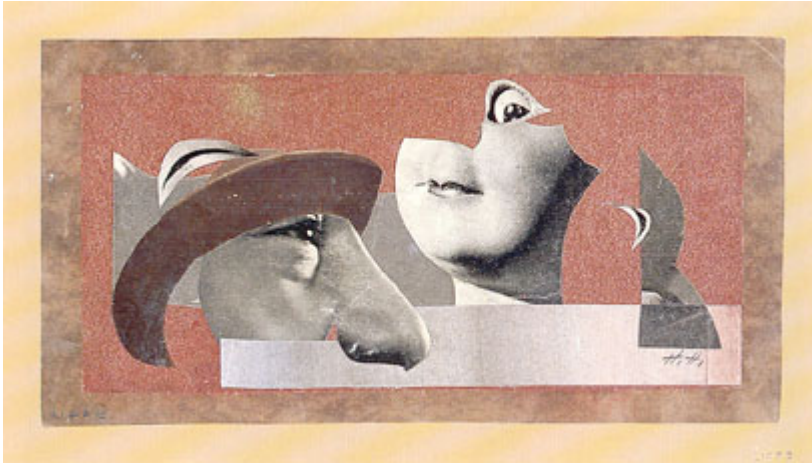
Frequently, within the totality of artistic manifestations, visual arts played an essential role due to their unquestionable potentiality for creating an immediate and more direct impact on viewers. Thus, in the taxonomy of humorous modes of pictorial combination with James Beattie carries out in his essay “*Of Laughter and Ludicrous Composition*”, he underlines the superiority of painting as a subversive form of representation, insofar as the ridiculous effect that arises from the “mere contiguity of objects, may [...] be better exemplified by visible assemblages”. (1776: 601-3). In fact, Beattie somehow anticipates what became the basic principle for photomontage throughout the earlier decades of the twentieth century. This technique, often ascribed to Surrealism, was regarded as an ideal vehicle for the transgression of traditional norms and conventions by prompting through these montages the birth of new creatures that defiantly inaugurated a new reality. As K. A. Hoving has remarked, these forms of expression constituted “the starting point for the blurring of distinctions between things, leading to misshapeness and even to complete

disintegration of existing categories” (2003: 221).

Bearing this in mind, the development of photomontage attested during the 1920s and the 1930s is to be considered in clear connection with the context of *entre-guerre* within which it arises, along with the vehement urge for opposing the tyrannical oppression effected by Fascist powers. In this sense, Maria Makela has defined photomontage as “the handmaid of the grotesque” on the grounds of its inherent power to subvert traditional, imposed reality, which finds its most accurate representational equivalent in photography. On the expressive advantage of photomontage, Makela states that:

Photomontage has a special relation to the grotesque, because by definition it brings together unlike things from disparate worlds and thus transgresses and destabilizes boundaries, more naturally than any other medium. Indeed, because the photograph is intuitively felt to be – a mirror of reality, photomontage, with its surprising juxtapositions of disparate photographic images, is inherently more unsettling than paintings or sculptures that similarly jumble categories (2003: 195).

Aware of the transgressing power of these images, Surrealist photographers often used their works to participate in the anti-militarist discourse of the period, thus contributing to spread their propaganda for the mobilization of public opinion. Artists such as the German Expressionist photomontage artist Hanna Höch exhibited their portraits composed by the juxtaposition of mismatched bodily parts, therefore achieving a considerable unsettling effect. The suggestive potential of these hybrids often also mixed animal fragments and vegetation within these human composites, which enhanced the grotesque effect of the composites arranged, as, in Höch’s photomontage “*Liebe*” (1931), which shows the unconventional lesbian love between two women, one of whom combines her collaged female bodily parts with a black woman’s head and plant fragments, while the other one, who consists of the mispairing between also female legs, a piece of war machinery and fly’s wings, overflies her lover. A similar fusion of races and boundaries between the animal and the human – the blurring between “Man the Master” and “The Brute” as Woolf herself had expressed it in *Between the Acts* (1965) – occurs in another collage by Höch from the same year. “*Peasant Wedding Couple*” depicts the unfamiliar combination of a black man’s head and a pair of military boots, and the childlike legs of a girl unsettlingly mismatched with the disproportionately large head of a blond plaited girl with the face of a smiling ape.



Höch - Liebe

Like Höch Dadaist artists and the Surrealists, Woolf would use the photographic technique of montage in her depiction of British interwar society in *The Years*. Indeed, fascinated by photography since fifteen, when she took pictures with her Frena camera, she kept a constant interest in this art, which she demonstrated through her exchange of pictures with the artist Dora Carrington and her friend Vita Sackville-West (*Letters III*: 46). Furthermore, like other Bloomsbury members, from Lytton Strachey to her sister Vanessa or Leonard Woolf, Virginia was soon conscious of the transgressing power of photography. Certainly, even though – as D. Gillespie has noted – the term “photographic” meant for Woolf “superficial”, or merely “representational” (1993: 115) when applied to artistic forms, she was profoundly convinced that, in practice, “photographic documentation constituted an unassailable and objective truth” (Featherstone, 1991: 157). On the contrary, she was especially aware of the high potential of photography to reveal comicality, as well as to provide an undignified representation of people. Indeed, within the circle of her family and friends – Gillespie observes – a frequent entertainment consisted in creating humorous compositions, ranging from a saint-like pose of Vanessa or Lytton Strachey to the very picture of Virginia crowned with a wreath of leaves (1993: 127).



Höch - Bourgeoisie Bridal Couple

Moreover, commenting on the Woolfs' photographs, Maggie Humm highlights the striking modernity of the Monk's House's albums. In this sense, she points out the novelty of their sequences of snapshots of a same person taken in succession, which the critic defines as in tune with modernist developments during this period:

The Woolfs' use of composite images and their recognition that the process of construction is part of the content of a constructed piece synchronizes with other modernist developments in the 1920s and 1930s, i.e., John Hiartfield's montages and techniques of juxtaposition [...] (Caughie. 2000: 228).

In this sense, Humm notes Roger Fry's opinion about Cézanne's pictorial techniques. Thus, according to Fry, the post-impressionist artist "was concerned with the expression of emotion, not through spatial relationships of variable contiguity" (2000: 228). Particularly significant of Woolf's exploitation of the subversive capability of photography is the episode of the picture play in the middle of Delia's party. The scene, which occurs around the end of the novel, provides an efficient point of conversion for the carnivalesque decrowning of both fascism and the profoundly fragmented societal panorama it fed upon. Indeed, like Dadaist and Surrealist collages and photomontages, the scene distils the blunt vindicating tone of a claim for freedom through the

affirmation of wholeness, as it results from the creation of a new order which emerges from the demolition and re-ordering of its formerly fragmented parts. Hence, while in 1931, Höch indifferently intermixed animal and human limbs, a similar assemblage reappears in Woolf's "Present Day" chapter in *The Years* – also set in the same decade.

Moreover, if Höch's montages had a powerfully grotesque effect, the mocking tone in Woolf's episode becomes reinforced by a series of patently carnivalesque elements which add to the unfolding of the scene. Thus, recurrently throughout the episode, references to a general laughter accompany the game, a fact which propagates a spirit of universal merriness, which overcomes "the darkness of the country" – "[Eleanor] tried to think herself away into the darkness of the country. But it was impossible; they were laughing [...]". At the same time, while the contemplation of the picture elicits the mockery of everyone, it significantly acquires a certain obscene tone in Renny, whose gesture – "his beard was flung back; his mouth was wide open" (285) – in fact parallels the explicitly "obscene" expression in the sleeping Eleanor. Simultaneously, it retains some coincidences with the also typically carnivalesque image, in the same scene, of "(t)heir faces gap[ing] [...] like birds with their mouths open" as Peggy starts talking (286).

Yet, probably one of the central notes of the episode is represented by the very nature of the picture. Partaking of the collage technique of antiwar photomontage, the drawing emphasizes in particular the necessity of promoting the decrowning and fall of the authoritarian system of hierarchical structures which serves as a basis for tyranny and repression. In tune with this purpose, the picture illustrates the grotesqueness of Royalty – as one of the representative pillars of traditional conventionalisms – here viewed as a ridiculous "monster's person" resulting from the absurd fusion of a "woman's head like Queen Alexandra; with a fuzz of little curls", "a bird's neck", "the body of a tiger", and "stout elephant legs dressed in child's drawers". Indeed, this image retains much of the essence found in Bakhtin's description of grotesque hybrids as central elements in carnival imagery.

[Eleanor] could not help laughing.

'The face that launched a thousand ships!' said North, pointing to another part of the monster's person. They all laughed again. She stopped laughing; her lips smoothed themselves out. But her laughter had had some strange effect on her. It had relaxed her, enlarged her. She felt, or rather she saw, not a place, but a state of being, in which there was real laughter, real happiness, and this fractured world was whole; whole, and free. But how could she say it?

'Look here...' she began. She wanted to express something that she felt to be very important; about a world in which people were whole, in which people were free... But they were laughing [...] (285)

As well as the defamiliarizing amalgamation of these elements, the drawing contains the unrestricted duality conferred by its reunion – not only of both animal and human features, but even of the simultaneous convergence of old and young age. Hereby, the implicit adulthood in Queen Alexandra suddenly interacts with the childishness of her face framed by “a fuzz of little curls”, as well as with the garments that adorn her. It is necessary to observe that although such a rendering of monarchy could be interpreted as a reverberation of the actual status of royalty during the thirties, the truth is that a general tone of conformism characterized the popular attitude towards monarchy in this period. As Kenneth Morgan has noted in his *Illustrated History of Great Britain*, despite the panorama of depression and general decay and blackness typical of a post-war situation, a pleasing attitude of conformism and even content towards royalty was common among the popular masses, thus allowing monarchy as an institution to remain virtually unscathed. Surprisingly, the toll for such a privilege merely amounted to a campaign of royal attendance at superfluous public acts and performances that achieved populist acceptance from the masses:

The monarchy retained its esteem by responding subtly to marginal changes in the outlook of the mass democracy: George V's attendance at the annual working-classes festival of the Wembley Cup Final was one instance. The King's silver jubilee in 1935 provoked widespread national rejoicing. Even the brief crisis associated with the abdication of Edward VIII left the monarchy as an institution essentially unimpaired (1984: 550).

Hence, it is precisely this conformist attitude – which the narrator views as the stupid paralysis of the popular masses – that Woolf strives to eradicate by bluntly exposing her audience to the undignified reality of their royal leaders. In fact, this task was not new to the author, who had been struggling all throughout her narrative to decrown the near divinity of royal figures and turn them down to a more deserved position as carnivalesque Kings and Queens of Fools. This fact has already been commented on in relation to *Mrs. Dalloway*, a novel which literally demolishes the edifice of monarchy through the derisive rendering of Buckingham Palace and Queen Victoria as its most representative emblems:

As for Buckingham Palace (like an old prima donna facing the audience all in white) you can't deny it a certain dignity, [Peter] considered, nor despise what does, after all, stand to millions of people [...] for a symbol, absurd though it is; a child with a box of bricks could have done better, he thought; looking at the Memorial to Queen Victoria (whom he could remember in her horn spectacles driving through Kensington), its white mound, its billowing motherliness [...] (*Mrs. Dalloway*, 128).

The same view would be expressed through *Between the Acts*, where Queen Elizabeth – as it has been commented – is decrowned and exposed in her utter vulgarity to the eyes of the reader. In *The Years*, the opposition to the fundamentals of imperialist oppression and the war derived from it is expressed through the combination of the ridiculous depiction of royalty that occurs in the drawing

game, along with the implicit hybridization of the resulting figure. A central phenomenon within grotesque imagery, this form of expressive artistic creation indeed points to the dissolution of conventional borders, hand in hand with the defamiliarization of traditionally accepted categories and types. In this sense, Gombrich has commented on this transgressing element inherent to “hybrid creatures, part plant, part human; part woman, part fish; part horse, part goat” (1979: 256 [in Harpham, 1982: 42]). There are no names in our language, no categories on our thought, to come to grips with this elusive dream-imagery in which “*all things are mixed*”... It outrages both our “sense of order” and “our search for meaning [...] Not only do the limbs of these composite creatures defy our classifications, often we cannot even tell where they begin or end – they are not individuals... Thus there is nothing to hold on to, nothing fixed, the *deformatas*^[3] is hard to “code” and harder still to remember, for everything is in flux”.

It is precisely this obsolete sense of order represented by royalty as a symbol of reverence of tradition and hierarchy existing in post-Victorian society that Woolf thrives for debunking as a means of enabling the emergence of a new free and egalitarian order. Indeed, the resort to grotesque hybrids as an instrument of subversion against monarchy recurs in an essay written in the interval between the publication of *The Years* and *Between the Acts*, the year before Virginia’s death. Thus, holding to the technique of visual overlapping, through the contiguous presence of two paper pictures, a form of hybrid composite is created by the juxtaposition of Princess Elizabeth and a caterpillar.

It is true that it was a rare caterpillar; a gentleman in Kensington had found it in his back garden. And so it had its photograph in the news, and appeared almost life-size upon the very same page as the picture of the Princess who was feeding the panda. There they were, side by side (*The Moment*, 185-6).

Certainly, the carnivalesque excess entailed by the unusually large caterpillar comes to add to the inherent repulsiveness of its nature. Nevertheless, it is to be considered that, while these two factors contribute to the princess’ decrowning and repositioning onto the lower stratum – in Bakhtin’s terms – the drawing of Queen Alexandra is not, in fact, more dignified. Hence, her rudimentarily painted tiger’s body closely resembles the “brilliantly barred” body of the caterpillar.

Moreover, it is very likely that Woolf – demonstratedly fond of moths – purposefully chose this large caterpillar, curiously called “royal moth”, and whose body is, additionally, orange-and-black-striped in order to match the similarly “gross body” of a royal member (http://creatures.ifas.ufl.edu/bfly/regal_moth_photo1.htm). Indeed, the initial juxtaposition of the two photographs – of both the “almost life-size” caterpillar and “the Princess who was feeding the panda” (ibid: 185) – becomes reinforced by the narrator’s emphasis on the surprising similarity

between both the royal moth and its human homonymous equivalent. Woolf stresses not only the similarity of the thrill both of them can provoke in the spectators. Furthermore, through this overlapping, the alleged divinity of Royalty comes debased to the same level as the aura of mystery surrounding the life of the caterpillar, whereby the “symmetrical in shape and brilliantly barred” outfit of the caterpillar clearly outdoes the “gross body” (186) of Royalty – “(c)ertainly an old body in black with a pair of horn spectacles” (183) –, formerly “barred and beautiful and immune from human weakness”. Indeed, that alleged divinity of royal members becomes broadly reduced *ad absurdum* by the incomparably sublime beauty of the invertebrate.

But what is important is that the eye, passing from the Princess to the caterpillar, registered a thrill which, though different from the Royalty thrill, was like enough to serve much the same purpose. (*The Moment*, 185-6).

A similar process of hybridization affects other monarchy members in Woolf’s essay “Royalty”, in which Queen Elis of Romania – initially decrowned as Carmen Sylva, her friendly name – turns into the queen bee of the story read by the Italian secretary.

Two scenes stand out with genuine vitality – one where the romantic impulsive old lady seeks to enchant an ancient flame – the late Duke of Edinburgh – by dragging him to a hill-top where hidden minstrels spring out from behind rocks and bawl native melodies into his disgusted ears; the other where Queen Elizabeth of Romania and Queen Emma of Holland read aloud. He chose Maeterlinck, and as he declaimed the famous passage where the queen bee soars higher and higher in her nuptial ecstasy till at last the male insect, ravaged by passion, drops dismembered to the ground, Carmen Sylva raised her beautiful white hands in rapture (1947: 190).

Ridiculously portrayed in her “floating veils and a motoring cap” (ibid: 189), her dramatic melodramatization “under a top light” while trying “to enchant an ancient flame”, certainly comes close to the mating rituals of the queen bee. A significant overlapping with the bee’s ascent in her nuptial ecstasy occurs when the lady queen literally drags her beloved to a hill-top, just to echo the fit of passion experienced by the bee after dropping her mate dismembered, which causes an ecstatic rapture in Carmen Sylva.

Bearing in mind the suggestive power of these images, it is not illogical that the semi-metamorphosis of characters into human-insect composites recurs in Woolf’s novels. In particular, by developing this technique more in depth, the narrator offers a risible depiction of upper classes, and at the same time warns about the brutal destruction of a society which, aside from being literally ruined by the armed conflict, is becoming morally corrupted and devoid of any meaningfulness. This vacuum Woolf denounces, comes as the direct consequence of the paralysis and inner hollowness that Fascist action and imperialist propaganda are effecting upon the population.

Nevertheless, the image of the caterpillar turns out even more significant when considering its recurrence in *Three Guineas*. Indeed, the resort to the caterpillar in a work published the year after the mentioned novel attests to the evident proximity between the two referents of the image. Hence, in *Three Guineas*, an “ugly”, “dangerous” caterpillar acts as an allegorical substitute for Fascist dictators (1996: 166). As it becomes evident, Woolf aimed at a determined downturn of royal members, for whom she hardly allowed any distance from their metaphorical contiguous as were tyrannical leaders.

Accordingly, during the party in the final chapter of *The Years*, the narrator’s voice significantly has North reflect about the banality of war manifests and leagues promoted in the name of two concepts – Justice and Liberty – that have likewise lost their meaning in the midst of an *entre-guerre* panorama. In fact, in this context, it is precisely – as voiced through North’s thoughts – personal commitment towards reform that may enable a real transformation of society, which will derive from a redefinition and resubstantialization of Justice and Liberty as operating principles.

Nothing would be easier than to join a society, to sign what Patrick called ‘a manifesto.’ But he did not believe in joining societies, in signing manifestoes. He turned back to the desirable residence with its three-quarters of an acre of garden and running water in all the bedrooms. People met, he thought, pretending to read, in hired halls. And one of them stood on a platform. There was the pomp-handle gesture; the wringing-wet-clothes gesture; and then the voice, oddly detached from the little figure and tremendously magnified by the loudspeaker, went booming and bawling round the hall: Justice! Liberty! For a moment, of course, sitting among knees, wedged in tight, a ripple, a nice emotional quiver, went over the skin, but next morning, he said to himself as he glanced again at the house-agents’ placard, there’s not an idea, not a phrase that would feel a sparrow. What do they mean by Justice and Liberty? he asked, all these nice young men with two or three hundred a year. Something’s wrong, he thought; there’s a gap, dislocation, between the word and the reality. If they want to reform the world, he thought, why not begin there, at the centre, with themselves? (296).

Significantly, it is after these reflections that Edward, North’s uncle, reveals the clear unsubstantiality resulting from this situation through his very image as “an insect whose body had been eaten out”. Indeed, it cannot be strange to find insect imagery and metamorphoses in the writings of Woolf, fond as she was since her early childhood of insect hunting and observation. This particular interest of course contributed to the recurring employment of insects as elements of both narrative progress and characterization in her novels and short fiction. Hence, while in “*The Death of the Moth*” Woolf devoted a whole essay to the attempts for survival and final death of a moth – even providing the title for the whole volume of collected essays – the original title intended for *The Waves* before its final publication was precisely *The Moths*. Perhaps her most popular example, though, is represented by “*Kew Gardens*”. The story, which unfolds through the

observations of the people walking through the Kew Gardens on a summer day, as well as of the minute description of their natural surroundings, already points to a certain similarity between insects and “(t)he figures of those men and women straggl[ing] past the flower-bed with a curiously irregular movement not unlike that of the white and blue butterflies who crossed the turf in zig-zag flights from bed to bed” (2003: 84).

Whereas one of the most surprising aspects amounts to the discovery that the point of view throughout the story belongs to an animal’s, in fact, a snail – a resort Woolf would later repeat in *Flush* – it is to be underlined that in *Kew*, insects serve as a linking metaphor for the bellic context in which the action is placed. Indeed, at the end of the story, the white butterflies – as well as the thrush – exhibit the grotesqueness of having lost not only their purely bucolic association, but even their living nature, to acquire the mechanism of war machinery in the midst of a natural environment corrupted by the excessive heat and the “drone of the aeroplane” (ibid: 89). Hence, like the thrush, which now hops “like a mechanic bird”, the white butterflies have lost the spontaneity of their movements – “instead of rumbling vaguely the white butterflies danced one above another” (ibid.). Certainly, as Kayser has noted, the disproportion suggested by the fusion of organic and mechanical elements offers a target for the quotation equivalent to a form of disproportion. As he affirms, the mechanical object is alienated by being brought to life, the [living] being by “becoming deprived of it”(1981: 183). In its inertness, the butterflies metamorphose into a “shattered marble column above the tallest flowers” (2003: 89), probably reminiscent of the smoke columns provoked by bombs.

Actually, in a world destroyed not so much by the aftermath of an international conflict as it was by the prospect of a new, more violent outburst of war, many intellectuals contemporary to Woolf agreed on expressing their fear of an imminent return to a primitive form of existence in the light of a decayed modern civilization. Especially influential in this respect were Freud’s postulates sustaining that traces of prehistory survived in certain layers of people’s minds. This theory, along with the particular historical context in which it developed, contributed to spread the notion that a form of evil savageness was lurking beneath people’s consciousness, at the same time as the struggle for survival derived from war would suffice to awaken it. This form of horror underlies Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, in which the outcome of the primitive precedes human destruction. Similarly, Eliot reproduces Freud’s theory in his poem “*Dry Salvages*”, which he finished a few months before Virginia’s death. In his poem, Eliot defines these remnants of the past as

The background look behind the assurance

Of recorded history, the backward half-look

Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror” (1974: 208-9).

Likewise, in her denunciation of the absurdity of the motivations leading men to combat, as well as their pride in war glory, nowadays soldiers acquire to the ridiculous pomposity of feathered tribal warriors – indeed a spectacle, according to Woolf, which deserves the ridicule which we bestow upon the rites of savages:

Since the red and the gold, the brass and the feathers are discarded upon active service, it is plain that their expensive and not, one might suppose, hygienic splendour is invented partly in order to impress the beholder with the majesty of the military office, partly in order through their vanity to induce young men to become soldiers (*Three Guineas*, 139).

Throughout this ridiculization of the primeval, Woolf sought to bring to the fore the absurdity involved by the fallacy of development and progress through imperialist dominion and violence. As in *Three Guineas*, the aim underlying the use of prehistory in *The Years* is to debase the instruments that serve the expansionist politics of dictatorship by exhibiting both the tools and the motivation leading to war in their naked grotesqueness.

It is interesting to note that the same connection between insect imagery and the denunciation of war recurs in *The Years*. Hence, considerably profuse in animal metamorphoses of the characters, who frequently turn into grotesque hybrids, the “Present Day” chapter, reveals the sudden transformation of some of the guests at Delia’s party. Aside from her fascination with moths, Virginia Woolf was not unaware of the powerful suggestive potential of these images, nor of the profound connotative value these entailed. Thus, Kayser underlines as an essentially grotesque element the chorus of insects in Goethe’s *Faust* – a work Woolf was sparsely familiar with, particularly through Marlowe’s version, *Dr. Faustus*. As Brenda Silver has noted in her edition of *Virginia Woolf’s Reading Notebooks*, an entry for Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus* appears in volume XXV of her *Holograph Reading Notes*.^[4] Indeed, apart from the repulsiveness provoked by vermin – a word whose old German equivalent (*Ungeziefer*) denotes “everything that is unclean and unworthy” – the grotesque dimension of these creatures in Goethe’s work is to be explained on the grounds of their evil origin, unnaturally estranged from God’s creation. Nevertheless, by virtue of these associations, Kayser makes his conclusions extensive to artistic and literary manifestations. Thus, he observes, insects fall within the category of animals “especially suitable to the grotesque”, due to their creeping nature, as well as to their ability to “inhabit realms apart from and inaccessible to man” (Kayser, 1981: 182). Analysing grotesqueness in modern art, Noël Carroll (2003: 300) agrees on affirming that insects partake of the propensity to cause fear and disgust, two of the central elements to Bakhtin’s definition of the lower stratum.

In the light of this quality of insect imagery as element of subversion through hierarchical

inversion, Delia's party around the end of the novel offers a defiantly mocking vision of "the educated man" – to use Woolf's terms in *Three Guineas*. Certainly, in her long essay, the author denounced the ridiculous pretentiousness of those men who – provided with unlimited opportunities for both academic and social formation, in detriment of their sisters' – promote combat as the camp for the display of their assumed virility: "Why fight? [...] Obviously there is for you some glory, some necessity, some satisfaction in fighting which we have never felt of enjoyed" (*Three Guineas*, 113).

In her Introduction to the 1998 edition of the novel, Jeri Johnson affirms that the controversial points of the initial plan for *The Pargiters* were derived into *Three Guineas*, whereas *The Years* offers a much more softened vision of the social background. However, while it can be admitted that the pamphlet-like form of *Three Guineas* may address the reader in a more direct way, never does it overshadow the aggressive plasticity of the narrative devices employed in *The Years*. Thus, in the former, the image of a worm serves to denounce the absurdity of war glory, which "would be scotched and crushed where it lies curled up in the rotten cabbage leaves of our prostituted fact-purveyors" (1996: 215), concurrently with the image of dictators as repulsive worms:

[...] and are we not all agreed that the dictator when we meet him abroad is a very dangerous as well as a very ugly animal? And he is here among us, raising his ugly head, spitting his poison, small still, curled up like a caterpillar on a leaf, but in the heart of England. Is it not from this egg, to quote Mr. Wells again, that 'the practical obliteration of [our] freedom by Fascists or Nazis' will spring? (1996: 166).

Yet, it is in the novel that educated men are directly turned into the disgusting vermin of social reality. Moreover, while thus transformed into insects, their grotesqueness is precisely reinforced through the very symbols of war glory and bravery. Hence, the apparently random occurrence of the word "adenoids" during a conversation at Delia's party sets the clue for the metamorphoses of both Hugh Gibbs and North Pargiter – representative members of the class of educated men – into the actual bug North imagines. Indeed, as he reflects on the meaning of "adenoids" – a word he associates with a "wasp-waisted" insect, "pinched in the middle with a hard, shining metallic abdomen" – Hugh Gibbs turns up in his black-and-white-striped waistcoat, while a card in North's pocket, "ray[ing] out of its own accord", makes for the metallic body of the insect, at the same time as the indiscriminate shooting of its rays constitutes a clear reminiscent of war (274).

Similarly, another educated man – the presently old and worn-out Edward – reveals himself to his nephew as "an insect whose body has been eaten out, leaving only the wings, the shell". On this occasion, the grotesqueness implicit in Edward's hybridization into a kind of human insect becomes buttressed by the simultaneous conjugation of three further parameters. On the one hand, Edward's

body provides a site for the carnivalesque convergence of both poles of life and death, while, on the other hand, a further dimension is added to Edward's multiple reality by immediately connecting the absence of his eaten-out body with the inert insubstantiality of gargoyles.

[Edward] was spare and thin. He looked as if his face had been carved and graved by a multitude of fine instruments; as if it had been left out on a frosty night and frozen over. He threw his head back like a horse champing a bit; but he was an old horse, a blue-eyed horse whose bit no longer irked him. His movements were from habit, not from feeling. What had he been doing all these years? North wondered, as they stood there surveying each other. Editing Sophocles? What would happen if Sophocles one of these days were edited? What would they do then, these eaten out hollow-shelled old men? (296-7).

At the same time, the figure of a gargoyle-man, which had already appeared in the episode of Kitty's walk through London streets, brings to the fore the contemporary issue of the decay of culture and civilization, in conjunction with the urgent necessity of intellectual density. Indeed, by the allusion to the class of the "eaten out hollow-shelled old men" to which Edward belongs, Woolf retrieves the educated males her friend T. S. Eliot had previously portrayed in his poem "*The Hollow Men*". Significantly, Eliot had also employed the stone images to protest against the insubstantiality of those erudite men who, afraid of contact with the multitude of people, "dare not meet anyone's eyes", thus turning into alienated beings exhibiting the frigidity and inertness of stone. Hence, Edward, whose face looked as if "it had been carved and graved by a multitude of fine instruments; as if it had been left out on a frosty night and frozen over", is not far from Eliot's men, who, at night:

As wind in dry glass
In our dry cellar
Shade without form
Shade without colour
Paralysed force, gesture without motion (l. 8-12) [...]
Here the stone images (l. 41).

Consequently, by refusing to join the masses, these hollow men in Eliot's poem have lost their potency, thus turning into "stuffed men", who, confined to the "hollow valley" of their insipid erudition, are simply withering away. Thus, depicted as an "old horse [...] whose bit no longer irked him", Edward reveals the profound emptiness of someone whose "movements were from habit, not from feeling". Certainly, separated from contact with the others – "(w)hat had he been doing all these years? North wondered [...] (e)diting Sophocles?" – Edward cannot conceal the uselessness of his erudition in front of his nephew, who wonders "(w)hat would happen if Sophocles one of these

days were edited? What would they do then [...]?" (297).

Yet, like Eliot, Woolf resists giving up hope for her generation. Thus, it is precisely through the bringing down of these men to the lower realms that they may enter a corporeal reality that will enable them to experience the passions and substantiality of matter they had previously denied to themselves. Hence, the mockery of these educated old men entails for Woolf not only the burlesque dimension of their hollow existence. In addition, as typical of the grotesque dimension in which this mockery develops, it is endowed with the ambivalence of carnival laughter, whereby along with satirizing, a purpose of regeneration and renewal is also promoted.

In this sense, this form of dualism involved in the resort to emptiness in Edward's characterization leads to Ruskin's definition of the grotesque as a structure in which gaps and intervals become signifying elements by themselves. This incompleteness, thus, constitutes the basis of the openness to the future inherent to a grotesque conception of the world, insofar as, rather than a mimetic reproduction of reality, it requires an active role from the beholder, who is left to work out the ultimate meaning. It is precisely through this resistance to closure and definition – subsequent to the mentioned inversion of hierarchies – that the narrator announces the possibility of hope.

On the other hand, women do not escape this form of ridiculousness as participants of the same degrading paralysis by virtue of their complacent attitude and conformism. Accordingly, Woolf ferociously mocks the utter absurdity of a manichaeistic society in which "(t)he men shot, [...] the women – [North] looked at his aunt as if she might be breaking into young even there, on that chair – the women broke off into innumerable babies" (275). In fact, along with the insect hybridization, the narrator chose to expand the grotesque paradigm to depict a society lost in the midst of the useless anachronism of its strict conventions. Only through the transgression of this order by the alienating power of grotesque aesthetics can these structures begin to be demolished. In this sense, a dual subversion affects the traditional picture of motherhood in a twofold manner.

Hence, in her presentation as an aged woman giving birth, whereby the two ontological extremes of life and death are intermixed, Milly becomes close to the terracotta figurines described by Bakhtin in his *Rabelais*. Certainly, these figures manifest a "grotesque conception of the body" by "embodying the poles of the biocosmic cycle". Yet, according to Bakhtin, at the same time as manifesting a form of degradation, the images of these pregnant old women become the expression of a vindication for the resistance to accept an inert order of things, thus clamouring for the renewal and transformation of life, understood as an unfinished process. As he puts it: "(t)here is nothing completed, nothing calm and stable in the bodies of these old hags. They combine a senile,

decaying, and deformed flesh with the flesh of new life, conceived, but as yet unformed” (1984: 25-6).

This protest against the established patriarchal order is reinforced by the inclusion of a new dimension into the image of Milly’s motherhood through the scatological aspects involved by the rendering of motherhood at the very moment of birth-giving. Nevertheless, it is precisely through this association between the female and the lower stratum that Woolf transgresses the borders of sacredly “clean” motherhood as a form of submission to the male. In this sense, such a subversive image of motherhood is in tune with Kristeva’s definition of the subject. In her *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva uses the notion of abjection to describe the horror experienced by the child in its attempt to separate itself from the pre-Oedipal mother in the passage from the imaginary to the Symbolic Order. Yet, at the same time, the abject implies – as Christine Ross has noted – an effort to liberate the notion of subjective identity from the existing preconceptions and forms of definition. Indeed, chiming in with the grotesque notions inherent to a carnival perspective, this is only possible by bringing into play the traditionally rejected corporeal reality of the body – or, in Kristeva’s terms, the abject. As Ross affirms:

The abject belongs to the category of “corporeal rubbish”, of the incorporated-that-must-be-evacuated, indicating the incapacity of Western modern cultures to accept not only the mother but also, as Elizabeth Grosz underlines, the materiality of the body, its limits and cycles, mortality, disease, corporeal fluids, excrement, and menstrual blood (2003: 282).

This incorporation of an scatological dimension into maternity, thus, involves an abrupt disruption of the identity patterns created by a patriarchal apparatus that proves as useless and devoid of meaning as their artifices. Certainly, having proved the hollowness of male members of “intelligentsia” as well as their incapability to prevent combat, the narrator provides women with a special relevance as sites of hope for the future. Unlike Eliot, who glimpsed the possibility of regeneration in a reversal of the hierarchies in which these intellectual men were positioned, Woolf endows a primary role to women as agents of regeneration, even though she does not lose hope in the possibility of male regeneration. Nonetheless, as she would later manifest in *Three Guineas*, the narrator stresses that such a regeneration is feasible, not through the perpetuation of male values of culture and intellectuality, but from the free fluid reality of female existence.

Whereas another form of transgression of natural borders occurs through the suggestion of “babies having other babies”, it is perhaps more interesting to note the carnivalesque excesses entailed by a birth that results in innumerable creatures. Moreover, in one of the “two enormous chunks” – as later entitled by Leonard Woolf (1962: 302) – the narrator eliminated from the final version of *The Years*, a new form of multiple birth sets the bases for a grotesque characterization. In

this scene, Celia Pargiter reads in the newspaper about the triplets the postman's wife has given birth to. While already including within her narrative a form of abnormality, Woolf strived for highlighting the grotesqueness involved by the simultaneous coming to the world of "three red faces under a flannel hood" that Celia conceives as the potential graduates the narrator would mock in her *Three Guineas*.

Here then is your own letter. In that, after asking for an opinion about how to prevent war, you go on to suggest certain practical measures by which we can help you to prevent it. These appears that we should sign a manifesto, pledging ourselves 'to protect culture and intellectual liberty[5]'; that we should join a certain society, devoted to certain measures whose aim is to preserve peace; and, finally, that we should subscribe to that society which like the others is in need of funds (1992: 202).

So far, it might rather be interpreted as Woolf's announce of hope at the prospect of three just-born girls – the gender of the triplets is never specified – to "throw a shaft of light into the future" by attaining the possibility of becoming Cambridge "hooded" graduates. Nevertheless, a more consistent view arises when interpreting the irony entailed by the sharp downturn of the children's destinies who, born as males, will be "hooded" with war helmets instead, as it is inferred through Celia's calculations. Indeed, this irony is reinforced by the unawareness of Celia's paradoxically being able to survive them, while at the same time, her calculations have significantly been interrupted by nineteen-forty-four: "(i)f they were born yesterday, she thought, [...] in nineteen-twenty-four they'll be ten; in nineteen-thirty-four, twenty; in nineteen-forty-four – when I shall be dead, she thought, getting up" (372).

Bearing this in mind, the three red faces – which suggest the violent rage of combat – become similarly emblematic of the redness of the carnival fool described by Bakhtin, very much in tune with the grotesque undertones involved by the scene. Actually, though these episodes on multiple birth – even though one of them was removed from the definitive version – Woolf echoed the contemporary interest on abnormality and the defamiliarization of the usual order manifested by Surrealist artists. Indeed, the triplets retains a considerable degree of similarity with Claude Cahun's use of doubling in one of the photographs with which she illustrated her collection of autobiographical essays *Aveux nos avenues* (1930) – as mentioned by Hoving (2003: 223).

As in Woolf's scene, the only invisible part of the subject's body – in this case, the photographer herself – is the head, though multiplied to create a kind of bodiless Siamese quadruplets. Moreover, easily comparable to baby's heads on the grounds of their hairlessness, as well as their hermaphrodite nature – according to the artist's analysis of her work – these figures share with Woolf's episodes of plural birthing the inherent attempt for defying contemporary

impositions on the role of women, directly proceeding from patriarchal forms of categorization. Thus, while Woolf rebels against the definition of woman through her productive function as mothers, for Hoving, Cahun's photomontage responds to a desire for subverting traditional norms of female beauty (2003: 224).

Furthermore, without losing the connection with the war connotations referred above, Celia's association on reading the news – "(i)t was odd – birth; destruction" ultimately provides the birth of the triplets with the grotesque form of ambiguity that achieves in itself the impossible convergence of both extremes of life and death. Hence, as long as it constitutes a transgression of tyrannical violence, associated with male thirst for dominance, this image becomes a precedent of the inverted birth, whereby pregnancy is oriented to death, Woolf would later use in the episode of the toad half-swallowed by the dying snake in *Between The Acts* (89). In tune with the appearance of these grotesque hybrids, indeed from the very beginning of the novel, the narration strikes the reader through the sudden appearance of unexpected malformations that affect some of the characters. Thus, as soon as it opens, the narrative sets up the carnivalesque atmosphere in which the action is going to develop.

Plagued with the typical uncertainty of carnival – "(i)t was an uncertain spring" (3) – the initial scene describes the heterogeneous amalgam of sounds and personages crowding the city of London on a Spring day. While the location of the opening narration on a rainy April day can be considered as a hint of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* – admittedly, an emblematic medieval rendering of a catalogue of grotesque characters – it is necessary to point out that the allusion to the big shopping malls – such as Whiteley's and the Army and Navy Stores – has been noted by L. Peach as a modern form of carnival in the streets. Actually, – as J. Johnson remarks – before the turn of the century, Whiteley's had become a huge department store, to the extent of proclaiming itself a 'Universal Provider' (*The Years*, 1998: 302, n.1).

Moreover, if the description tallied with Bakhtin's outline of the carnival market-place, laughter – as a central element within the carnivalesque taxonomy – comes to dissolve any difference between Bakhtin's medieval public square and nineteenth century London squares. In this sense, even the "frail and for the most part melancholy pipe of sound" meets the imitation and even parody of the birds around:

It was an uncertain spring. The weather, perpetually changing, sent clouds of blue and purple flying over the land. In the country farmers, looking at the fields, were apprehensive; in London umbrellas were opened, and then shut by people looking up at the sky. But in April such weather was to be expected. Thousands of shop assistants made that remark, as they handed neat parcels to ladies in flounced dresses standing on the other side of the counter

at Whiteley's and the Army and Navy Stores. Interminable processions of shoppers in the West End, of business men in the East, paraded the pavements, like caravans perpetually marching, – so it seemed to those who had any reason to pause, say, to post a letter, or at a club window in Piccadilly. The stream of landaus, victorias and hansom cabs was incessant; for the season was beginning. In the quieter streets musicians doled out their frail and for the most part melancholy pipe of sound, which was echoed, or parodied, here in the streets of Hyde Park, here in St James's by the twitter of sparrows and the sudden outbursts of the amorous but intermittent thrush. The pigeons in the squares shuffled in the tree tops, letting fall a twig or two, and crooned over and over again the lullaby that was always interrupted (3).

Indeed, the same mocking birds would also serve as a marker for the carnivalesque tone in Woolf's *Between the Acts*, where the juggling thrush replaces the solemnity of the nightingale in a similar scene in Eliot's *The Wasteland*. Certainly, this view is consistent with the use of bird imagery throughout the novel, whereby birds become a kind of "buffoon" or "fool" figure through which a considerable bulk of the human ridiculousness exhibited in the narrative is channelled. Hence, at the manner of classical fabulists, who – as T. Wright has noted with his taxonomy of caricature and grotesque types – employed birds in their long narratives to satirize "the vices of contemporary society" (1976: 77). Woolf recurs to the bird with a similar purpose of unmasking the foolery of a system self-enclosed by its own conventionalisms: "I want to give the whole of the present society – nothing less: facts as well as the vision". (*A Writer's Diary*, 1953: 192). Bird imagery does provide a fruitful source to ridicule and parody the society portrayed in *The Years*. Accordingly, while from the beginning Abel is characterized by a "right hand resembl[ing] the claw of some aged bird" – particularly, a grotesque feature reminiscent of old Miss Parry looking like a frozen bird in *Mrs. Dalloway* (68) – this form of animalization tallies, at the same time, with the exposure of the moral corruptness inherent to Abel Pargiter, as it will be discussed in further detail on dealing with deformity.

At the same time, the aging condition in the Colonel – as it also applied in the case of Miss Parry – becomes symptomatic of the alluded atrophy of a post-Victorian society, in which people have developed the claws and paws of prehistoric animals in their zeal for protecting at any cost the roots of the institutional apparatus. In this sense, G. Beer has commented on the implicational meaning of prehistory in Woolf's novel, where the narrator uses the primitive as a warning against the fallacy of development and the danger of the collapse of civilization on the verge of an international conflict (1996: 26). Hereby, through the eyes of North – the returned combatant in *The Years* – the family is revealed as "defending traditional structures" with "the unsheathed claws of the primeval swamp" (227).

Indeed, Woolf was already familiar with the vice and corruption of the satirization of contemporary society through the grotesque transformation of characters into ridiculous birds.

Among Woolf's reading notebooks, B. Silver (1983: 107, XIX, B.32) includes *Volpone*, the Elizabethan comedy in which Ben Jonson, who had defined his play as "a study of human depravity" – as quoted by A. Fox (1990: 88) – effected his harsh critique through characters such as Corvino or Volpone – the Latin equivalents for "raven" and "vulture", respectively. It must be noted that Woolf did not particularly admire Ben Jonson, whose resort to satire she considered as too evident a form of expressing his social protest. As A. Fox remarks, "(s)he resented Jonson's intellectualism", which she conceived as linked to the rudimentariness of his "vision", on the grounds, as Woolf had observed in her *Diary*, that "the more complex a vision the less it lends itself to satire" (*A Writer's Diary*, 237, May 6th, 1935). Nevertheless, in her essay "*Notes on an Elizabethan Play*", she did praise Jonson's technique for the construction of these hybrid characters in *Volpone*, mentioning him as the only author, along with Shakespeare, capable of creating "flesh and blood characters" (*Common Reader I*, 76).

Notwithstanding the degree of admiration Woolf felt towards Jonson, the truth is Fox (1990: 148) has noticed particular echoes of Volpone's seduction speech to Celia – his also sly wife – in Elvira, The Pargiters' version of Sara, in the scene in which the latter refers to Kitty as "clothed in starlight; with green in her hair" (138). Thus, while not so much concerned with moral depravation, Woolf addressed her collection of bird types in *The Years* to the derision of the general incapability of reaction against imposed norms and conventions.

Another brick in the solid edifice of British society at the turn of the century, Court members would also be exposed by the narrator as a representative case of the profound absurdity on which the consolidation of the patriarchal system lies. Hence, *Three Guineas* would offer a portrayal of judges as utterly ridiculous in their animal-like outfit and paraphernalia surrounding them.

Likewise, the judges at the Court in *The Years* cannot escape being debased through bird metamorphosis, whereby they become "like a flock of birds settling here and there on a field" (79). Certainly, noting the "unfamiliar" feature typical of grotesqueries, the narrator bluntly mocks the oddness of Morris, one of the Pargiter brothers, in his yellow wig, at the same time as one barrister turns into "a chicken breasted little man". Significantly, this transformation becomes reminiscent of Hugh, also a Court member in *Mrs. Dalloway*, on the basis of whose pretentiousness he had metamorphosed through the narration into a swollen-busted pigeon:

Evelyn was a good deal out of sorts, said Hugh, intimating by a kind of pout or swell of his very well-covered, manly, extremely handsome, perfectly upholstered body (he was almost too well dressed always, but presumably had to be, with his little job at Court) [...] (*Mrs. Dalloway*, 6).

Nevertheless, in the case of the judges at Court, as emblematic of the post-Victorian zeal for preserving honour and respectability within the precincts of patriarchal rule, the narrator extends her satire beyond the irony involved by bird metamorphosis. In this sense, she highlights the grotesque exaggeratedness conferred by judges' garments upon the faces of their wearers, very much in tune with the unfamiliarity of "the solemn sallow atmosphere forbidding personalities":

From where [Celia] sat she could see [Morris'] face in profile; the wig squared his forehead, and gave him a framed look, like a picture. Never had she seen him to such advantage; with such a brow, with such a nose. She glanced round. They all looked like pictures; all the barristers looked emphatic, cut out, like eighteen-century portraits hung upon a wall (79).

In fact, Woolf herself had already contemplated very similar features in some family portraits by an early Victorian blacksmith she had bought at The Monks House Sale. Thus, in a letter to Margaret Llewelyn-Davies on August 17, 1919, as quoted by J. Marcus (1987: 73), Woolf pointed out the powerfully suggestive quality of these paintings as seemingly bird-like caricaturizations:

They are family groups and [the painter] began the heads very large, and hadn't got room for the hands and legs, so these dwindle off till they're about the size of sparrows' claw, but the effect is superb – the character overwhelming[6].

Furthermore, in their picture-like appearance and "framed look", these Court members in *The Years* chime in with the form of caricature observed by Wright, whereby satirization is accomplished by endowing the character with the features of a playing card. Hence, as Wright notes, in the seventeenth century the use of these cards became in England a popular "medium for spreading political caricature" (1972: 372). In particular, Wright underlines the ace of diamonds, which bore the satirical title "The High Court of Justice, or Oliver's Slaughter's House" and a caricature of Sir Arthur Hafelrigg, an "impetuous and authoritative" Court member during the Commonwealth. The picture, which shows Sir Arthur in Court attire holding a flower is not far from Woolf's depiction of these wigged and gowned men, whose excessive pomposity points to a dubious form of virility.

In view of these scenes, it becomes evident that the narrator appoints both Kitty and North as the carnival buffoons through which a considerable bulk of her social critique is channelled. Their function as narrative vehicles for the presentation/exposure of society's ridiculousness is aided by their position as patent outsiders – in the case of Kitty, she is alien to the Oxbridge system, whereas North, as a returned combatant, is endowed with the distant vision of the traveller. Nevertheless, according to carnival politics, the figure of the buffoon is simultaneously linked to the role of fool, whereby his position as an exposé of general vices and corruption is in conjunction with his identity as also the receiver of communal mockery. At the same time, displayed under the

distinctive suit of playing cards, the portrait of the authoritative Sir Arthur, whose long hair and wide-rimmed hat frame his head, becomes certainly reminiscent of the square-looking face of Morris, significantly sitting “awful, magisterial” under the symbols of the Lion and the Unicorn.

Not only authority representatives such as Court members are mocked by Woolf in *The Years*. The upper classes in general, a bedrock for the maintenance of the rigid structures of the Victorian system, constitute as well a major front for Woolf’s harsh critique against the society of her time. Accordingly, the party guests at Kitty Lasswade’s, in the “1914” chapter, undergo a similar bird transformation, thus becoming “like gulls settling on fish” moving around in a “rising” and “fluttering” movement a form of caricaturization epitomizing the profound insipidity of their chattering: “Yet animated as it sounded, to Kitty’s ear the talk lacked substance. It was battledore and shuttlecock talk, to be kept going until the door opened and the gentlemen came in [...] ‘Damn these women!’ [Kitty] said to herself” (189).

Moreover, it is through Kitty that the hypocrisy governing upper-class manners becomes unmasked – “How many parties ‘would’ it need, she wondered, to turn her satirical, uncompromising cousin into an obedient member of society?” (191-2). In this sense, while Kitty envisions her upper-class party guests as insubstantial gulls, she becomes, in return, the object of laughter for the attending ladies on account of her different, less lady-like manners:

‘Why should we all stand?’ said Kitty. She made a movement with her hands towards the seats. She did things like that so abruptly that they called her, behind her back, ‘The Grenadier’ (188).

Even Martin, Kitty’s cousin, teases her through his ironical remark about the success of the party – “ ‘A very brilliant party, Lady Lasswade’, he said with his usual tiresome irony” (191). Likewise, the same applies to North, the buffoon-figure through which Maggie had become a primeval bird struggling for the survival of traditional Victorian family. Hence, as it has been pointed out, ‘North would, in return, get immersed into the same swamp he had criticized, simultaneously metamorphosing into a kind of bird, as suggested by his pecking movements – “(w)hy – why – why –’ he said at last, making a gesture as if he were plucking tufts of grass from the carpet” (277).

Furthermore, as with Kitty and North, who at a certain point serve as heralds of the narrator’s mockery against a decayed upper society, an outsider from those layers summarizes this view. Hence, Jo Robson, left out from the Oxbridge society to which his father belongs – much like Woolf’s reality – and the farming son of the Robson family, launches, through an apparently meaningless remark, Woolf’s apprehension of contemporary society as a catalogue of stunningly

absurd and hypocritical personages.

In the light of this, it becomes evident that Woolf intended Jo's vision of his hens as a bunch of "imbecile fowls" susceptible of reduction to a pure "huddle of feathers", not different from the birdlike Robsons and upper-class peers who move around without any substantial purpose. Certainly, it seems clear that it is both classes of fowls that Jo refers when describing their senseless activity – "(t)hey scratched up the path; left little curls of feather here and there [...], which were more to his fancy". Moreover, the inherent paralysis of these members of the upper classes, which obstructs the way to progress the imperative of demolishing the obsolete structure on which it is founded, becomes consolidated within the paradigm of its own grotesqueness through Jo's final reflection: "(B)ut nothing grew there. How grow flowers [...] if one kept hens?" (49).

Further complexity is involved by the character of Sara Pargiter. Even though depicted at a certain moment as a "dishevelled fowl" (167), comparable to "one of those birds at the zoo" (127), her presence throughout the novel entails a broader development of the Fool's figure. Actually, Woolf did not ignore the immeasurable potential of this personage, which she had already employed in her previous novels. Indeed, familiarized as she was with Shakespeare's plays, she had admitted in her 1925 essay "*On Not Knowing Greek*" that Shakespeare's "fools and madmen" functioned to help one grasp "the meaning of the play", at the same time as she suggested the role of the chorus in terms of a mockery to the hero, as well as to the society he represents (*The Common Reader I*, 1968: 46).

Hence, if Kitty and North had been formerly pointed as buffoons, this identity acquires additional solidity in Sara, a character Woolf herself intended as the spokesperson to voice the reality of "an utterly corrupt society [...] speaking in the person of Elvira Pargiter" (Woolf, 1978: 190). As in the case of fools in Shakespearean drama, Woolf aimed at endowed Sara with the responsibility of accomplishing the narrator's desire for making her novel "a summing up" of "millions of ideas but no preaching" (ibid), yet without conferring Elvira, the holograph version of Sara, with the privileged position of a leader or focal character within the narration: "(t)he figure of Elvira is the difficulty. She may become too dominant. She is to be seen only in relation to other things" (ibid: 192).

Furthermore, even though discarded for the published version of *The Years*, an explicit reference in the draft about Elvira's role was meant to leave no doubt as for the role of Sara within the novel. As Fox has quoted it, the manuscript unmask an Elvira Pargiter announcing her cousin – with whom she is to leave for Delia's party in the "Present Day" chapter – they should "dress up and go to the party" where they will "act another play", with George in the role of the "returned

wanderer” and Elvira in “the part of zany fool buffoon [...]”. (Woolf, 113-4 [Fox, 1990: 144-5]). Indeed, certain hints to that role, which Virginia had directly borrowed from Greek drama, as well as from Shakespeare’s plays, are strategically pointed out in *The Years*. In this sense, Sara’s living near Prison Tower implies the assumption of her own identity as a battered figure, in terms of its clear connection – as Fox suggests – with Clarence, the Duke in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, condemned to imprisonment before being murdered by his brother, King Edward (1990: 151). In consonance with this, though from a different perspective, Marcus points to Sara’s reference to her abode as a “cave [...] scooped out of mud and dung” (139) as the character’s self-recognition of her outsider position – a fact Marcus associates with Woolf’s desire for attesting for the marginal position of women within the patriarchal house. Thus, for the critic, this cave becomes a mocking version of the morally restrictive patriarchal house, yet ‘pargetted’ so as to conceal its absolute decay (1987: 57) – a view in fact consistent with the ridiculization of the traditional Victorian family through Maggie’s fowl-like transformation, as it was discussed before.

Moreover, while the published version excluded Sara's explicit self-allusion as a fool, numerous glimmers of her identity contribute to the recognition of this character as such. Accordingly, even when recognizing Sara as more “oblique” and “cryptic” than her holograph’s equivalent, Jeri Johnson considers the character “has the licence of a Shakespearean Fool but one who most frequently suggests rather than states her criticisms” (*The Years*, 339, n.6). Indeed, it is precisely through Sara that the sharpest critique against society is addressed. Thus, even as a girl, Sara already reveals her function as the voice for the narrator’s attack against Victorian conventions. In this sense, she anticipates both her Fool identity and her zeal for demolishing the rigid structure imposed by the patriarchal rule. Thus, aware of the truth about her father’s brother, the dubiously moral Abel Pargiter, Sara bluntly mocks Sir Digby, representative of the same rotted structure of patriarchal society, on being rebuked by him. Hence, not accidentally, Sara’s playful imitation of her father’s advice to “reform one’s habits” significantly turns into an overt burlesque version or patriarchal impositions, which become deprived of any solemnity and meaning.

‘That is a reason, I should have thought’, said Sir Digby, surveying his daughters, ‘to-er-to-er- reform one’s habits.’ He stumbled, trying to make his sentence sound playful; but it turned out as it generally did when he talked to the children, lame and rather pompous.

Sara looked at her father as if she were considering him.

‘To-er-to-er- reform one’s habits’, she repeated. Emptied of all meaning, she had got the rhythm of his words exactly. The effect was somehow comic [...]; but Digby [...] was annoyed (92).

Yet, this mockery of tradition is not limited to patriarchal structures. In fact, in the “1907”

chapter, also through imitation, Sara comes to embody a grotesque projection of her mother: “she imitated her mother’s manner so exactly that Maggie smiled. They were the very opposite of each other – Lady Pargiter so sumptuous; Sally so angular [...] The imitation had been perfect” (102). The “angular” and unfeminine Sara, whom not even drunken men follow – “(t)hat was obvious. She was sallow, angular and plain” (127) – reveals herself as the charmless, though liberated version of womanhood after the murder of the Angel in the House, mainly represented in the novel by the complacent and delicately feminine Mrs. Pargiter.

[...] you may not know what I mean by the Angel in the House. I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it – in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all – I need not say it – she was pure” (*The Death of the Moth*, 150).

In view of Woolf’s zeal for disrupting the conventionality of a centralizing, one-sided social reality, it is precisely the carnival paradigm based on the politics of subversion and multiplicity that provides the narrator with the tools for transgressing this monochromy. In this sense, Sara’s androgyny becomes a form of surpassing the patriarchal monadism of sex categories, and attaining liberation. Bearing this in mind, the same applies to Rose, Sara’s vindicating cousin. Indeed, partaking of a similar form of androgyny, Rose illustrates another embodiment of this new woman, released from the manacles of self-enclosing feminization of the female as an instrument of patriarchal control. Self-defined as “Rose of Pargiter’s Horse”, Rose partakes of a twofold form of carnivalized portrayal. Hence, depicted by means of the extended metaphor of a horse throughout the whole narrative, Rose’s rendering occurs in consonance with the pattern of grotesque hybridizations analysed in *The Years*. In fact, in a letter dated from 1919, Woolf had already begun to conceive of “an idea for a story where all the characters do nothing else – but they’re all quadrupeds!” (*Letters II*, 394, 28th October, 1919). Considering the nature of these hybrid forms, Margaret Rickert has pointed out the derisive overtone of these creations, designed with a purpose of social satire and vindication. In this sense, according to Rickert,

the animal-human grotesque is a different creature. Its basic idea is the application to animals (sometimes rendered naturalistically, sometimes as monsters) of the attributes of human beings, usually with the intention of caricaturing or even satirizing human types or their occupations (1965: 100).

In this light, the equine Rose comes to represent, in its physical dimension, the most radically grotesque projection of combatants who, paradoxically, are often revered in similar terms as the whole of war machinery. As Woolf herself quoted from a soldier’s biography.

Certainly, Rose's depiction as a horse arises as a manifest of Woolf's desire for bringing to the fore a satirical counterpart to the war propaganda that was spreading in the years preceding the international conflict – a mocking reversal she would later expand in her *Three Guineas*. Indeed, considering the ridiculousness of men's garments for war as a form of boastfulness, Woolf would remark the absurdity of "(a) woman who advertised her motherhood by a tuft of horsehair", which "would scarcely [...] be a venerable object" (1996: 114).

I have had the happiest possible life, and have always been working for war, and have now got into the biggest prime of life for a soldier [...] Such a magnificent regiment! Such men, such horses! Within ten days I hope Francis and I will be riding side by side straight at the Germans" (cf. *ibid*).

Simultaneously, endowed with the utter freedom of reference over space and time inherent to grotesque forms, Rose also embodies the delusive psychological image that arises as the aftermath of war – once neither patriotism nor the impressive magnificence of war paraphernalia have been of use to avoid it. Accordingly, Rose's monstrous hybridization accurately reflects the bellical metaphors Woolf quotes from Owen, whereby the poet precisely portrays the "Inhumanity [and] Horrible beastliness of war" (1996: 115).

On the other hand, this presentation of Rose in the midst of a metamorphic process of animalization chimes in with the particular effect arising as a result – according to Harpham – of "our confrontation with the most discordant of all figures", which in fact entails a form of validation of whatever was previously repressed and unacceptable. In Harpham's words, "(t)he grotesque provides a model for a kind of argument that takes the exceptional or marginal, rather than the merely conventional, as the type" (1982: 21).

Along with the transgression involved by the grotesque rendering of Rose, a further form of boundlessness is suggested by the implicit carnivalesque cross-dressing of the character, often perceived as "more like a man than a woman" (125). Hereby, at the same time as she subverts the enclosing categorizations Woolf had insistently denounced, Rose accurately represents a corporeal realization of the androgyne Woolf had vindicated in *A Room of One's Own*.

But the sight of the two people getting into the taxi and the satisfaction it gave me made me also ask whether there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body, and whether they also require to be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness. And I went on amateurishly to sketch a plan of the soul so that in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female [...] Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties (1996: 90)

In her study of androgyny and Modernism, Lisa Rado situates Woolf's resort to this figure as

an attempt to find a kind of mystical centre where “to express a fantasy of wholeness [...] beyond the corporeal”. Nevertheless, it is necessary to remark that the employment of Woolf’s androgyny is to be understood as a form, not of idealistic unitarism or spiritual quest. Instead – within the context of a fragmented post-war society, still governed by aesthetic preceptal norms – androgyny would represent a clamour for the validation of corporeal principles as the starting point in the search for identity. Accordingly, as Rado herself admits, it is precisely because the unfinished nature of the androgyne is opposed to any form of close definition or, absoluteness – that Woolf promotes the disruption of the suffocating monadism of traditional sex roles.

In the light of this, Rado has acknowledged the permanently unending process of “the figure of androgyne”, whereby it “is always on the verge of destroying itself”, thus impeding, at the same time, any form of permanent definition. Indeed, in the “1908” chapter, Eleanor’s thoughts entail a dual form of cross-dressing through which both Rose and Martin become affected by a similar sexual uncertainty.

[Rose] ought to have been the soldier, Eleanor thought. She was exactly like the picture of Old Uncle Pargiter of Pargiter’s House. Martin, now that he had shaved his moustache off and showed his lips, ought to have been – what? (115).

Furthermore, in order to accomplish the defiant fusion of sexes entailed by Rose, the narrator strategically offers the powerful contrast, nearly by the end of the novel, her image involves through the subversive overlapping of past and present scenes in Rose’s portrayal. In this sense, the unfeminine image of Rose as a girl in a pink frock, yet envisioned by Martin as “a horrid little spitfire [...] with her hair scraped off her forehead” becomes counterpoised by the suggestion of a penis in Rose’s body, who “sat down abruptly, holding her knife erect in her hand” (304-5).

On the other hand, Woolf goes further in exploiting Rose’s association with war. Often depicted as a kind of soldier – “(s)he made an odd angle with her head thrown back [...] as if she were a military man” (262) – Rose’s dual form of ambiguity, by virtue of both her hybrid and androgynous nature, constitutes a clamour for women’s liberation from the subservient role, withdrawn from force-requiring activities, in a manichaestically conceived world where, as North pointed out, “men shot” and “women [...] had babies”.

Hereby, Rose comes to complete the allegorical triad – along with the characters of Miss Craddock and Milly, whom North imagines as giving birth to multiple creatures – Woolf had echoed on attacking the conformism of upper-class women. Thus, while envisioning two of these cases – Lady Winchilsea and the Duchess of Newcastle – as both “disfigured and deformed”, Woolf quotes the latter to illustrate the subservient position of women, who, as she graphically makes the

reader realize through her characters, “ ‘live like Bats or Owls, labour like Beasts, and die like Worms’ ” (*A Room of One's Own*, 1996: 57).

This form of duality chimes in with the type of carnivalesque duality Sara acquires through her buffoon-like imitations. In particular, this becomes evident in Sara's imitation of Edward, who by 1910, the year in which the episode occurs, is a Cambridge student. In tune with the Oxbridge mockery distilled throughout the novel, the scene becomes especially significant insofar as it constitutes Sara's voicing of the protest against the unequal opportunities for the daughters of educated men. Not only that, the pomposity with which she recites the quotation she has had to learn subsidiarily through Edward clearly mocks the hypocrisy characterizing her cousin, as well as the Oxbridge world in which he resides: “(f)or he had a way of belittling himself, when in fact he had a very good opinion of himself” (124). Moreover, it is by exactly embodying her cousin's identity, which constitutes an extension of her androgyny – “(t)he voice was Ed's; Rose could hear him say it” – that the mockery is reinforced.

Yet, if this ambiguity has remained a constant throughout the historical development of the grotesque, the contemporariness of Woolf with Surrealist artists particularly contributed to an inevitably common background for the emergence and evolution of their respective creations, as it was anticipated in the discussion about hybrid types. Certainly, the narrator in *The Years* would also share the Surrealist delight in deformity, sometimes at the boundaries of monstrosity and bestialization. In this respect, it is necessary to consider the two-dimensional nature of the grotesque, in terms of Bakhtin's ambivalence of carnival politics. Bearing this in mind, an inherent form of duality lies at the very core of grotesque manifestations, whereby two components quite essentially define the nature of the grotesque. Hence, on the one hand, Bakhtin associates grotesque manifestations as symptomatic of the fear imposed upon man throughout generations. As McElroy has expressed it:

This, then, is the first goal of the special kind of terror that discharges itself in images of the grotesque: it is primitive, magical, uncanny. The grotesque transforms the world from what we 'know' it to be to what we fear it might be. It distorts or exaggerates the surface of reality in order to tell a qualitative truth about it (1989: 5).

On the other hand, while it externalizes man's fear and disgust towards a distorted reality, the vision of the world it offers simultaneously serves as the most radical expression of hope in the prospect of a universe in continuous change and progress towards future:

(E)l cuerpo grotesco es un cuerpo en movimiento. No está nunca listo ni acabado: está siempre en estado de construcción, de creación y él mismo construye otro cuerpo; además, este cuerpo absorbe el mundo y es absorbido

por éste[7] [...] (65)

Indeed, Surrealist artists' interest in deformity is attested by Bataille's definition of the term "*informe*", in radical opposition to the notion of the shaped, precise order of things that academic men pursue. Accordingly, for Bataille, the "*informe*" – as noted by K.A.Hoving – "serves to bring things down in the world, away from the form that things are generally required to have" (2003: 226).

Hereby, even as a child, Sara's malformation is emphasized in conjunction with that feeling of disgust the grotesque aims at provoking on its beholder as a call upon the truth it attempts to communicate. Hence, when taken to greet her uncle, Colonel Pargiter, Sara's deformity is revealed: "(s)he had been dropped when she was a baby; one shoulder was slightly higher than the other" (88). Yet, she will also exhibit the defiant attitude that would later characterize her, thus opposing her mother's consciousness about her body – "(s)he held out her hand partly to coax the little girl, partly, Abel guessed, in order to conceal the very slight deformity that always made him uncomfortable [...], it made him feel squeamish; he could not bear the least deformity in a child". In addition, Sara demonstrates her purpose of turning down the privileged position of patriarchy by laughing off her early experience of male rejection: "(i)t did not affect her spirits however [...]. Then she tugged at her sister's frock, and they both rushed away into the back room laughing" (88).

As years go by, birth malformation – an issue particularly central to Surrealistic aesthetics – accentuates in Sara, a fault that will result in her being nicknamed "Hunch" in the holograph version of *The Pargiters*, as Fox has pointed out (1993: 143). Indeed, in a scene in the "1910" chapter, Sara is precisely introduced through this feature – "Sara sat hunched on the music stool", a fact that is stressed as "she was not playing". Nonetheless, as it became evident in the episode of Sara's childhood, the grotesqueness entailed by the character's rendering actually turns her into the herald of hope for – if not a near improvement of social conditions – at least the plausibility of its buttressing and promotion. In this sense, D. Summers has pointed out the talismanic value of Hellenistic "hunchbacks", insofar as these types have been regarded as "idols" (2003, 30-1) since ancient times for prompting the advent of prosperity. Yet, even when conferring positive connotations to Sara – the most patently grotesque character in the novel – Woolf took care not to endow her with a privileged position. In this respect, a significant parallel is to be established between this novel and its subsequent, *Between the Acts*. Hereby, as it would later occur in Woolf's last novel, an explicit rejection of leaders, very much in tune with the carnival politics of decentralization, has been inserted into the narration. Hence, if in *Between the Acts* this end is mainly accomplished through Lucy Swithin's reports about her brother's reluctance to thank the author, as well as through the gramophone's final speech, in *The Years*, the narrator has in Maggie,

Sara's sister, the voice that rejects leadership. Of course, her speech is imbued within a carnivalesque atmosphere of laughter and joyful relativization of official seriousness (Bakhtin, 1929: 124). Indeed, while the guests at the party debate about who is to give a speech, Maggie suddenly laughs off their insistence on a central figure, while displaying the typical merriness inherent to carnival spirit:

'Yes, it's Maggie's turn to speak', said Nicholas. [...] But she shook her head. Laughter took her and shook her. She laughed, throwing her head back as if she were possessed by some genial spirit outside herself that made her bend and rise, as a tree, North thought, is tossed and bent by the wind. No idols, no idols, her laughter seemed to chime as if the tree were hung with innumerable bells, and he laughed too (311).

Again, as in *Between the Acts*, in which the gramophone has been considered as a mocking deviation from the dictator's figure, special emphasis is placed on the rejection of discourse as an instrument of leadership – which implicitly debunks political speeches in the period as a form of Fascist propaganda. In this sense, oratory is dismissed insofar as it may also constitute a vehicle for mass control, notwithstanding the purpose it is intended at. Accordingly, religious sermons become as well debased as mere samples of artistic discourse, yet devoid of any transcendental meaning, as Ed's statement suggests: “ ‘The only place where oratory is now practised as an art [...] is the church’ ” (306). Indeed, this rejection of homiletic preaching anticipates the subversive depiction of Reverend Streatfield, the priest in *Between the Acts*, reduced to the absurd image of “an irrelevant forked stake” (171), and whose attempts for becoming a representative member of the community are invariably interrupted.

Furthermore, in this scene from the “Present Day” chapter, any attempt for leadership over the audience through intellectual pretension becomes soon aborted. This is, for instance, the case of Nicholas, whose ridiculousness on adopting a pompous attitude for his intended speech is confirmed by his display of “an oratorical gesture” – exactly after the hollowness of oratory has been affirmed:

But Nicholas has risen. He took a deep breath which expanded his shirt-front. With one hand he fumbled with his fob; the other hand he flung out with an oratorical gesture (306).

As it was commented on dealing with hybridity, Woolf's characterization for her androgynous Sara does not differ from the use of grotesque aesthetics made by Surrealist artists, nor do her objectives. Of course, it is obvious that, despite the different connotations and priorities it obtains in different periods, the resort to the grotesque paradigm obeys to the desire for becoming immersed in a series of parameters which are common to the different aesthetic perspectives throughout its diachronic evolution. Hereby, an inherent residue of a subversive purpose surrounding impositions

whatever their nature, along with an attempt for promoting the creation of a new reality, which should result from the conceptualization of a dramatically different order, free from the oppression of the world destroyed through this art. As defined by B. McElroy:

[...] to render an object as grotesque is to situate it in a world which is grotesque. The artist of the grotesque does not merely combine disparate forms or distort surfaces. He creates a context in which such distortion is possible, an implied world where men can and do find themselves metamorphosed [...] (1989: 5).

At the same time, Maria Makela draws attention upon the fact that stereotypes of feminization, frequently linked to the Fascist purpose of spreading a system of self-restricting categorization, sometimes constituted the goal of subversion through art. In this sense, she underlines the use of a grotesque aesthetics in illustrations and photography, displaying women that radically disrupt that imposed canon of a feminine appearance. This occurred in tune with the rise, during the 1920s, of bisexuality and androgyny as the foundational terms for the understanding of sexuality (2003: 208). Partaking of this defiance against the monadism of traditional sex typologies, grotesque art in this period would spread a view of bi-gendered figures displaying not only both male and female parts. Additionally, these figures exhibit mismatching, disproportionate features, often associated with strange and disconcerting attitudes and expressions. Such is the case of Hanna Höch's "*German Girl*", a photomontage showing a female face composed by the clash of misplaced eyes of considerably different size each attached to a similarly mismatching face and superposed hair (2003: 209). In another photomontage by Höch, "Tamer", a mannequin making the figure of a genie in a bottle combines the muscular torso and arms of a man with a female face and skirted legs of a woman (2003: 211).

Certainly, in the scenario of Victorian England the metaphor of a perfectly ordered universe ruling over all aspects of life included, of course, the eugenicist belief in the principle of orthogenesis as the only form of birth agreeing with providential desires. These ideas reached considerable resonance through the British Deists and the Cambridge Neoplatonists. These intellectuals, who pursued the utopian ideal of ontologizing experience, viewed reproduction as the principal via to achieve their purpose. Accordingly, they developed preformationist theories whereby the body was shaped in clear analogy with moral values and worthiness, like – as Harvey expressed it – "the fetus in the womb". Therefore, on the basis of the Platonist Henry More's assertion of "the imperium of the soul's will over matter", scientists and thinkers of the period, such as Shaftesbury and Winckelmann, propagated the equation between physical or mental deformity and monstrous, morally unacceptable savagery (2003: 76, 78). This derived, at the same time, in Winckelmann's proposal of a "physiognomy identity between lovely mental and physical children",

whereby the mentally or physically defective were to be regarded as “Pre-Conceptions” or literally unformed children. In tune with this, a more moralistic view of the issue was provided by Nicolas Andry, for whom physiological amorphousness was the result of wrongful and morally deviant copulations (2003: 68).

Moreover, Sara’s angularity defies the conventional belief that spread throughout different scientific discourses in the twenties. Hence, as Maria Makela has noted, particularly illustrative is the typology developed by the physician Gerhard Venzmer, whereby he classified women according to their suitability for marriage. Thus, while he concluded that only women with rounded bodies could make good marriage partners, Venzmer especially disapproved of angular types – “Gedanken-mensch” or “Tatmensch”. These, which the gynaecologist considered as displaying the natural attributes of the masculine, were classified by Venzmer as bound to be dangerously out of balance and unsuited for marriage due to their inherent tension and radical mood swings. Similarly, another scientist of the era, P. Mathes, situated femininity as ideally placed within a soft, rounded body. In contrast, what he defined as intersexual women – or less feminine, on the grounds of their physical angularity – were regarded, as Makela points out, “to be prone to irregularities in their sex drive, frigidity, physical complications or *psychoses*[\[8\]](#)” (2003: 202-3).

Furthermore, Woolf would take to the utmost her thrive for eliminating any possibility for an emerging leader, even to the extent of allowing Sara – a character with which Virginia would feel special affinity – to erect herself as a mockery of the very narrator. Indeed, during the process of her novel-writing, Woolf had noted in her *Diary* the particular intimacy she experienced with Elvira/Sara, even to the extent of stating: “I hardly know which I am, or where: Virginia or Elvira: in the Pargiters or outside.” (*A Writer’s Diary*, 190). Thereby, since Sara was endowed with the fool’s licence – plastically marked in the story, as Radin has argued (1981: 99) by her mismatching stockings (271), Woolf exhibits through her the blunt disruption, on the other hand, of solemn masculine speech by allowing her character the carnivalesque permissibility of free, unrestricted speech. Thus, Sara’s nonsensical conversation with Rose at a certain moment of her cousin’s visit, subverts conventional linearity, as well as the imposition of a strictly logical cohesion by male narrators, now replaced by the joyful relativity of talk that reigns over the market-place carnival square. Indeed, imbued by “a carnival sense of the world” – as Bakhtin has signalled – this is essentially a language defined for being “free and unrestricted, full of ambivalent laughter, blasphemy, the profanation of everything sacred, full of debasing and obscenities”.

‘What was that about clinging to a fat man in the Campagna?’ she asked, setting her tray down.

‘The Campagna?’ said Rose. ‘There was nothing about the Campagna.’

‘Heard through a door,’ said Sara, pouring out the coffee, ‘talk sounds very odd.’ She gave Rose her cup.

‘I thought you were talking about Italy; about the Campagna, about the moonlight.’

Rose shook her head. ‘We were talking about the Waterloo Road,’ she said. But what had she been talking about? Not simply about the Waterloo Road. Perhaps she had been talking nonsense. She had been saying the first thing that came into her head.

‘All talk would be nonsense, I suppose, if it were written down,’ she said, stirring her coffee.

Maggie stopped the machine for a moment and smiled.

‘And even if it isn’t’, she said. (126).

Additionally, nonsensicality in Sara’s speech is reinforced by the adoption of a language that J. Johnson (*The Years*, 339, n.11) has identified as reminiscent of the type of naïve, illogical language that can be found in a patently carnivalesque work as is *Alice Adventures in Wonderland* (W. Kayser, 1972: 122). Hence, while Sara continues exhibiting her disparate movements “balancing herself on the arm of a chair [...] and swinging her foot up and down” (126) – another form of disruption of patriarchal linearity – she expresses in Alice-like terms her doubt about whether visiting the Pargiters or not: ‘“Shall I go, or shan’t I? Shall I go, or shan’t I?”’ As Johnson observes, this question, sung by the Mock Turtle, brings about a twofold implication. Thus, whereas on the one hand, it serves to emphasize physical deformity in Sara, on the other hand, it directly connects the character’s speech with the burlesque portrayal of the party’s guests at the end of the novel. Indeed, during the conversation between Peggy and North, it is precisely through reference to Carroll’s character that one of these guests, old William Whatney – a name significantly reflecting some form of carnivalesque uncertainty – becomes portrayed.

‘Did you see old William Whatney?’ [Peggy] said, turning to [North].

‘No!’, he exclaimed. ‘He^[9] still alive? That old white walrus with the whiskers?’

‘Yes – that’s him’, she said. There was an old man in a white waistcoat standing in the door.

‘The old Mock Turtle’, he said (289).

Furthermore, Sara, in her metanarrative of the Pargiter’s story in the same episode, becomes the direct caricaturesque embodiment of the narrator. Like Woolf, Sara will reproduce her own version of the Pargiter’s account, at the same time as she – not differently from her non-fictional equivalent – resorts to carnivalesque principles to render her narration. Thus, Sara’s story, which – as in the novelistic frame that surrounds her – entails a parodical overtone through which Rose and

the rest of her characters are envisioned. Of course, as it pertains to a carnival setting, the devices employed – kitchen cutlery and utensils – fall into the catalogue of grotesque images and elements typically described by Bakhtin (1965: 250-1). Simultaneously, she voices a patent mockery against the subsidiary plot of her novel, and against the novelistic subgenre to which it belongs: “(W)hat could be more ordinary? [...] A large family, living in a large house...” This mockery seems to foreground some of the critiques Woolf had to face after the publication of *The Years* – a novel which she certainly aimed much beyond a family saga.

While physical deformity has been demonstrated as within the paradigms of a grotesque rendering of the body, this feature is not exclusive of Sara in the novel. On the contrary, the very opening of *The Years* anticipates a context in which Colonel Abel Pargiter, Sara’s uncle, appears as a red-faced man, typically, a carnivalesque feature, additionally alien to the community and liveliness populating the streets of London. Moreover, it is precisely through the remark “he had no longer any finger in that pie”, stressing his outsider condition, that the narrator ironically emphasizes Abel’s absolute deformity – evident even in figurative terms.

He rose and looked out of the window down into Piccadilly. Holding his cigar suspended he looked down on the tops of omnibuses, hansom cabs, victories, vans and landaus. He was out of it all, his attitude seemed to say; he had no longer any finger^[10] in that pie. Gloom settled on his red handsome face as he stood gazing (4).

Truly, as the narrative progresses, increasing emphasis is made on the grotesqueness of the atmosphere surrounding the Colonel as he enters the house of Mira, his lover. Hence, in the midst of the noise of children screaming – which anticipates the particular closure of the novel through a parallel episode – Abel feels the sordidness and meanness of his disloyalty to his dying wife. At the same time, the non-randomly placed picture of a kingfisher that he gazes at on first entering the house fulfils a twofold function in this respect. Thus, while on the one hand it connects the Colonel’s grotesqueries with the bird imagery employed throughout the novel in order to caricature the characters, it also refers the reader to an inescapable connection with the figure of the Fisher King in the Grail’s story – the personage typically embodying the idea of the worthlessness of old values, as well as the need for these being renewed.

Nobody was there; he was too early. He looked round the room with distaste. There were too many little objects about. He felt out of place, and altogether too large as he stood upright before the draped fireplace in front of a screen upon which was painted a kingfisher in the act of alighting on some bulrushes. Footsteps scurried about hither and thither on the floor above. Was there somebody with her? He asked himself listening. Children screamed in the street outside. It was sordid; it was mean; it was furtive (5-6).

In this atmosphere, in which a “creaking basket-chair” represents the symbolical throne of

Abel's decrowning, the old king is welcomed by a dog showing "a red patch – possibly eczema – behind one of its ears [...]" right before the Colonel himself sets to examine it: "(w)as it eczema? or was it not eczema? He looked at the red patch, then set the dog on its legs in the basket and waited" (6). As it is frequent in Woolf's writings, the presence of the dog is far from accidental. In this sense, Woolf had already displayed a similarly grotesque transformation through this animal in *Mrs. Dalloway*, where men suddenly undergo a dog's form of hybridization. This was suggested by the convergence of the image of the dog-like homoerotic play in which Septimus engages with his war officer (*Mrs. Dalloway*, 94) and the particular remark about Richard's familiar treatment of the animal, "as if it were a human being" (ibid, 82). A further step into grotesque characterization, though, is taken in *The Years*, where the dog, whose "hand had lost two fingers" (7) matching with the deformity in Abel Pargiter, becomes a form of reduplication of the Colonel, in tune with the animalizations that occur throughout the narrative. Certainly, in a subtle manner, the narrator hints to this form of projected metamorphosis of Abel by presenting the ridiculous portrait of a military man unaware of the patronizing treatment he receives from her lover. Indeed, incapable of ending with an affair which unsettles him with irrepressible guilt, the Colonel feels impelled to enter the house as soon as his mistress opens the door – "(o)ne of these days, he said to himself... but the door opened and his mistress, Mira, came in" (6).

Additional stress is made on his absurd naivety by means of the contrast between his belief – "[Mira] was really glad to see him, he thought" – and the objective reality offered to the reader, whereby Mira actually pets the Colonel with the only purpose of obtaining his money: "(h)e had come before she had done her hair, which was a nuisance. But her duty was to distract him" (6). In this sense, a veiled hint at an attempted recognition – prompted by Mira – is pointed through the woman's significant remark – " 'Lulu, Lulu', she cried, catching the little dog in one hand [...] 'come and let Uncle Bogy look at you'." Indeed, the Colonel remains blind to this truth even when the dog appears wearing his own glasses – a fact which, paradoxically, suggests a reversal of roles, whereby it is precisely Lulu, the dog, that performs the act of "looking" at the fooled Abel Pargiter: "The Colonel put on his glasses and bent down to look at the dog's ear [...] Then his glasses fell off. She snatched them and put them on the dog" (6).

As it occurred in *To the Lighthouse*, where Mrs. McNab, the charwoman, was unable to recognize her own mirror reflection, the same inability affects Colonel Pargiter, who is unaware of his fool's reality, revealing his utter ridiculousness. Moreover, while the grotesque image of Abel stroking his mistress with his mutilated head emphasizes the Colonel's actual identity, a decisive fact marks his debasement, as he becomes rebaptized by Mira through the pet's name of "Bogy". This term entails as well further implications. Johnson has identified it as a derogative word

denoting “a hobgoblin, a person or object of terror, a bugbear” (323, n.20), while “Colonel Bogy” is – as Johnson notes – “the name given in golf to an imaginary player whose score [...] is supposed to be the slowest that a good average player could do it in”. Michael Bristol has pointed out the existence of the Bogeyman, a carnivalesque form of devil in theatre, who, against logical expectations, typically constitutes a weakling figure (1985: 152). In addition, in his analysis of the Victorian grotesque, Trodd includes a reference to a medieval sculpture reproducing a series of monstrous gargoyles, which displaying claw-like limbs, received the title of “Old Bogey” (1999: fig. 7.11).

Indeed, thus characterized by his grotesque deformity, Abel Pargiter undergoes a significant assimilation towards these sculptures – “(h)e had lost two fingers on the right hand in the Muttiny, and the muscles had shrunk so that the right hand resembled the claw of some aged bird” (10). While in the case of Sara Pargiter, malformation obeyed to the rendering of a new female body, released from the imposing categorization of patriarchal society, a different overtone is intended for the type of deformities characterizing the Colonel. In this sense, the claw-like hand resulting from finger mutilation is dovetailed with the suggestion of moral deformity. Hence, even his actions reveal the kind of inner grotesque sordidity implied by the disloyalty to a wife in her death-bed, simultaneously with his ironical intolerance towards deformity in children, which as we have seen, arose in the Colonel a kind of “squeamish” feeling.

In fact, Woolf, who had profoundly disapproved moralization through fiction, was probably not so much interested in exposing a moral judgement of her characters as in portraying the decaying paralysis of the social panorama. Accordingly, Abel’s deformed hand is just a patch within the entire pattern of the novel, where deformity certainly represents a kind of leit-motif allegorical of the reality of a society still haunted by the ghost of Victorian prejudices. Thus, the description of Abel’s crippled hand strategically matches the presence of a gilt claw in the Colonel’s brother’s chair. Indeed, Marcus has insisted upon the mockery of the patriarchal house in the novel (1987: 57). Consistently with this view, L. Peach – as it was previously discussed – also insists on Woolf’s purpose of debasing the traditional structure of the Victorian family by unveiling the corrupted reality of its apparent compactness: “(t)he novel exposes what might be seen as the crypt within the solid, public structure of the Victorian family, especially since the large house is analogous to the family as a social institution” (2000: 172). In this sense, it is precisely Digby Pargiter’s house – the site of a golden claw – that Peach identifies as one of the focal centres for the rendering and subsequent decrowning of the traditional family. Hereby, Abel’s visit to his brother comes to add to the Colonel’s dubious morality, insofar as his insistence upon Eugenie’s dancing for him represents a cryptic form of incestuous relationship between them. Certainly, as Peach has

argued, Eugenie, who performs her dance before her husband's return with the only presence of the delighted Abel, reveals a "more spontaneous and physical sense of herself that has been hidden beneath the weight of her marriage to Sir Digby" (2000: 176). Similarly, right after he has manifested his aversion towards deformity in children, the corrupt Abel is significantly challenged by Rose, his daughter, who does not hesitate to remind her father of the malformation in the Levy's child – a family who, additionally, possess the "stigma" of their Jewish origin: "'Bertie Levy's got six toes on one foot', Rose piped up suddenly. The others laughed" (10).

In tune with this finality of unmasking the ridiculous development of society during the interwar period, the view of a grotesquely deformed system is emphasized towards the end of the novel. Accordingly, during the already commented episode of Delia's party, it is North – one of the buffoon figures in *The Years* – whom the narrator chooses to voice her apprehension of an "informe" reality. Through North's rendering of the Gibbises, Woolf displays her patently grotesque vision of upper classes, where she exhibits the Neoplatonic influence of her Cambridge-formed contemporaries. Hereby, the grotesquely-depicted Gibbises hint to the belief of these intellectuals in a mimetic development of the body, which evolves in consonance with the particular degree of moral worthiness. Bearing this in mind, the Gibbises reveal a bunch of "(g)ross, obese, shapeless" beings, who "looked to [North] like a parody of a travesty, an excrescence that had overgrown the form within, the fire within" (278).

Nevertheless, even though inheriting to a certain extent these traditions, the narrator makes special emphasis on her actual purpose of promoting the renewal of the decaying Victorian anchorage. Thus, as North continues to unveil the deformity of Delia's guests, the symbolical value of deformed hands reveals, not so much an allegory of moral corruptness, as in fact, a metaphor of the social general incapacity of action and reform. Hence, the girl North meets at the dance soon reveals the recurring lameness of her inner conformity with traditional values:

And [North] wanted her to help him. Why should she not take the weight off his shoulders and give what he longed for – assurance, certainty? Because she too was deformed like the rest of them? He looked down at her hands. They were strong hands; fine hands; but if it were a question, he thought, watching the fingers curl slightly, of 'my' children, of 'my' possessions, it would be one rip down the belly; or teeth in the soft fur of the throat. We cannot help each other, he thought, we are all deformed. Yet, disagreeable as it was to him to remove her from the eminence upon which he placed her, perhaps she was right, he thought, and we who make idols of other people, who endow this man, that woman, with the power to lead us, only add to the deformity, and stoop ourselves (278).

The issue of malformation in *The Years* brings about another aspect included within the paradigm of the grotesque. Like the mutilation involved by Abel's fingerlessness, numerous

dismemberments populate Woolf's novel. While it has been discussed in terms of its implied deformity, the presentation of the Colonel with an amputated right hand reinforces Woolf's idea of the inadequacy of male leaders. It is precisely through this lack in Abel's hand that a form of debasing mutilation, chiming in with the limping condition suggested through the image of the Fisher King overlaps the Colonel's portrayal. At the same time, this act of male amputation broadly opposes the symbolical female castration imposed by the incessant forms of repression effected by "that purely patriarchal society" as Woolf envisioned her time (*A Room of One's Own*, 77).

Certainly, female castration has been identified as the particular concern of male tyranny, by critics like B. A. Schlack. In the discussion on *Between the Acts*, it became evident how Woolf frequently resorted to veiled allusions to the myth of Philomela as a testimony of female. Similarly, references to this act of female amputation – whereby Philomela, who had her tongue cut so that she could not reveal her rape by King Tereus, finally turned into a nightingale – appear in *The Years*, where these allusions conform to a common pattern. The open mouth of the sleeping Eleanor elicits in North, her nephew, some kind of obscene feeling – in fact, not disconnected from the "obscene" nightingale in *Jacob's Room*: "Eleanor snored. She was nodding off, shamelessly, helplessly. There was an obscenity in unconsciousness, [North] thought. Her mouth was open; her head was on one side" (277). Simultaneously, the allusion to the violation of female sexuality and freedom evokes another moment in the novel, where a horrid face afloat in front of the sleeping Rose anticipates the horrible episode of the child's rape. In fact, the scene becomes clearly reminiscent of Woolf's parallel experience during her adolescence, when she was the victim of sexual abuse by George Duckworth, her stepbrother:

Sleep had almost come to me. The room was dark. The house silent. Then, creaking stealthily, the door opened; treading gingerly, someone entered. "Who?" I cried. "Don't be frightened", George whispered. "And don't turn on the light, oh beloved. Beloved –" and he flung himself on my bed, and took me on his arms. (Moments of Being, 2002: 53)

In addition, the monstrous presence of the "bubbling, grey [...], pock-marked" face and the rest of monsterly creatures populating Woolf's novel matches Marcus' argument of patriarchal hegemony in Woolf as the embodiment of a beastly monster (1987: 141-2). Moreover, the hanging head of a beast placed in the nursery, where it becomes the object of horror for the female since her early childhood, also parallels a reminiscent scene in *To the Lighthouse*. Significantly, in this novel – as it is commented in the corresponding chapter – a similarly hanging head, on this occasion, a pig's skull placed in the children's room, serves to terrify the Ramsay's little girl, and also objectifies an animalized version of Charles Tansley, a patently ridiculous instance within a patriarchal society.

Nevertheless, whereas in *To the Lighthouse* the presence of the mother manages to dissolve the girl's fears covering the skull with her shawl, and has the girl think about fairies and beautiful landscapes, this kind of magical solution has ceased to have any effect years later. In a time marked by the unstoppable rise of fascism – a force comparable, as distilled from *Three Guineas*, to patriarchal dictatorship – the terrifying ghost of male tyranny turns out crudely real. Therefore, when Rose shuts her eyes, it is just to find out the presence still remains. Likewise, her attempt to think about something nice – as sheep-counting – also reveals the sordid truth of a sheep that “would not jump”, but “turned round and looked at her” instead, before committing his repulsive end.

The scene, which closes with Rose calling her nurse, is evoked when, years later Kitty sets on an allegorical trip on a train. The journey, as it is frequent in Woolf, has a symbolical meaning as rite of passage and emphasizes the haunting presence of patriarchal dominance throughout these women's lives. In this sense, if Rose had experienced the violation of her own will and freedom, a projection of the pernicious effects of male tyranny is prolonged throughout youth, as evidenced by its parallel occurrence in Kitty's trip. Hence, her joyful feelings setting off – “as if she were a little girl who had run away from her nurse and escaped” (197) certainly echo the passage of Rose's rape, which takes place after the girl elopes from her nurse to visit Lamley's shop (20). Indeed, imagining herself a brave horse on the verge of accomplishing “a desperate mission”, the 1880 Rose does not differ much from the 1914 Kitty, overwhelmed by the thrill of mounting the “great [...] monster” (197) that is to lead her “galloping past” the fields (199) – an image, indeed, consistent with Rose's later portrayal as a kind of horse, as it has been discussed above. For the little Rose, the experience will mark “a moment of transition”, whereby it is right at the very moment she is undressing that Kitty feels as if “passing from one world to another” – a fact the narrator precisely describes as “an act of amputation” (198). On the other hand, a new recurrence of this leit-motif of mutilated parts is exemplified by the presence of a noseless violet seller:

[Martin and Sara] passed the woman selling violets. She wore a hat over her face. He dropped a sixpence in her tray to make amends to the waiter. He shook his head. No violets, he meant [...] But he caught sight of her face. She had no nose; her face was seamed with white patches; there were red rims for nostrils. She had no nose – she had pulled her hat down to hide that fact (172).

As pointed out by Maria Makela, noselessness in the nineteenth century, along with some other facial marks, constituted a clear symptom of syphilis. Bearing this in mind, the ineludible presence of the beggar in Martin's mind – “(a)n old straw hat with a purple ribbon round it, he thought opening his paper. The sight persisted” (172) – acquires particular significance. On the grounds that syphilis is frequently connected with vice and sinfulness, the permanent presence of

the noseless face – even if just through Martin’s memories – represents a carnivalesque vindication for the lower, objected faction of reality, in stark opposition to the ideals of cleanliness and purity that dominate the entire order of life at the turn of the century. Thus, the focus on the mutilated face as a symptom of disease represents a means of assertion of grotesque principles, since these forms constitute – according to M. Douglas – a “by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements” (1966: 35).

At the same time, the grotesque absence in the woman’s face entails a twofold meaning. Hence, on the one hand, it constitutes a form of vindication of that impossible completion or full self-realization in the midst of a patriarchal oligarchy. Thus, even though Martin was already familiar with such a sight, it is precisely through its contemplation with Sara – endowed with the thoughtfulness of the licensed fool – that the experience becomes an epiphanic revelation for him. Indeed, Sara once again becomes a carnivalesque doppelgänger of the narrator, thus serving as the vehicle channelling the social protest against women’s repression to achieve their fullness – as Woolf would do in *Three Guineas*. Moreover, in resemblance to this work, such claim is reinforced through the contrast with those “(m)en in wigs and gowns” who spend their time in the “gloomy and funereal” Law Courts, purely a “cold mass of decorated stone” (171).

On the other hand, the incessant permanence of the incomplete woman stands for a determined affirmation of womanhood and sexuality, now liberated from the categorization concerning “wholeness” and chastity imposed by patriarchal dictatorship. Certainly, as Christine Ross has noted, the introduction of the object in contemporary representations of the female body allows for the reordering of conventional boundaries by means of the incorporation of grotesque principles (2003: 281). Accordingly, for Ross, this new incomplete body becomes a vindicating “failure to be what is supposed to be in contemporary Western society (productive, healthy, and young)” (2003: 286), hereby disrupting the Kantian orderly universe from whence a definition of aesthetics as pure pleasure derives. In the light of this, it is precisely within these parameters that the image of the noseless beggar acquires its “completion” of meaning. Indeed, Ross explains,

(w)hen failing, mortality, catastrophe, noise, unpredictability, loss of control, nonorganicity, and contingency become the predominant components of the body, this means that a major redefinition of subjectivity is at play, one that seeks to displace the conception of the subject as presence to the detriment of the objected female body, which represents lack and absence [...] (2003: 286).

Whereas this form of emptiness coincides with Bakhtin’s vision of the grotesque body as incomplete and open to the future, on other occasions, the different forms of dismemberment attest for the presence of this grotesque notion of being in *The Years*. Hereby, the loose limbs of the body often exhibit themselves, thus proclaiming their independence from the subjection of a ruling body.

This is, for instance, the case of the plaster legs surprisingly appearing in the opening scene of the “1908” chapter. Indeed, the particular rendering of the mind prepares for the patently carnivalesque atmosphere surrounding this episode. Hence, while conventionally associated with change, the wind here becomes an agent of destruction of present stability – “it was not blowing. It was scraping, scouring [...]”. Moreover, by this action, the wind rips off the covering veils of truth to unmask it in its naked though banal reality, at the same time as it becomes an uncompassionate buffoon of the decay and hollowness it finds in its way – a “degraded existence” it impiously “scorn[s]” and “deride[s]”.

It was March and the wind was blowing. But it was not ‘blowing’. It was scraping, scouring. It was so cruel. So unbecoming. Not merely did it bleach faces and raise red spots on noses; it tweaked up skirts; showed stout legs; made trousers reveal skeleton shins. There was no roundness, no fruit in it. Rather it was like the curve of a scythe which cuts, not corn, usefully; but destroys, revelling in sheer sterility. With one blast it blew out colour – even a Rembrandt in the National Gallery, even a solid ruby in a Bond Street window: one blast and they were gone. Had it any breeding it was in the Isle of Dogs among tin cans [...] on the banks of a polluted city. It tossed up rotten leaves, gave them another span of degraded existence; scorned, derided them, yet had nothing to put in the lace of the scorned, the derided. Down they fell. Uncreative, unproductive, yelling its joy in destruction, its power to peel off the bark, the bloom, and show the bare bone, it paled every window; drove old gentlemen further and further into the leather-smelling recesses of clubs; and old ladies to sit eyeless, leather-checked, joyless [...] Triumphant in its wantonness it emptied the streets; swept flesh before it; and [...] scattered along the pavement a litter of old envelopes; twists of hair; papers already blood-smearred, yellow-smearred, [...] and sent them scudding to plaster legs, lamp-posts, pillar-boxes, and fold themselves frantically against area railings (107).

It is precisely this ripping-off the distracting clothes that hide reality as an act of blunt mockery of the surrounding society that turns it into an equivalent of Albert the idiot in Woolf’s following novel. Hence, like Albert, who, during the representation of Queen Elizabeth in the pageant, “pick[ed] and pluck[ed] at Great Eliza’s skirts” (*Between the Acts*, 78-9), the wind determinedly “tweaked up skirts; showed stout legs; made trousers reveal skeleton shins” (*The Years*, 107). Furthermore, if at a certain moment during the play in *Between the Acts*, Albert “leer[s] at the audience in turn” (78), on the other hand, cracked mirrors expose the audience to the true reality about themselves. In a passage undoubtedly reminiscent of the wind’s action in *The Years* we read: “Here a nose... There a skirt... Then trousers only... now perhaps a face...” (*Between the Acts*, 165). Certainly, the bleach-white faces and red noses of those exposed to the wind in *The Years* acquire a clownish appearance comparable to Mrs. Manresa, “who, facing herself in the glass, [...] powdered her nose [...] and [...] reddened her lips” (*Between the Acts*, 167). While both cases stand for unequivocal markers of the clown-like reality of a fossilized existence, the narrator continues to employ the wind as the vehicle by means of which this absurdity is uncovered. In this

sense, the wind voices Woolf's contempt for the restricting gender roles attributed to each sex, yet without obliterating the complementary carnivalistic task of promoting the renewal of an encroached order of things. Hence, while "old gentlemen [are droven] further and further into the leather-smelling recesses of clubs", an inert form of existence, untouched by the impulse of change, is unveiled in the case of women, which the wind sends "to sit eyeless, leather cheeked, joyless among the tassels and antimacassars of their bedrooms and kitchens". As it pertains to such a carnival buffoon, the wind delights in the most sordidly grotesque side of its unmasking of reality, which it determinedly shows in "the bare bone", at the same time as it "swe[eps] flesh" at will, or exposes and stirs the "blood-smear[ed]" papers. Moreover, this rendering of reality partakes in the *danse macabre* tradition of grotesque representations of death transgression (Harpham, 1982: 13). This is completed by the unsettling play with life-boundaries involved by the sinister return to life presided by the wind, which "tossed up rotten leaves" just to "g[i]ve them another span of degraded existence". Yet, while the narrator insists upon the urgent imperative for effecting a profound destruction of a decayed system, she also warns against the danger of creating merely out of the empty hollowness enveloping it. Hence, it is not from hopelessness that she describes the action of the wind as "(u)ncreative, unproductive", but, much on the contrary, as a testimony of the "sheer sterility" of a society where "(t)here was no roundness, no fruit in", "a polluted city" with "nothing to put in the place of the scorned, the denied" (107).

Indeed, incompleteness characterizes this panorama, where, in the midst of the carnivalesque amalgam of incongruent objects invoked by the wind, plaster legs unexpectedly come to focus through the paper pieces sent by the gust. Participating of the "dismembered" nature mentioned above, these plaster legs form a pattern of disconnected bodily parts enveloping the whole narrative in *The Years*. In this sense, they become constitutive elements of the same structure as the "white arms" and "shirt fronts" of the attendants at the Opera (133), or the more immediate image of the "pair of legs" Matty Stiles, the character at the Pargiters', sees through the railing. Significantly, while these legs also appear in the middle of a curious mass of objects, "between the canaries' cage and the dirty linen", emphasis is made on the dismemberment involved by this image, which becomes reinforced as Matty wonders "(h)and't he eyes?" (108).

As was commented in the discussion of Abel Pargiter's crippledness, these plaster legs constitute a straightaway allusion to the incompleteness – both figurative and literal – ruling over *entre-guerre* society. Hence, while the recurrence to these loose limbs throughout the novel rhythmically stresses the profound sense of non-fulfilment that affects the rotted post-Victorian social system, a more physical dimension of its complex signifier is also entailed by the presence of these plaster legs. Accordingly, as has been demonstrated in other Woolf's novels, in the post-war

context that serves as a background, a direct reference to war mutilation cannot be obliterated.

Indeed, Woolf did not remain impassive to the horrors of the conflict, as she had expressed in *Three Guineas*. Here – as was remarked in the chapter on *To the Lighthouse* – she illustrates the cruelty of the slaughters committed at war through the description of a photograph showing the mutilated body of a hardly recognizable child. In tune with this, the situation of mutilated British soldiers after the World War I constituted a major issue of social concern. Certainly, it was not only marked by the pitiable circumstance of their health condition. Additionally, they also had to struggle for attaining from the Government the concession of worthy artificial limbs that would allow them to live in a relatively comfortable way. As Bourke has put it:

The right of the war-disabled to artificial substitutes was not disputed – the battle was primarily over the type of limb that was to be fixed. From the point of view of the limbless, there was no contest: the metal limb was lighter – and lighter was better” (1996: 45).

Nevertheless, unwilling to face the financial expense the concession of these limbs would mean, the Government entered a much disputed contest that Ernst Muirhead Little, adviser of artificial limbs to the Ministry of Pensions in 1922 labelled as “the battle of limbs” (Bourke, 1996: 43). Yet, as pertains to a carnival rendering of reality, this purpose of denunciation and demolition of the present order only acquires its full meaning through the simultaneous invocation of a new form of existence, hereby announced through the focalized presence of the dismembered legs. In this sense, naturally connected with feet, legs enter the realm of the lower stratum insofar as they become the channel whereby men are literally grounded to the earthly and therefore material world. Indeed, as P. Stallybrass has argued, a hierarchical division of the body during the Renaissance situated the feet among its most dishonest parts. He mentions the example of Coriolanus, where “Meneius derides the Second Citizen” as “the great Toe of this Assembly”, insofar as this part was “one of the lowest, basest, poorest” of the human body (as quoted by Stallybrass, in Hillman and Mazzio, 1997: 316).

Moreover, if feet become the organizing centre of the circus, where the enormous pair of shoes of clowns “stage their baseness, their groundedness” (Stallybrass, 1997: 313), a similar equivalent is to be found in these plaster legs, which, not differently from the clown’s shoes, are brought to the fore in an atmosphere characterized by the disrupting presence of a catalogue of deformed figures of uncertain identity. Likewise, an additional version of these legs is represented by the bleeding joint that presides the final dinner in the “Present Day” chapter.

“ ‘Another cut off the joint?’ [Sara] asked. ‘No, thank you’, [North] said, looking at the rather stringy disagreeable object which was still bleeding into the well. The willow-pattern plate was daubed with gory streaks” (234).

Included within a series of allusions to food, the joint represents a direct reference to Bakhtin's conception of a carnival sense of the world, where the feast and the allusions to eating and drinking become an expressive means of proclaiming the triumph of the body over the dictatorial impositions of repression and fear from official authority:

El comer y el beber son una de las manifestaciones más importantes de la vida del cuerpo grotesco. Los rasgos particulares de este cuerpo son el ser abierto, estar inacabado y en interacción con el mundo. En el comer estas particularidades se manifiestan del modo más tangible y concreto: el cuerpo se evade de sus límites; traga, engulle, desgarrar el mundo, lo hace entrar en sí, se enriquece y crece a sus expensas [...] El hombre degusta el mundo, siente el gusto del mundo, lo introduce en su cuerpo, lo hace una parte de sí mismo [...] Este encuentro con el mundo en medio de la absorción de alimentos era alegre y triunfante. El hombre vencía al mundo, lo engullía en vez de ser engullido por él [...] (1987: 252-3)

Nevertheless, while these triumphal meals represent for Bakhtin a victorious act of swallowing the world, Woolf resorts to a powerful reversal of this meaning in order to portray the putrefaction of traditional structures concerning family life. Accordingly, whereas Christopher Ames points to this final dinner in *The Years* as a ritual form of celebration (1991: 11), it is necessary to consider that if Woolf was determined to end her novel "with a supper party in the downstairs room" (*A Writer's Diary*, 214), reuniting most of her characters, it was not completely with a purpose of depicting a joyful closure of her social portrayal. Indeed, the raw-like appearance of the joint – still oozing blood – suggests, as Peach (2000: 193-4) has noted, a form of cannibalistic devouring, by virtue of which the anachronistic Victorian foundations on which those structures are based enter the realm of grotesque disgust and monstrosity. Hereby, the upper-class guests at Delia's party – who have proved to be fervent supporters of these traditions – are unmasked as the uncouth monsters that swallow and devour any possibility of regeneration and change.

Moreover, even though many references to food are mentioned through the course of the party, all of them have in common their non-appetizing presentation. Hence, while the tablecloth where it is displayed shows yellow stains, which underlines the ideas of corruption and decay concurrently characterizing the background social system, the meals offered in the midst of this panorama suggests a similar non-palatability. Thus, "the yellow potatoes [...] looked hard", and "a slabbed-down mass of cabbage [...] oozing green water" directly point to the "*informe*" condition of the grotesque body. Indeed, according to M. Featherstone, it is a body that inspires disgust, insofar as it exhibits a lack of boundaries and, therefore, an unsettling impossibility to be defined or categorized.

The grotesque body of the carnival is the lower body of impurity,

disproportion, immediacy, orifices, the material body, which is the opposite of the classical body, which is beautiful, symmetrical, elevated, perceived from a distance and which is the ideal body. The grotesque body and the carnival represent the otherness which is excluded from the process of formation of middle class identity and culture. With the extension of the civilizing process into the middle classes the need for greater control over the emotions and bodily functions produced changes in manners and conduct which heightened the sense of disgust at direct emotional and bodily expressivity (1996: 79).

The same disgusting appearance present, in fact, the undercooked mutton, from the beginning deployed as oozing a “red juice down into the well of the dish” (233). Observing these scenes, L. Peach has also pointed out the disruption of the classical Victorian conception of the social body implied by such descriptions. Hence, according to the critic, “(t)he references to an excess of blood and water suggest the impurities, orifices and leakages of the lower body excluded from the classical ideal body”. Bearing this in mind, Peach adds that the “chain of colours – red, yellow, green” chosen for the food’s picture “signify bodily infection and disease”, in tune with Mary Douglas’ conception of holiness and purity as principles tallied with “correct definition, discrimination and order” (1966: 35). As K. A. Hoving has noted, slimy, oozing things are grotesque insofar as they “are hard to grasp, they slip away from us and defy our ability to define or control them”. Hereby, the grotesque body that “flows over its borders [...], symbolizing both beginning and ending, all the while becoming unbecoming” (2003: 228). It is this grotesquery implied by the rendering of food that completes a radical subversion of traditional Victorian family life through the protest entailed by a reality that oozes out of its conventionally delimited boundaries to vindicate for a new form of unrepressed existence.

As it was pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, much beyond the pure, linear chronicle of a family saga, *The Years* consolidates, even more markedly than in the previous novels, the open resort to a carnivalistic-grotesque paradigm in its portrayal of a visibly corrupt society. Nevertheless, while she bluntly turns down moral didacticism for her fiction, it is the depiction of the profoundly corrosive inertia of society that the narrator envisioned as a major aim in her desire for debunking the oppressively precept-like foundations of a post-Victorian system, as well as of the spreading Fascism that promotes it. Hereby, whereas this attack against present society occasionally remains behind the cryptic carcass of its symbol-imbued narrative style, not rarely does Woolf choose the broad plasticity of numerous images in her urge to depict the deforming anachronism and rottenness of an evidently degraded socio-political body.

[1] Emphasis added

[2] Emphasis as in the original

[3] Emphasis as in the original

[4] This volume, corresponding to the Berg Collection, includes notes dating from 1922 to 1927. The allusion to *Dr. Faustus* belongs to a first group of entries ranging from 1922 to 1924, and will be hereafter referred to – following Silver’s classification – as XXV; B.8b.

[5] Extract from a letter received from the London and National Society for Women’s Service, 1938 [in *Three Guineas*, 1992:283, n.1]

[6] My emphasis.

[7] Emphasis as in the original

[8] Emphasis added

[9] Emphasis in the original.

[10] Emphasis added.

9. On Holy Boughs and Kings of Fools: The Carnavalesque Scenario in *Between the Acts*.

9.1. 'For There is Joy, Sweet Joy, in Company': The Zeal for Togetherness in *'Between the Acts'*.

i. Tuning In: The Unifying Power of Music and Machines.

ii. 'Let's Perform Together': The Role of the Pageant.

9.2. The Ritual of the Second Birth.

9.3. The Lamb, the Puppet, and the Dying-God: The Role of the Scapegoat.

9.4. The Donkey and the Bough: Religious Decrowning in *Between the Acts*.

Throughout this chapter, an analysis of Woolf's last novel within the parameters of a convergent overlapping of Unanimism and carnivalistic postulates is provided. This intersection, which poses a considerable parallel with the similar confluence of perspectives in *Mrs. Dalloway*, will thereby bring to the fore a significant return to her belief in communal benefits, which significantly occurs little after her formal declaration in *Three Guineas* of the imperative for creating an Outsiders' Society. Bearing this in mind, two fundamental parameters will be considered in the analysis of *Between the Acts*. Hence, at the same time as the inescapable decentralization of hegemonic power Woolf had defended all throughout her entire career, a form of community, redolent of French Unanimism, as well as of Harrison's ancient drama, is thrived on the vespers of the inexorable outburst of conflict. Nevertheless, a permanent sense of alertness against a dictatorial form of amalgamation prevails, Woolf's formulation of the crowd consisting in the democratic solidarity of a classless, unhierarchical constitution of society.

9.1. 'For There is Joy, Sweet Joy, in Company': The Zeal for Togetherness in '*Between the Acts*'

If, in the previous pages, we noticed the coincidence of the above mentioned postulates from two different theoretical sources, a similar convergence of unanimist premises and carnivalistic principles affects the communal gatherings in Woolf's last work, *Between the Acts*. Certainly, the setting of the novel around a village pageant provides, beforehand, a particularly fertile ground for some of these premises. Indeed, focusing on the comic policy that governs *Between the Acts*, Christopher Ames proposes a carnivalesque reading of the novel. Thus, he emphasizes the festive mood that pervades Virginia Woolf's last work, essentially as regards its formal aspects.

The festive subject matter and the concern with narrative multiplicity come together in the humor and comedy of [*Between the Acts*]. That comedy arises from "parody, incongruity, and linguistic play – (1998: 1).

In this sense, the author emphasizes the abundance of alliterative phrases, such as "gobbets of gossips" (42), or the frequent onomatopoeic plays, like the reiterated "chuff, chuff, chuff" or "tick, tick, tick", as well as the musical changes on words, as it occurs with the binomial Sunny Sung-Yen. Ames also points out the presence of puns, arguing that "Woolf's wordplay reinforces the comic themes of the pageant and the novel as a whole" (1998:10). Continuing with his interest in the parodical features of the novel, the author comments on the rupture of the mimetic illusion of the stage through different comic devices, among which he includes "the flaws of the amateur production, the interruptions of the audience, the audience's familiarity with the local actors, even the sound of birds and cows and weather" (1998:2).

Nevertheless, little does he mention about the community in *Between the Acts*. In fact, as has been noted for the other two novels analysed, and in particular for *Mrs Dalloway*, it is most convenient to consider, on the one hand, the parameter of unanimism as far as it is concerned with collective experiences. On the other hand, the specific situation in which this collectivity is formed, along with the different events around it, will refer us straightaway to the premises of a carnivalistic vision of the world.

Consistently throughout the novel, the pageant provides a powerful device to join together the community of villagers. First, the collectivity gathered on occasion of the play possesses the heterogeneous quality of carnivalesque 'mésalliances', thus encompassing people of all ages and conditions. Certainly, from the retired Cobbet of Cobbs Corner to children, including members of the "most respected families", along with new-comers, or the local reporter, a wide assortment of

people come to enter this collectivity that forms around the pageant. Moreover, the carnivalesque nature of this medley becomes reinforced by means of certain linguistic procedures. Hence, one of the most evident devices amounts to the alliterative constructions present in “Cobbet of Cobbs Corner”, “Wickhams of Owlswick”, or “Dyces of Denton”, which obey to the homogenizing purpose through the decrowning and mockery of aristocracy, as is typical of carnival collectivities:

The audience was assembling. They came streaming along the paths and spreading across the lawn. Some were old; some were in the prime of life. There were children among them. Among them, as Mr Figgis might have observed, were representatives of our most respected families – the Dyces of Denton; the Wickhams of Owlswick; and so on. Some had been there for centuries, never selling an acre. On the other hand, there were new-comers, the Manresas, bringing the old houses up to date, adding bathrooms. And a scatter of odds and ends, like Cobbet of Cobbs Comer, retired, it was understood, on a pension from a tea plantation [...] Also there was Mr Page, the reporter, representing the local paper (68-9).

Second, the sense of wholeness among the attendants to the spectacle is created, to a great extent, by the particular structure of the paragraph, some of whose primary axes rely on a series of parallel constructions arranged into binomials of opposites. The union of these pairs of contrasted elements favours a sense of completion:

- A. Some were old; some were in the prime of life.
- B. Some had been there for centuries [...] On the other hand, there were new-comers.
- C. [...] had Figgis [...] called a roll call, half the ladies and gentlemen present would have said: “Adsum [...]”, had Figgis called the names of the villagers, they too would have answered.

Of course, the members of the audience are perfectly aware of the necessity of remaining together. Indeed, not only do they greet each other on meeting, but as they seat, these assembled individuals strive to find “if possible a seat next to one another” (69). The desire for union is, in fact, in tune with one of the ontological principles central to the life of Clarissa Dalloway. Certainly, if she had assured that “[people] survived, lived in each other” (9), Mrs Swithin now echoes Clarissa's thought when she remarks “‘But we have other lives, I think, I hope’, she murmured. ‘We live in others, Mr.... We live in things’” (64). Indeed, her statement echoes Bakhtin's definition of carnival experience, where he emphasizes the “familiar contact *with everyone and everything*”⁸¹ (1929:130).

Accordingly, Mrs Swithin's theory is verified throughout the novel, as people's concern with remaining together is also extrapolated into the material world, which becomes imbued with of a similar unifying zeal, thus acquiring a symbolic communal value. In this sense, the heterogeneous

⁸¹ My emphasis.

assembly of people that gather around the celebration of the pageant is echoed by the varied assortment of chairs arranged for them: “deck-chairs, gilt chairs, hired cane chairs, and indigenous garden seats had been drawn up on the terrace” (69).

Likewise, while friends hail each other on meeting again at the end of the pageant and the audience as a whole exhorts itself to “keep together”, their vehicles represent a similarly multifarious unity in the surroundings of Pointz Hall, “where cars, push bikes and cycles were crowded together” (177). In addition, automobiles epitomize as well the cohesive concern that pervades the novel. Indeed, while the audience “was assembling” before the beginning of the celebration, “the window cars were assembling” concurrently down in the courtyard. Moreover, as well as the narrator emphasizes the union of the spectators into an integrated whole - “(t)ogether they leant half out of the window”, she also remarks the particular arrangement of the cars, whose “narrow black roofs were laid together like the blocks of a floor” (66).

A similar purpose underlines the inclusion of the picture contemplated by Dodge while visiting Lucy's house (66). Its not at all random title, '*Good Friends*', endows the painting with an allegorical value encapsulating the essence of that sense of 'communitas' distilled by the celebration of the village pageant. Actually, one of the situations mentioned by P.J.Norrish as prompting the existence of 'unanimistes' is precisely the theatrical play, a circumstance the author points out in connection with Jules Romains' *La Vie Unanime* (1926). Indeed, the audience themselves agree with the unanimists on the interrelation established between the rapid pace of modern societies and the impulse for people to gather together. As Norrish has noted, a form of fusion takes place from the very beginning of the play:

(A)t the moment when the curtain goes up and attention is focused for the first time on the stage; the 'total soul' of the audience springs into life as the first words are spoken; and the soul of each individual is said to 'dissolve' (1958:6).

Accordingly, Streatfield confirms Lucy's previous assumption that 'we live in each other'. Besides the already mentioned unanimist reverberation of the Reverend's statement, which constitutes the Romainian belief in a form of spiritual communion within the group, Streatfield's words retain a considerable degree of similarity with the Bakhtinian conception of 'mass body': “The individual feels that he is an indissoluble part of the collectivity, a member of the people's mass body” (1989:229) and thus, as if imbued with Bakhtin's carnival spirit, Streatfield dares to affirm: “we are members one of another. Each is part of the whole” (172).

Significantly, in his account of the birth of 'les unanimistes', Norrish emphasizes his notion of such groups as “particularly a feature of modern civilization”, in view of the interrelation

established between the rapid pace of modern societies and the impulse for people to gather together. Precisely on the basis of this conception, whereby the rapid growth of towns has resulted in multiple forms of collective life everywhere (1958:4), Norrish seems to echo the audience in Pointz Hall, who remarks: “That's what's so nice – [the pageant] brings people together. These days, when we're all so busy that's what one wants...” (143).

Moreover, like Romaine and the rest of unanimists, who believed in the emergence of one collective soul of individuality on occasion of communal gatherings, Reverend Streatfield affirms that “there is a spirit that inspires, pervades” (173). Later, his choice of words becomes strikingly revealing of the parallel with unanimist theories when he concludes - “(o)ne spirit animates⁸² the whole” (180). Indeed, Woolf, who, like Bakhtin, had read in detail the novels of Dostoevsky, also praised the special relevance with which the soul was yielded in the author's narrative. In particular, she emphasized its presentation as fused with other souls, and this, by virtue of the freedom it was endowed with. Thus, according to Woolf's analysis of the Russian author: The soul is not restrained by barriers. It overflows, it floods, *it mingles with the souls of others*⁸³ (1925).⁸⁴

Accordingly, the play has hardly begun in *Between the Acts* when the audience also experiences a first moment of 'fusion', even before being sure of the commencement of the pageant: “Then the play began. Was it, or was it not, the play? [...] *All looked at the bushes.*⁸⁵ For the stage was empty” (70).

This moment of unity out of a collective experience entails significant similarities with another scene in *Mrs Dalloway*. Certainly, as we have seen, the collective contemplation of the royal car, which represents a form of spectacle for the populace, gathers a variety of people of all classes, ages and conditions, actually comparable to the convergence of aristocratic families, villagers, old people, and children that occurs in *Between the Acts*. In both cases, the climactic moment corresponds with the coincidence of all the members of the group when performing the action of looking at the same point:

- All looked at the bushes (*Between the Acts*, 70).
- [...] all heads were inclined the same way (*Mrs Dalloway*, 19).

In addition, the element boosting such a reaction in both scenes involves the arising of a mystery around the spectacle watched. Thus, while in *Mrs Dalloway* the uncertainty about the occupant of the car vibrates in the hearts of the assembled crowd, the audience in *Between the Acts*

⁸² My emphasis.

⁸³ My emphasis.

⁸⁴ “*The Russian Point of View*”, *The Common Reader, First Series*.

⁸⁵ My emphasis.

is startled on realising the stage is empty at the additionally uncertain beginning of the play. On top of that, it is essential to consider the particular effect this communal action provokes, which amounts to the raising of that collective emotion – either defined as 'total soul', following Jules Romains; as Bakhtin's mass body; or as Le Bon's "collective mind" – and which, in the particular case of *Mrs. Dalloway*, makes the whole community think in unison "of the dead; of the flag; of Empire".

In *La Vie Unanime*, Romains situates the moment in which that collective soul/body/consciousness/mind – 'unanime' – gradually comes into existence in the theatre experience even before the beginning of the play. Thus, the poet describes first how the audience is made up of different individuals. Yet, being unable to remain isolated, these soon begin grouping side by side. After this initial step towards togetherness – 'la juxtaposition' – other factors contribute to the raising of that communal identity. Hereby, Romains explains the way in which the noise of the seats, of coughing, even of breathing, «s'accordent, se pénètrent», amalgamating into a unique compound which results in the fusion of the previously discrete individuals into a whole (1958:6).

Surprisingly, the events in *Between the Acts* unfold following a very similar pattern. Indeed, the villagers in *Between the Acts*, like the audience in Romains' poem, try to take their seats next to one another, while the noise produced by the chairs is just part of their wholeness and their unity of action upon the arrival of new members:

They grouped themselves together.

Then there was a rustle and an interruption. Chairs were drawn back [...] Mr and Mrs Haines had arrived (74).

Initially, the attendants to the play, even when referred to as families, have been presented as separate beings. Thus, along the Dyces of Denton, the Manresas, or the Wickhams of Owlswick, the reader is also introduced to Mrs Swithin, Bart Oliver, or Mr Page, among others. Moreover, the most evident manifestation of the rejection of individualism is confirmed by Dodge's assertion in the previous scene - "I'm William" (67), a sentence which ultimately becomes rather useless, as his name remains consistently forgotten by Lucy Swithin. Significantly, when in *Mrs Dalloway*, Richard utters a similar sentence - "My name is Dalloway!" – his remark serves as a device through which Richard is mocked:

For of course it was that afternoon, that very afternoon, that Dalloway had come over; and Clarissa called him 'Wickham'; that was the beginning of it all. Somebody had brought him over; and Clarissa got his name wrong. She introduced him to everybody as Wickham. At last he said 'My name is Dalloway!' – that was [Peter's] first view of Richard – a fair young man, rather awkward, sitting on a deck-chair, and blurting out 'My name is Dalloway!' Sally got hold of it; always after that she called him 'My name is

Dalloway!' (67).

Furthermore, if “there is sweet joy in company”, as the audience in Pointz Hall claims, Romaines had also acknowledged a similar feeling in the required yielding of individual identity in the name of the community – an act which he comes to label as a form of slavery to humankind. As Norrish had expressed it:

The poet of *La Vie Unanime* clearly believes that a man should willingly sacrifice his individual being to that of the group, gladly accepting that his soul be mingled with the souls of his fellow beings. Communal living of this kind is held to be the highest good, for there is only joy, [Romaines] felt, in being ‘l’esclave heureux des hommes’ (1958:11).

Not at random, Miss La Trobe is portrayed as “a slave to her audience” (85), altruistically rendering her sacrifice to the community with the sole aim of bringing all the attendants together around her announcement of the existence – as voiced by Streatfield – of “one spirit [that] animates the whole” (178). Indeed, Romaines’ concept of collective benefit as derived from individual sacrifice refers us straightaway to the ancient notion of the scapegoat, one of the most immediate predecessors of the central figure in carnivalistic traditions.

In the light of this new brought to light connection between unanimist theories and ancient traditions, the second part of our essay will precisely deal with the incorporation of carnival into Woolf’s novels through her inheritance of ancient rituals and myths, which will undoubtedly become decisive to interpret the particular ‘carnivalization’ of the narrative of Virginia Woolf.

In any case, while this has been already announced, our focus throughout this chapter has been to analyse the relevance of the pageant as a collective experience in *Between the Acts* in order to prompt – as in Romaines’ poem – the arising of a communal emotion among the audience in Pointz Hall. Thus, it has become evident that, in the midst of the development of modern societies, the very celebration of the pageant provides a starting point for the longed-for collective fusion – or, as Romaines called it, the birth of the ‘unanime’.

i. Tuning In: The Unifying Power of Music and Machines

Along with the particular arrangement of the pageant, Romaine also emphasizes the linking potential of music, prompting the birth of a collective whole. In his poem '*Le Square Parmentier*', Romaine describes – as Norrish has explained – how a group of people gathered round a band-stand experiences a series of emotions different both in kind and intensity from those lived individually. In the middle of this state the group is aware, not of the sounds, but of the growth of certain forces which are gradually strengthened among them until, after a few minutes, “when interest in the music has stirred each listener to a pitch of feeling, a common rhythm envelops them all, filling the gaps and establishing a kind of psychological bond” (1958:5).

Virginia Woolf herself did not ignore the particular ability of music to create a collective union despite the personal associations elicited on each listener. Thus, in her essay “*Impressions at Bayreuth*”, she states:

Perhaps music owes something of its astonishing power over us to this lack of definite articulation; its statements have all the majesty of a generalization, and yet contain our private emotions (1977:21).

Indeed, music acts as a powerful linking force, compelling individuals to unity: “The audience was assembling. The music was summoning them” (107). Actually, as Cuddy-Keane has observed, the laws inherent to music confer a particular harmony on its listeners, which results in “the integration of human with natural sound” (1990:281). Accordingly, at a certain moment of the pageant, the spectators become identified with the mixed notes of different tunes, whereby the final harmonic fusion of the notes occurs parallel to the process of integration which encompasses, not only among the villagers, but also the narrator proper, who comes to join the gathering crowd in Pointz Hall by including herself as one of the summoned spectators when she states: “on different levels ourselves went forward”. Thus, like the chaotic mixture of notes that – in spite of their patent heterogeneity, as well as of the existence of certain points of divergences and opposite forces among them – achieve a harmonic unity, the spectators of the pageant along with the narrator also manage to eventually 'solve' and 'unite' from a similar “chaos and cacophony measure” (170).

A hitch occurred here. The records had been mixed. Fox trot, Sweet lavender, Home Sweet Home, Rule Britannia – sweating profusely, Jimmy, who had charge of the music, threw them aside and fitted the right one – was it Bach, Handel, Beethoven, Mozart or nobody famous, but merely a traditional tune? Anyhow, thank Heaven, it was somebody speaking after the anonymous bray of the internal megaphone.

Like quicksilver sliding, filings magnetized, the distracted united. The tune

began; the first note meant a second; the second a third. Then down beneath a force was borne in opposition; then another. On different levels they diverged. On different levels ourselves⁸⁶ went forward; flower gathering some on the surface; others descending to wrestle with the meaning; but all comprehending; all enlisted. The whole population of the mind's immeasurable profundity came flocking; from the unprotected, the unskinned; and dawn rose; and azure; from chaos and cacophony measure; but not the melody of surface sound alone controlled it; but also the warring battle-plumed warriors straining asunder: To part? No. Compelled from the ends of the horizon; recalled from the edge of appalling crevasses; they crashed; solved; united (169-170).

The villagers themselves are aware of this potential of music, as they admit: "Music makes us see the hidden, join the broken" (108). Yet, the unifying power of music overreaches human frontiers to achieve a communion between man and nature. As Cuddy-Keane has observed, "the language of music permits the integration of human with natural sound", whereby, she notes, a two-fold decentering of individualism is accomplished. Thus, according to this author, "not only is the individual voice repositioned as a part of the collective voice, but anthropocentric vision is replaced by an integrated vision of humanity and nature" (1990:281). Therefore, nature itself, through the music which is inherent to it, compels man to unity. Thus, "the trees with their green and yellow leaves hustle us and shuffle us, and bid us, like the starlings, and the rooks, come together, crowd together, to chatter and make merry while the red cow moves forward and the black cow stands still" (108).

Moreover, if people gather together at the call of music from nature, a similar effect is produced upon nature on being summoned up by the music specifically created by man. Certainly, while a waltz is being played, "the trees tossing and the birds swirling seemed called out of their private lives, out of their separate avocations, and made to take part" (105). The climactic moment of this communion between man and nature coincides with Old Bartholomew's simultaneously "tapp[ing] his fingers on his knee", at the same time as he addresses Lucy, his sister, as "O sister swallow, O sister swallow", echoing the song she is singing while symbolically "perched on her chair" (104-105).

A similar episode occurs when the sound of an uncertain melody summons up different elements from nature, which in their togetherness on joining the rhythm of music, compose a chant for freedom through unity:

The tune changed. A waltz, was it? Something half known, half not. The swallows danced it. Round and round, in and out they skimmed. Real swallows. Retreating and advancing. And the trees, O the trees [...] Yes, they barred the music, and massed and hoarded; and prevented what was fluid

⁸⁶ My emphasis.

from overflowing.⁸⁷ The temple-haunting martins who came, have always come... Yes, perched on the wall, they seemed to foretell what after all, The Times was saying yesterday [...] Each of us a free man⁸⁸ [...]; all liberated, made whole⁸⁹ (163-4).

Hence, through this depiction of the flux of the sound as 'barred' and 'hoarded' by the action of trees which “[prevent] what [is] fluid from overflowing”, music becomes endowed with an aquatic quality. The other way round, it is also the action of water that will effect an important change upon the course of music and, consequently, upon the evolution of communal relationships. Thus, in the middle of the pageant a 'sudden' and 'profuse' rain makes its appearance. Of course, the act being celebrated outdoors, the rain is initially interpreted as an unfortunate interruption of Nature, particularly by Miss La Trobe, who laments the unexpected shower: “That's done it', sighed Miss La Trobe, wiping away the drops on her cheeks [...] The risk she had run acting in the open air was justified” (162).

Nevertheless, its pouring is soon acknowledged by the villagers as the completion of Nature's integration within the community formed on occasion of the pageant. Certainly, as Miss La Trobe herself states, “Nature once more had taken her part” through its sudden irruption in the middle of the act. Thus, not only is its adherence to the group effected by the pouring's literally enveloping the audience. In addition, this rain is felt by the attendants as a 'universal' rain consisting in a mutual process, whereby all the people's tears simultaneously weep for the whole of the humankind, precisely with the purpose of putting an end to collective human pain. As Isa claims:

Down it poured like all the people in the world weeping. Tears, Tears, Tears.
'O that our human pain could here have ending!' Isa murmured [...] But they were all people's tears, weeping for all people [...] The rain was sudden and universal.

Through the rain, a kind of reconciliation of opposites is also enabled, thus allowing for the accomplishment of unity. As Frank Kermode has observed, throughout the narration the reunion of these pairs of antithetical elements is enacted, thus eliciting a sense of unity. In this case, the rain provides the centripetal force bringing to a point those previously opposite poles: “If you put together the pageants when it rained, and the pageants when it was fine, you have all the pageants and all the days together; wet and fine may be reconciled by prayer and umbrellas” (1992:25).

Furthermore, in the accomplishment of this unifying task, the rain also partakes in the musical quality that has been revealed in Nature. Hence, the new music that begins after the rain, a tune “as simple as could be” undoubtedly suggests the sound of raindrops after the shower, clearly

⁸⁷ My emphasis.

⁸⁸ Idem.

⁸⁹ Idem.

implied by the monotony of its rhythm – “A.B.C. - A.B.C.” Yet, even such a simple melody succeeds in its aim to achieve unity among the attendants to the play. Hereby, it is after the rain that “the other voice [...] the voice that was no one's voice” but the voice of the whole community in its togetherness, now takes the word” (162).

Hence, once “the reticence of nature [has been] undone” and the borders separating “Man the Master from the Brute” have disintegrated through music, an all-encompassing fusion of man and nature is possible. Thus, impelled by the cacophonous melody emitted by the gramophone, people and animals alike gather together to celebrate the merriness of company:

And Lord! the jangle and the din! The very cows joined in. Walloping, tail lashing, the reticence of nature was undone, and the barriers which should divide Man the Master from the Brute were dissolved. Then the dogs joined in. Excited by the uproar, scurrying and worrying, here they came! Look at them! And the hound, the Afghan hound... look at him! (165)

So far, we have analyzed the existence of music in nature, as well as its unifying capacity of buttressing the harmonic fusion of man with natural elements. Nevertheless, everyday modern life also involves the presence of certain musical sounds that result in the creation of communities. Indeed, this is very much in tune with the premises held by Romaine, who identifies 'les unanimes' as “particularly a feature of modern civilization”, which prompts “more varied and more intense forms of collective life everywhere” (1958:4). Significantly, the audience in *Between the Acts* reflect about the experiences in an office, one of the examples mentioned by Romaine, whereby, besides the cohesiveness achieved through the sounds in the city – the day's “hard mallet blows” – and the office, the mere fact of different people grouping around the same thought, as the indications in brackets remark, points to the raise of unanimist collectivities.

'When we wake (some were thinking) 'the day breaks us with its hard mallet blows'. 'The office' (some were thinking) 'compels disparity. Scattered, shattered, hither thither summoned by the bell. “Ping-ping-ping” that's the phone. “Forward!” “Serving!” - that's the shop' (107).

In an era of change and technical development, as announced by the oracular martins, artificial birds also play a part in this unifying task. Hence, Streatfield's speech at the end of the pageant is interrupted by “(t)welve aeroplanes in perfect formation like a flight of wild duck” at the same time as the audience contemplate it in unison. The scene, which considerably reminds of the skywriting episode in *Mrs Dalloway*, differs in particular from the latter in the predominant role of “music” in the performance of the common action.

The word was cut in two. A zoom severed it. Twelve aeroplanes in perfect formation like a flight of wild duck came overhead. That⁹⁰ was the music. The

⁹⁰ Emphasis as in the original.

audience gaped; the audience gazed. The zoom became drone. The planes had passed (174).

Indeed, such relevance purportedly marked by the narrator through her use of italics, involves a two-fold meaning. On the one hand, it points directly to the preponderance of the sound of the planes over Streatfield's words, thus betraying the possible identification of the Reverend as a leader of the group. On the other hand, the decision of placing the emphasis of the sentence on the pronoun may also suggest a causal reading of the utterance, as subordinated to the clauses that immediately follow it - "(t)he audience gaped; the audience gazed." According to this interpretation, a possible paraphrase could be: "It was *because of the music* that the audience gaped and gazed", thus reinforcing its unifying power.

In his analysis of *Between the Acts*, Beer attributes negative connotations to the presence of the aeroplanes in the novel, which he connects with Woolf's dread of a war invasion by air:

The twelve planes in perfect formation at the end of *Between the Acts* are machines [...] The sombre untranslability of the planes here is part of the new meaning of the aeroplanes after the Spanish Civil war (1996:175).

Even despite such association with the conflict, the truth is that the incident of the planes also entails significant allusions to the convenience of a unitary integration. Thus, as he himself observes, the audience recognizes the implicit meaning of the "zoom-drone music", and consequently, they realize the necessity of including the Army within the Grand Ensemble aimed at by the pageant: "Also, why leave out the Army, as my husband was saying, if it's history?" (178)

Additionally, the union represented by the planes in "perfect formation" suggests to the audience the possibility of a unanimist sort of togetherness among the aeroplanes, which would thus partake, in sum, in the 'unanime' originated through the pageant: "And if one spirit animates the whole, what about the aeroplanes?" (178).

Furthermore, what Beer interprets as the aeroplanes' sabotage and abortion of Streatfield's unifying attempt through the interruption of his discourse, becomes rather the firm confirmation of the Reverend's purpose. Certainly, it is precisely the moment noted by Beer as the ultimate victory of this abortive action against union that, much on the contrary to Beer's view comes to reaffirm the accomplishment of such unity. Indeed, Streatfield's claim for a common "centre", "(s)omething to bring us together" (178) is eventually fulfilled by the zooming music of the planes, which certainly leads the whole audience to the common action of 'gaping' and 'gazing' in unison. In addition, even when the aeroplanes interrupt a second time the Reverend's speech, their presence immediately after his assertion of the existence of "(o)ne spirit [that] animates the whole" becomes rather the

definitive confirmation of his words.

This far, the role of the aeroplanes has been analysed regarding their “natural” dimension. Yet, we must not forget that they also partake of their nature as machines. In this sense, their presence, along with the inclusion of the gramophone, illustrates the dissolution of the barriers, not only between Man and the Brute, but also within the triad formed by Man, the Brute, and the Machine. What is more, the latter, even when retaining certain negative implications for its direct association with war, often subverts the imposed utility upon it to become an instrument at the service of communal bonding. Thus, the rhythm produced by the periodical repetition of the 'tick' and 'buzz' of the gramophone accompanies the performance of the pageant, literally enveloping the audience gathered:

Chuff, chuff, chuff, sounded from the bushes. It was the noise a machine makes when something goes wrong [...] Chuff, chuff, chuff the machine buzzed in the bushes [...] Chuff, chuff, chuff [...] Chuff, chuff, chuff, the machine buzzed [...] Chuff, chuff, chuff, went the machine [...] Chuff, chuff, chuff, the machine ticked (70-72).

Only after a while does the gramophone finally grind out a tune. Yet, even when the 'buzz' is heard instead of the songs, the sound of the gramophone achieves a unifying effect similar to the music in Romain's poem. Indeed, it is precisely on hearing the sound of the gramophone that the first act in unison of the crowd assembled in Pointz Hall takes place. Moreover, through the chuffing sound of the machine after the first interval between the acts, a perfect fusion is accomplished among the members of the audience, for whom the impossibility of moving and talking transcends pure politeness. Instead, it becomes symptomatic of their entrance into a new reality, marked by the sign of the collectivity:

Chuff, chuff, chuff went the machine. Could they talk? Could they move? No, for the play was going on. Yet the stage was empty; [...] only the tick of the gramophone was heard. The tick, tick, tick seemed to hold them together, tranced (75).

What is more, the cohesive function of the gramophone overreaches the internal frontiers of the novel. Indeed, if the periodical repetition of the tick and chuff of the gramophone has the power of achieving the unity among the characters gathered round Pointz Hall, its potential extends as well onto the reader, who through his participation in the particular rhythm and musical effect produced by the machine, participate not only in the adherence to the collectivity, but also in its festive mood. Indeed, the transcription of the repetitive sound of the machine provides a specialy cohesive effect at the level of the narration.

Without resorting to its rhythmical effects, the gramophone also fulfils the unifying

function by managing the intervals between the acts. Thus, it is under the indications of “Unity” / “Dispersity” that the audience gets to know the dynamics of the pageant. Considering this role, the gramophone has occasionally been identified with a form of authority over the populace. Hence, Pridmore-Brown envisions the inclusion of the machine as Woolf's explanation of fascist strategies to effect their control over the popular masses, and more precisely, as quoted by P. Caughie, of “fascism's emphasis on acoustic communion” (2000:112, n.8). “*Dispersed we are*, the gramophone triumphed, yet lamented, *Dispersed are we...*” (178)

Certainly, very much in tune with the upside-down logics of the carnival sense of the world, Woolf subverts the destructive value of machines on the threshold of an international conflict to put it at the service of her unifying zeal. Yet, in opposition to fascism, the end of this union is not the leader-centred hegemony over the masses, but rather the egalitarian cohesion of the community in a period menacingly marked by the evident outburst of disruptive powers. In fact, Woolf is cautious enough to prevent the gramophone from ascending to a leader position, whereby the machine's indications for 'Unity/Dispersity' are endowed with a descriptive, rather than prescriptive meaning. This is confirmed by the verbs introducing its parallel occurrence, “Dispersed are we”, whose referential value becomes evident in examples such as:

The gramophone was *affirming*⁹¹ in tones there was no denying, triumphant yet valedictory: Dispersed are we; who have come together (176).

- Dispersed are we, the gramophone repeated⁹² (177).
- Dispersed are we, the gramophone informed them⁹³ (177).
- Dispersed are we, the gramophone triumphed, yet lamented, Dispersed are we...⁹⁴ (178).

In this sense, P. Caughie has also pointed out the absence of quotation marks for the gramophone's speech, which, according to the author, constitutes the narrator's denial of providing the machine with character status, and therefore, with the possibility of becoming a leader.

Thus, the gramophone's final speech by the end of the novel constitutes a powerful vindication of carnivalistic principles through the assurance of the existence of an egalitarian basis underlying not only the community gathered in Pointz Hall, but also the whole of the humankind. Hence, after mentioning a variety of people of all ages and characteristics – ranging from children

⁹¹ My emphasis.

⁹² Idem.

⁹³ Idem.

⁹⁴ Idem.

to aged people including both the rich and the poor, as well as a “lady of the manor”, to different types of murderers, artists, and intellectuals – the conclusion directly points to the belief in the permanence of human nature beyond the artificially imposed social stratification. As Bakhtin holds: “El hombre *escapa* a toda *jerarquía*, en la medida en que la jerarquía sólo puede estar referida a la existencia firme, inmóvil e inmutable, y no al libre devenir” (1987:328). In a world in permanent progress, where hierarchical divisions among people lack any reasonable logic, the conclusion, as the gramophone affirms, is simply obvious - “O we're all the same”.

Before we part, ladies and gentlemen, before we go [...] let's talk in words of one syllable, without larding, stuffing or cant, let's break the rhythm and forget the rhyme. And calmly consider ourselves. Some bony. Some fat [...] Liars most of us. Thieves too [...] The poor are as bad as the rich are. Perhaps worse. Don't hide among rags. Or let our cloth protect us. Or for the matter of that book learning; or skilful practice on pianos; or laying on of paint. Or presume there's innocency in childhood [...] Or virtue in those who have grown white hairs. Consider the gun slayers, bomb droppers here or there. They do openly what we do slyly. Take for example [...] Mr. M's bungalow. A view spoilt for ever. That's murder... Or Mrs. E's lipstick and blod-red nails... A tyrant remember, is half a slave [...] Then there's the amiable condescension of the lady of the manor – the upper class manner [...] O we're all the same (168).

On the grounds of this principle of universal homogeneity underneath individual difference, the gramophone's speech advocates for the maintenance of community. Furthermore, the machine itself participates of the audience's feelings of merriment, and thus is able to assert triumphantly: “let us retain whatever made that harmony”, an invitation to cohesion immediately responded by the audience, who encourage themselves to “keep together. For there is joy, sweet joy, in company” (177).

In fact, in her account of Dostoevsky's novels, Virginia Woolf had also spotted this very sameness among, at first sight, radically different human beings. Thus, in “The Russian Point of View”, she praised the author's achievement, whereby:

The old divisions melt into each other. Men are at the same time villains and saints; their acts are at once beautiful and despicable. We love and we hate at the same time. There is none of that precise division between good and bad to which we are used. Often those for whom we feel most affection are the greatest criminals, and the most abject sinners move us to the strongest admiration as well as love (1925).

As it has been discussed throughout these chapters, Woolf resorts to any means within her reach in order to achieve the longed-for unity. Thus, not only does she choose a pageant as the centre where an ample variety of people converge and become fused into a unique whole through the specific

implications of collective experiences. In addition, the arrangement of this pageant, in clear connection – it has been revealed – with unanimist and carnivalistic principles alike also advocates for the dissolution of any separating borders between actors/idols and spectators/worshippers. Of course, at the service of this erasure of barriers, Woolf does tune in the unifying powers of both music – either as created by man or as inherent to Nature – and machines in order to prompt and impel the long-desired as well as vital universalization.

ii. 'Let's Perform Together': The Role of the Pageant

Consistently throughout this chapter, the celebration of the pageant in *Between the Acts* has been described as the occasion giving rise to the emergence of a unanime, at the same time as it favoured the creation of a community imbued with the familiarity and cohesiveness that are typical of the carnival spirit. Actually, bearing in mind that one of the basic principles underlying the performance in Pointz Hall amounts to its advocacy for the dissolution of the barriers between actors and spectators, the association with the parameters above becomes no less than inevitable. Certainly, one of the main notes of the pageant is the impossibility to establish this classic division, for both audience and actors exchange their roles throughout the play. This, of course, retains a considerable degree of similarity with Bakhtin's definition of carnival, while it surprisingly encapsulates much of the essence underlying the politics in *Between the Acts*: “Carnival is a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators”⁹⁵. In carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act” (1929:122).

In order to understand the real meaning of these wholly integrated communities, it is also necessary to remark that Bakhtin traces the celebration of this carnivalized pageant back to the ancient Greeks and Romans, who performed similar rituals in which a major feature was “free familiar contact” among its participants (1929:128). Indeed, the classical scholar Jane Harrison, whose influence on Woolf will be discussed in the next part of our essay, points out the same characteristics when describing the origins of drama, a genre she particularly associates with a communal and leader-free form of art: “There is no division at first between actors and spectators;”⁹⁶ all are actors, all are doing the thing done, dancing the dance danced” (1913:126). Hence, as S. D. Shattuck has noted, the roles of chorus and spectator are blended and interchanged, whereby the “ever-present chorus” occasionally acts as spectator when, for example, the group gathers round Queen Elizabeth's throne “simulating the audience at a play”. Conversely, Shattuck remarks, “the spectators [...] have a choral function. Like the chorus of the pageant, they remain for the most part an amorphous group of villagers without proper names”, whose comments can be considered, for the critic, as “choral refrains given in passages of broken phrases that read like the choral texts within the pageant” (1984:294).

Accordingly, it is essential to call attention upon the particular role the anthropologist attributes to the chorus as a focal element in the decentralization characterizing the former transition

⁹⁵ My emphasis.

⁹⁶ Idem.

of ritual into art, whereby the distinction between actors and worshippers/spectators does not enter yet the conception of these ancient dramatic forms. In fact, Harrison explains, in such celebrations, “the whole community assembles” and dance (1913:126). In this sense, the specific arrangement of the theatre becomes particularly illustrative of this democratic nature of ancient drama:

The theatre to the Greeks was simply 'the place of seeing, the place where the spectators sat [...]'.⁹⁷ But the kernel and centre of the whole was the orchestra, the circular dancing-place⁹⁸ of the chorus; and, as the orchestra was the kernel and centre of the theatre, so the chorus, the land of dancing and singing men [...] was the centre and kernel and starting-point of the drama (1913:123).

Yet, not only through the choral device is the distance between actors and spectators bridged. Indeed, at a certain moment, the borderline signalling the territory belonging to each of them is eventually blurred and dissolved, thereby constructing before the reader the illusion of the continuance of the pageant's fiction throughout the pretendedly less fictitious universe of Pointz Hall. Significantly, Isa announces – “(t)here is little blood in my arm” - right after the crone has stated the same during the performance of the Shakespearean play. Similarly, she still continues extending the fictionality beyond the borders of the play by her action of pressing a rose “twixt thumb and finger” (138), which echoes the crone's holding “a bead between thumb and finger” (81). In addition, while Elsbeth's act becomes a kind of penance for the murder she has committed - “Each bead [...] a crime!” - Isa's action represents the crime against her husband she secretly carries out only in her mind: “She looked among the passing faces for the man in grey” (138) as well as her later repentance: “She dropped her flower. What single, separate leaf could she press? None”.

That, in spite of her being perfectly aware that her decision, as in the case of Elsbeth, will eventually carry her to death, indeed to the place where “grows nothing for the eye [...]”, where “no evening lets fall her mantle; nor sun rises” (139). Furthermore, if the crone's victim has been a “man with a hood on his face, and the bloody hands” carrying a “babe in a basket” (81), Giles, Isa's husband, appears before her with his shoes stained in blood. At the same time, Giles' portrayal is often associated with a child through Isa's frequent references to her husband as “the father of my children”.

Certainly, Giles himself participates in a similar overlapping of roles. Hence, he transgresses his nature as a mere spectator, and thus obtains his own part in Shakespeare's play by his quoting a line from King Lear: “I fear I am not in my perfect mind” (78). What is more, Giles comes to embody the “bold and blatant” Rhoderick, an identity conferred to him by Mrs Manresa who, in the course of the pageant, appoints him as “the surly hero”, at the same time as she has

⁹⁷ Quotation marks in the original.

⁹⁸ Emphasis as in the original.

arisen as the Queen of the festival: “Mrs Manresa applauded loudly. Somehow she was the Queen; and he (Giles) was the surly hero” (84).

It has, therefore, become clear that, by erasing the divisory line between actors and spectators in *Between the Acts*, the traditional hierarchical lines of power are subverted, and subsequently replaced with – in the words of Cuddy-Keane – an “undifferentiated and participatory communal form” (1990:283). This revisionary and decentralizing task, it has been noted, is of course in consonance with the carnivalesque transgression of social barriers through the constitution of communities ruled by a “free and familiar contact” among its members.

As a safe guarantee of this egalitarian community characterized by the absence of a head or leader, special emphasis is made at the end of the play in *Between the Acts* to thank, not the author, a symbol of centralized authority, but the actors or even the audience, or more precisely, since borders have been erased, 'ourselves', as Bart Oliver expresses it (183). Furthermore, after having exposed his reticence to thank the author, Bart's decision to congratulate Miss La Trobe confirms her status as a non-leader:

'And we mustn't, my brother says, thank the author', Mrs Swithin repeated, looking in the direction of Miss La Trobe.

'So I thank you', he said (186).

Certainly, if Miss La Trobe has ever been portayed as a leader, a suggestion elicited by her image as a commander,

Miss La Trobe was pacing to and fro between the leaning birch trees. One hand was deep stuck in her jacket pocket; the other held a foolscap sheet. She was reading what was reading there. She had the look of a commander pacing his deck (57),

the narrator soon bewares of allowing Miss La Trobe to become a figure of authority. Hence, the inclusion of the gramophone in the novel is significant insofar as it represents a form of subversion even from an allegedly human-controlled machine. Indeed, this arbitrariness of the gramophone's sounds, often unrelated to Miss La Trobe's directions, has been interpreted by P. Caughie as symptomatic of the narrator's purpose of “adulterat[ing] messages of authority” (2000:112, n. 8).

In this sense, it is necessary to consider the location of the pageant in *Between the Acts*. As in carnival festivities, the performance takes place in the open air, out in the lawn of Pointz Hall. Indeed, Bakhtin conceives carnival as an essentially outdoors celebration, whose focal point is situated in the public square. As he puts it – “The main arena for carnival acts was the square and the streets adjoining it” (1929:128). Yet, along with the public square, Bakhtin contemplates as well

other locations as potential settings for carnival, as long as they provide “meeting and contact-points for heterogeneous people”. Among these places, Bakhtin underlines the house as inevitably one of the centres – “To be sure, carnival invaded the home”. Significantly, Miss La Trobe selects for his pageant the yard in the Olivers' house, a place she describes as “the very place for a pageant!” (69) Indeed, we have already insisted on the markedly universalizing character of the performance, very much in tune with Bakhtin's idea that “carnival belongs to the whole people, it is universal, everyone⁹⁹ must participate in its familiar contact” (1929:128).

However, perhaps the most obvious expression of this universalization is constituted by the aim, throughout the performance, to achieve the formation of a “Grand Ensemble” bringing to a point the major institutional associations, such as the Army, the Navy, the Union Jack, and the Church (161). In this sense, it is to be remarked that Freud, an author Woolf had read and whose theories she had even admired (1939:202)¹⁰⁰, mentions the interaction between groups as one of the conditions contemplated by McDougall in his work *The Group Mind* (1920:45) “for raising – in Freud's words – collective mental life to a higher level” (1921:30).

Even when none of these authors refers to such elevation of 'collective mental life' as unanimism, a certain link with this theory cannot be denied. Hence, this definition perspires the belief, shared by both McDougall and Freud, in the emergence of a unique group's mind/consciousness. In addition, beneath this notion, the idea underlying is that of the superiority of such collective mind, even of a higher status than the individual one. Particularly interesting is the second condition proposed by McDougall, whereby the author emphasizes the importance of the emotional factor in the perpetuation of the group. As expressed by Freud:

The second condition is that in the individual member of the group some definite idea should be formed of the nature, composition, functions and capacities of the group, so that from this he may develop an emotional relation to the group as a whole¹⁰¹ (1921:30-31).

In this sense, it is crucial to resort once more to the theories suggested by Harrison. Thus, in her outline of ancient drama, the scholar notes that it is not actually in the plot or the characters that the real meaning of such performances is contained, but rather, she affirms, “(i)t is in the common act, the common or collective emotion, that ritual starts” (1913:125-6).

It is undeniable that this belief is also central to the events in Pointz Hall. Indeed, this thought seems to haunt the visionary Isa, who remarks that it is not the plot, but the emotions, that matter (82-3). Certainly, the emergence of a common emotion blends together the participants, even

⁹⁹ My emphasis.

¹⁰⁰ *Virginia Woolf's Diary*, vol. 5 (1936-1941), p.202.

¹⁰¹ My emphasis.

to the extent of making them feel “(w)e are members one of another. Each is part whole” (172). Furthermore, if the emotion originated among the members of the crowd in *Mrs Dalloway* was so 'formidable' and strong as even to overreach the extent of any “instrument [...] capable of transmitting shocks in China” (19), a similar feeling arises among the attendants in *Between the Acts*, who realize their utter fusion into one unique emotion. At the same time, their announcement of a never sufficient togetherness directly points to their advocacy for the elimination of limits and constraints in favour of unrestrained freedom:

Their minds and bodies were too close, yet not close enough. We aren't free, each of them felt separately, to feel or think separately [...] We're too close; but not close enough (60)

Likewise, the maintenance of this 'collective emotion' enables them to coexist harmoniously:

But, the gramophone asserted, let us retain whatever made that harmony.¹⁰²

O let us [...] keep together. For there is joy, sweet joy, in company (176-7).

Moreover, it is only through the preservation of such emotion that unity can be guaranteed. In this all-encompassing fellowship, when even the barrier between man and animal is blurred, a perfect cohesion within the group is ensured by the adherence of the cows at the end of the play. In fact, “(t)he cows annihilated the gap; bridged the distance; filled the emptiness and *continued the emotion*”¹⁰³ (126).

Hereby, in its vindication for eliminating those borders through the fusion of the roles between actors/spectators, along with the particular nature of its location, the pageant partakes in the universalizing attempt that brings together both carnival and unanimism, as it has been discussed. Yet, only through the existence and preservation of communal emotion can this collective union last and survive.

¹⁰² Emphasis as in the original.

¹⁰³ My emphasis.

9.2. The Ritual of the Second Birth

Of the permanence of those ritual practices through literature, no doubt, some of Virginia Woolf's novels constitute a reliable, yet – as Goldman notes – underestimated testimony (1998). Particularly, we will focus our attention on *Orlando* (1929) and *Between the Acts* (1941) on the basis of their providing valuable evidence of the trace of Harrison and her anthropological theories on Woolf's thought, as well as on her adaptation of mythological elements and rites. Thus, in her 1913 *Ancient Art and Ritual*, Jane Harrison points out, on describing the Spring Festival celebrated in Greece, the role of the Dythirambes, which she defines as “the Song and Dance of the New Birth” (p. 101). Indeed, she remarks, in the savage world, it was of vital importance that every member of the tribe unexceptionally undergo two different births. Hereby, after the first, or biological coming into existence, the individual experiences a second rebirth, this time of a social nature. As Harrison herself explains:

With the savage, to be twice born is the rule, not the exception. By his first birth, he comes into the world, by his second, he is born into his tribe. At his first birth he belongs to his mother [...]; at his second he becomes a full-fledged man and passes into the society of the warriors of his tribe (1913:104).

Indeed, such belief in a second life would also be observed by Bakhtin, who conceived carnival as a second life for man. Hence, people in the Middle Ages experienced in carnival a kind of rebirth, whereby they passed from a life of alienation and submission promoted by the rigid, official authority to a territory of freedom and re-encounter with their 'unacted parts' – as Reverend Streatfield would define it. In Bakhtin's words:

It could be said [...] that a person of the Middle Ages lived, as it were, two lives: one was the official life, monolithically serious and gloomy, subjugated to a strict hierarchical order, full of terror, dogmatism, reverence, and piety; the other was the life of the carnival square¹⁰⁴, free and unrestricted, full of ambivalent laughter, blasphemy, the profanation of everything sacred, full of debasing and obscenities, familiar contact with everyone and everything (1929:129-130).

Like the savage, who is integrated into the society of his tribe through that second birth, the medieval man fuses himself among his equals on undergoing the process of a second rebirth during the carnival experience. Yet, such incorporation into the group, far from constituting the subjection to communal norms, involves rather the entrance into a realm of freedom and closeness to his equals.

¹⁰⁴ Emphasis as in the original.

The theme of the twice-born recurs in the whimsical novel *Orlando*. Hence, initially born as a man, Woolf's androgynous character re-emerges as Lady Orlando after going through a ritual ceremony majestically presided over by the “gods who keep watch and ward by the ink pot of the biographer” (65). Under the form of sexual inversion, this ritual of the second birth becomes a leit-motif in the novel. Hence, the until then Archduchess Harriet undergoes a similar process by later arising as Archduke Harry:

Orlando [...] turned to present the Archduchess with the salver, and behold – in her place stood a tall gentleman in black. A heap of clothes lay in the fender. She was alone with a man (87).

Likewise, Orlando's discovery of Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine as formerly a woman brings to the fore the issue of Shel's transformation:

'Oh! Shel, don't leave me!' She [Orlando] cried. 'I'm passionately in love with you', she said. No sooner had the words left her mouth than an awful suspicion rushed into both their minds simultaneously,

'You're a woman, Shel!' she cried.

'You're a man, Orlando!' he cried (124).

Moreover, Woolf goes even further by challenging the traditional process of the “rite of passage”, or “transition from one stage to another”, – as Harrison explains it (1921:14) – which is transgressed and surpassed in *Orlando* through the introduction of what can be considered as a third birth. Particularly, the series of re-genderings that Orlando, as well as the Archduke and Shelmerdine, experience throughout the novel distils the purpose of exaggeration and eccentricity, two principles inherent to the idea of carnival, and the latter of which is connected, for Bakhtin, with “the violation of the usual and the generally accepted” (1929:126). Indeed, the introduction of this third birth within the conventional diadic structure of the ritual becomes symptomatic of the 'carnival sense of the world' pervading the novel. Hence, not only the rite, but also the entire natural order of things, is over-exceeded and reverted – a phenomenon which Bakhtin attributes to the fact that: “[...] carnivalistic life is life drawn out of its *usual*¹⁰⁵ rut, it is to some extent “life turned inside out”, “the reverse side of the world” ” (“Monde à l'envers”) (1929:122).

Similarly, the unsettling image of the toad inside the snake's body in *Between the Acts* suggests as well a sort of second birth. Indeed, the description of the snake as lodging the still alive toad inside itself constitutes a form of pregnancy, one of the typical images of the body in carnival, whereby two bodies are displayed into one.

There, couched in the grass, curled in an olive green ring, was a snake. Dead?
No, chocked with a toad in its mouth. The snake was unable to swallow; the

¹⁰⁵ Emphasis as in the original.

toad was unable to die. A spasm made the ribs contract; blood oozed. It was birth the wrong way round – a monstrous inversion (89).

Nevertheless, as in the case of Orlando's third birth, a kind of subversion takes place, though on this occasion, in a twofold sense. First, the traditional form of the ritual second birth is transgressed through the presentation of a pregnancy oriented to death. Certainly, it is not the toad's second birth that is expected of this grotesque pregnancy, but its death - "the toad was unable to die". This unusual end of pregnancy represents, at the same time, a reversion of Bakhtin's grotesque body, whose simultaneous encompassing of life and death epitomizes the regenerating capacity of death to engender a new life.

However, the scene does partake in the carnivalistic principle of carrying life out of its usual track through the presentation, not only of a dual body where both life and death converge, but also of the implicit ambiguity entailed by the uncertain border separating life and death. Moreover, the episode constitutes in itself an inversion of the natural order of things – undoubtedly, one of the major principles promoted by the carnival sense of the world: "(i)t was birth the other way round – a monstrous inversion."

In both cases it is observed that, beyond the subversive value implied by the inclusion of a second birth, thus transgressing the barriers of natural limitations, the narrator's desire for taking such transgression to its utmost is revealed. Hence, not only does she revert the logics of nature, but even the very instruments employed for this subversion, as they are the myths and rites inherited from Jane Harrison. Hereby, her main purpose evidently amounts to emphasize her utter discontent with the oppressiveness and absurdity of a strict adherence to norms, whatever their nature.

9.3. The Lamb, the Puppet, and the Dying-God:

The Role of the Scapegoat

This chapter will examine how the introduction of the figure of the dying-god – or scapegoat – permits the filtration into both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Between the Acts* of the carnivalistic theme of the crowning/decrowning process. Hence, in Frazer's anthropological study of ancient religions – one of Jane Harrison's major sources – the author notices the convergence of religion and superstition, in a direct conjugation with astrological beliefs, in the ideological system underlying these societies. Accordingly, as the legend goes, the Egyptian sun-god Osiris had been born during the intercalary days thus arranged by the ancient Greeks who, impelled by a superstitious belief, attempted to equal the duration of both the lunar and the solar years.

Significantly, Pointz Hall serves as a point of convergence for these cosmic-religious rituals, which provides one of the main tools at the service of certain 'crowning' acts. Indeed, it is precisely Lucy Swithin, about whom her brother wonders “why [...] there existed [in her] such a prayable being”(23), who represents the most emblematic figure of these ritualistic performances. Hence, her portrayal from the beginning as wearing “a cross gleaming gold on her breast”, which she handles in order to protect the pageant against bad weather (21), prepares for the ritualistic act she magically performs. Not at random, it is precisely during the 'intercalary' moments between the acts of La Trobe's pageant that Lucy suddenly emerges into a “majestic goddess, rising from her throne among her peers” (66), in order to yield a tribute to the sun-god, represented by “the yellow gravel that made a crescent round the door” she leans in front of and where she fixes her eye. At the same time, through this offer, which is completed by the sun's response as it strikes the swinging cross that is pendant from Lucy's neck, the god-like Swithin eventually heals the tormented Giles:

'At school they held me under a bucket of dirty water, Mrs Swithin; so I married; but my child's not my child, Mrs Swithin. I'm a half-man, Mrs Swithin; a flickering, mind-divided little snake in the grass, Mrs Swithin; as Giles saw; but you've healed me...' (67)

Furthermore, crowned as a pagan goddess through this image, Lucy Swithin also embodies a Christian Saint. Indeed, her name constitutes a token of St. Swithin, a Saxon Bishop of Winchester intimately linked to the rainy season. Thus, according to legend, when the Bishop lay on his deathbed, he asked to be buried outdoors, where he could be trodden on and rained on. This ritual was performed for nine years, after which the monks of Winchester attempted to remove his remains to a shrine inside the Cathedral on 15th July 971. The legend went that there was always a

heavy rain storm either during the ceremony or on its anniversary. From this derived a popular folk tale, based on the belief that, if it rains on St. Swithin's Day, it will rain for the next forty days in succession, and a fine 15th July will be followed by forty days of fine weather:

St. Swithin's Day, if it does rain
Full forty days, it will remain
St. Swithin's Day, if it be fair
For forty days, it will rain no more.¹⁰⁶

Not only does Lucy's surname correspond with the Saint's name. Indeed, her brother, Bart, alludes to her as a “skull” lodging “a prayable being”, whereas at a certain moment, Lucy fixes her eyes on the sky as “she saw God there, God on his throne” (21). Moreover, Pointz Hall lodges the same burial rite, which is initiated by Lucy's decision to show Isa and William her house, since “it was time to fulfil her promise” (62). As they mount up the staircase, Swithin's identity is revealed by the painting they stop to contemplate. Hence, both Isa and William wonder about the never answered identity of the woman in the picture, who significantly “looked lit up, as if for a banquet, with the sun pouring over her” while, curiously, “Mrs Swithin reflected”. During their ascension, funeral music is suggested through the subtle combination of a veiled allusion to descent, along with the musical reference:

She [Lucy] panted slightly, going upstairs. Then she ran her hands over the sunk books in the wall on the landing, as if they were pan pipes.

'Here are two poets from whom we descend' (63).

Moreover, at a certain moment, Mrs Swithin becomes aware of the “invisible procession” leading her to bed, at the same time as she spontaneously prompts into a reference to “[a] bishop, a traveller”.

'Now up, now up again.' Again they mounted. 'Up and up they went', she panted, seeing, it seemed, an invisible procession, 'up and up to bed.'

'A bishop; a traveller; – I've forgotten even their names. I ignore. I forget' (63-64).

It is yet on arriving at the bedroom that the climactic moment of this episode takes place, when William expects to see somebody “knelt in prayer” in the room, whose straight counterpane and candles, along with its utter emptiness clearly suggest the appearance of a shrine.

'Now', she said, 'for the bedrooms'. She tapped twice very distinctly on a door [...] He half expected to see somebody there, [...] knelt in prayer. But the room was empty [...], not slept in for months, a spare room. Candles stood on

¹⁰⁶ As transcribed in the web source <http://www.newadvent.org>.

the dressing table. The counterpane was straight (64).

What is more, the scene, which is preceded by a symbolic rise of doves – “(t)hree white pigeons were flirting and tiptoeing [...] Suddenly, up they rose in a flutter, circled, and flew away” (64) – closes with Swithin's 'sinking down' in the bed, while “(h)er voice died away” in her desire for expressing her belief in an after-life, once her body significantly returns to the place that saw her be born.

Mrs. Swithin stopped by the bed.

'Here', she said, 'yes, here', she tapped the counterpane, 'I was born. In this bed.'

Her voice died away. She sank down on the edge of the bed [...]

'But we have other lives, I think, I hope', she murmured. 'We live in others, Mr... We live in things' (64-5).

Actually, Mrs. Swithin acts as a vehicle for the transposition of the legend into the fictional world of Pointz Hall. Hence, as a reincarnation of the rain Saint, Mrs. Swithin bridges the legend with the general worry about the weather for the pageant – “And which would it be, wet or fine?” Indeed, the action takes place in the middle of the summer, which suggests its proximity to St. Swithin's Day, while the remark on the yearly repetition of the words endows it with a ritualistic value: “Every summer, for seven summers now, Isa had heard the same words” (20).

Curiously, whereas the tribes observed by both Frazer and Harrison oriented their rituals to the coming of the rain, which they longed for so that their crops might grow, all magical-religious acts in *Between the Acts* actually aim to prevent it from coming, in their desire for the pageant, Miss La Trobe's harvest, not to be spoilt.

Mrs. Swithin's eyes glazed as she looked at [the sky]. Isa thought her gaze was fixed because she saw God there, God on his throne. But as a shadow fell next moment on the garden Mrs. Swithin loosed and lowered her fixed look and said:

'It's very unsettled. It'll rain, I'm afraid. We can only pray', she added, and fingered her crucifix (21).

As far, Lucy has been raised both as a pagan goddess among gods and as a Christian Saint. Yet, carnivalistic crownings, by virtue of the 'joyful relativity' that characterizes the carnival sense of the world, are double-sided, and therefore, paired with a subsequent act of decrowning. As Bakhtin expressed it:

From the very beginning, a decrowning glimmers through the crowning. And all carnivalistic symbols are of such a sort: they always include within themselves a perspective of negation (death) or vice versa [...] The ritual of

decrowning completes, as it were, the coronation and is inseparable from it (I repeat: this is a dualistic ritual). And through it, a new crowning already glimmers (1929:125).

Hence, the decrowning of Lucy as a Saint is mainly performed by her brother, Bartholomew, who laughs off any attempt for religious seriousness in Lucy's actions. Indeed, Bart provides an earthly counterpoint to his sister's elevated beliefs, thus wholly depriving her acts from the solemnity previously intended. Accordingly, her advice to pray in order to prevent the rain is debased by Bart's suggestion to provide umbrellas:

It's very unsettled. It'll rain, I'm afraid. We can only pray', she added, and fingered her crucifix.

'And provide umbrellas,' said her brother. Lucy flushed. He had struck her faith. When she said 'pray', he added 'umbrellas'. She half covered the cross with her fingers. She shrank; she cowered [...] (21-22)

Additionally, at a certain moment, Lucy is forced to stop talking before the imminence of the mockery addressed by her brother, willing to “crack another joke about saints” (28). Likewise, the image of Lucy as a “majestic goddess” becomes also degraded and lowered by the reference to the laughter of the other gods on seeing her rise and ceremoniously toss her garments among them (66-67).

The belief underlying carnivalistic decrownings, as Bakhtin noted, amounts to the debasement and inversion of what had been previously considered as irrefutably sacred and superior to men. Through this process, old 'immutable' values and conventions became eroded and demolished, thus allowing for the triumph of renewal and change. In the light of this, death acquires a new meaning, as purely a stage necessarily previous to a renovated world. In Bakhtin's words:

Under this ritual act of decrowning of the king lies the very core of the carnival sense of the world – the pathos of shifts and changes, of death and renewal.¹⁰⁷ Carnival is the festival of all-annihilating and all-renewing time [...] Moreover, precisely in this ritual of decrowning does there emerge with special clarity the carnival pathos of shifts and renewals, the image of constructive death¹⁰⁸ (1929:124-5).

It is precisely in connection with this decrowning typical of carnival that Harrison's idea of ritual is to be brought to the fore. Indeed, the scholar insists on the pragmatic nature of ritual practices, which she conceives as 'mediate' – that is, as means to achieve an end: “Ritual, [...] was a [...] copy or imitation of life, but – and this is the important point, – always with a practical end” (1913:135). Thus, in the case of Spring Festivals, she concludes, this aim amounts to the assurance of food-supply. In the light of this, Harrison underlines the emergence of the scapegoat as a figure

¹⁰⁷ My emphasis.

¹⁰⁸ Idem.

embodying the desire for renewal, which constitutes an essential prerequisite for the assurance of fertility and, therefore, of the prosperity of the crops. Accordingly, she points to Osiris as the central emblem of the scapegoat, or the “prototype of the great class of resurrection gods who die that they may live again” (1913:15).

Moreover, for Frazer, as well as for Bakhtin, this renovating function inherent to the public scapegoat is linked to a process of decrowning of such figure, previously situated in an upper position. Indeed, according to the anthropologist, this debasing purpose justifies the choice of a 'dying-god' as a scapegoat among ancient societies. Frazer explains this duality:

The divine character of the animal or man is forgotten, and he comes to be regarded merely as an ordinary victim [...] He was killed, not originally to take away sin, but to save the divine life from the degeneracy of old age; but since he had to be killed at any rate, people may have thought that they might as well see the opportunity to lay upon him the burden of their sufferings and sins, in order that he may bear it away with him [...] (1913:227)

As the myth goes, Osiris married his sister Isis, who ascended the throne with him and helped him to civilize Egypt. When Osiris departed on his peaceful conquests of the world, Isis remained in Egypt as a governess until Osiris' return. Yet, during one of those conquests, Osiris was assassinated by their violent brother Set. On hearing it, Isis disguised herself as a swallow and set forth to find the coffer in which Osiris had been enclosed and cast into the Nile. Once she recovered it with the help of Astarte, who presented her with the trunk of a miraculous tree containing the coffer, she bathed it in tears and returned it to Egypt, where she hid it. In his evil impulses, Set recaptured the body and cut it into fourteen pieces, which he scattered far and wide. Isis searched for the fragments and found them all, except for the phallus, which had been eaten by a Nile crab. Despite that, Isis reconstituted her brother's body and performed the rite of embalmment that returned the murdered god, traditionally represented by the Nile, to eternal life. At the same time, Isis represents the rich plains of Egypt, separated from Osiris by Set, the arid desert, until the yearly inundation of the Nile reunites them and makes those plains fruitful and fertile (2002:93-95).

If the novel of *Mrs. Dalloway* displays a range of Carnival Fools – as it has been seen – the same applies to *Between the Acts*. The most obvious example in this case is represented by Albert, overtly referred to as “the village idiot”. In fact, apparently a mentally-ill character, Albert fits into Bakhtin's postulate of the carnivalistic association between foolery features and buffoonery acts. Hence, while Bakhtin identifies the crowned king as the buffoon, beaten and ridiculed, he also acknowledges him as the one who voices the new perspective provided by the carnival sense of the world. In this view, Bakhtin's grotesque aesthetics conceives such foolery as a means of getting rid of the official, false truth of the world, thus gazing it from a new angle, radically

different from the conventional world (1987:49).

Accordingly, it is he who dares to enact precisely 'the unacted part' of each of us. Indeed, scorned and dispaired by the attendants, Albert stands for, as Streatfield announces, "something hidden, the unconscious as they call it?" (179). Certainly, Streatfield's words portray Albert as the pure essence of carnival, whereby man in the Middle Ages – as Bakhtin notes – was allowed to live his second and most authentic life, independent from and opposed to the official one (1929:129-30). In fact, Albert accurately embodies the image of the fooled and decrowned expiatory figure through which societies can progress and survive. Thus, while different characters, such as Mrs. Elmhurst or Mrs. Parker, admit to there being an idiot in every village, – "The village idiot', whispered [...] Mrs. Elmhurst – who came from a village ten miles distant where they, too, had an idiot" (79), such remark indeed points to Freud's notion of this figure, which, according to the author, already existed in ancient civilizations and has remained throughout the centuries as a necessary safety valve for the endurance of societies. As Freud has put it, these become more solid insofar as they may have "other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness" (1949:51).

Actually, in the middle of a strictly-ruled society, still imbued with the Victorian spirit, Woolf revisits the ancient past to pose the nearly rhetorical question - "'(s)urely [...], we're more civilized?'" (100) – as voiced by Mrs. Parker, one of the attendants to the pageant. In the light of the evident answer, in a nation crowded with technological developments, yet on the verge of an international conflict, the presence of Albert, a patently carnivalesque buffoon, brings down and debases the as rigid as inefficient system of values. As Beer has noted:

In *Between the Acts* Victorian England re-emerges as a not quite dislodged present [...] *Between the Acts* is preoccupied with synchrony as a new form (perhaps the only feasible remaining form) for permanence [...] In the village pageant the past is summoned up, in the form of caricature, celebration, and reminiscence [...] (1989:155).

Certainly, Virginia Woolf does not conceal her desire to put an end to the repressive Victorian society. Thus, she has Isa look "at Mrs. Swithin as if she had been a dinosaur or a very diminutive mammoth". Moreover, she continues to express the feeling shared by both Isa and Virginia that "(e)xtinct she must be, since she had lived in the reign of Queen Victoria" (156).

Accordingly, it is precisely Albert who, in the midst of the conventionalisms surrounding the Elizabethan period which is being performed, overtly laughs at the audience, "leering at each in turn" (78). Furthermore, as implicitly suggested by Streatfield, who prompts into a sudden reference to sex when trying to define the idiot's role – "(b)ut why always drag in sex..." (179) – Albert's buffoonery is associated with the system of carnivalistic obscenities and profanations that

constitute, for Bakhtin, a form of 'debasement' and 'bringing down to earth' whatever is officially worshipped as high and elevated (1929:123). In this sense, Albert's dodgeful attitude to 'Queen Elizabeth' obviously contributes to the decrowning of the oppressive and monolithic authority she represents.

Now he was picking and plucking at Great Eliza's skirts. She cuffed him on the ear. He tweaked her back. He was enjoying himself immensely [...] There he was pinching the Queen's skirts (78-9).

Yet, this is not the only means through which political power is mocked. Alluded to as “old Queen Bess” or “Great Eliza”, the paradoxically 'eminent' and 'dominant' figure of Queen Elizabeth is actually unmasked as merely Eliza Clark, the tobacco-seller. Indeed, despite the ironical remark that “(s)he was splendidly dressed up”, her appearance is no more dignifying, actually falling into the grotesque aesthetics outlined by Bakhtin. Thus, her 'pearl-hung' head epitomizes the carnivalesque dismemberment whereby natural limits become transgressed and over-exceeded as a form of degradation of the high and conventional (1987:189).

Similarly, the 'splendid' royal vestments amount in fact to fake, ridiculous versions of its original, as in the case of the “sixpenny brooches [glaring] like cats' eyes”, or the down-looking pearls. At the same time, the delusory depiction of her regals – allegedly silver-made – acquires a patently carnivalesque overtone, certainly reminiscent of the portrayal of Don Quixote, as concerns the description of kitchen utensils elevated to the category of royal vestments:

Her head, pearl-hung, rose from a vast ruff. Shiny satins draped her. Sixpenny brooches glared like cats' eyes and tigers' eyes; pearls looked down; her cape was made of cloth of silver – in fact swabs used to scour the saucepans (76).

Mounted on what turns out to be a soap-box, serving as “perhaps a rock on the ocean”, the Queen acquires a grotesquely 'gigantic' size, symptomatic of carnivalesque excesses. Moreover, like the Prime Minister in *Mrs. Dalloway*, she becomes dwindled to the status of a mere puppet placed, at the own will of the narrator, behind a counter in a shop:

And when she mounted the soap-box in the centre, representing perhaps a rock in the ocean, her size made her appear gigantic. She could reach a fitch of bacon or hawl a tub of oil with one sweep of her arm in the shop (76).

Simultaneously, her association with greasy food is in tune with the carnivalesque concern with abundant food. Indeed, Bakhtin notes the enumeration of different sorts of venom and poultry in Rabelais' *Gargantua*, one of the most outstanding examples of carnivalized literature (1987:268).

From all sources, the Queen's decrowning becomes evident. Hence, her presentation as “(t)he Queen of this great land ” is overwhelmed by “the roar of laughter”, the continuance of which

is implied by Giles' muttering “(l)laughter, loud laughter”¹⁰⁹. Indeed, as in carnival, this popular laughter utterly destroys official authority. Hence, even when Eliza has forgotten her lines, it is actually unnoticed – “the audience laughed so loud that it did not matter” (78). Similarly, while Shakespeare is supposed to sing for her – as expressed through her lines – it is actually “a cow moo[ing]” and “a bird twitter[ing]” that can be heard. In addition, also the impersonal gramophone partakes in this mockery, which is at the same time accompanied by the drink excess pointed by Bakhtin in connection with carnivalistic imagery: “The tune on the gramophone reeled from side to side *as if drunk with merriment*”¹⁰⁹ (77). Moreover, a literal 'decrowning' and 'ripping-off' of her clothes actually occurs when, not accidentally, her ruff is unpinned and her shirts “picked” and “plucked”, at the same time as “the wind [gives] a tug at her head dress”, which becomes undone (77).

Powerfully satiric and debasing as this political mockery reveals itself, this is not yet the only decrowning at an institutional level that occurs in *Between the Acts*. Indeed, along with politics, religion, the other Victorian colossus, goes through a similar 'bringing down to earth' – a process which will precisely constitute the focus of our next chapter.

¹⁰⁹ My emphasis.

9.4. The Donkey and the Bough: Religious Decrowning

in *Between the Acts*

As it has been announced, in her determination to demolish the prejudices and repression in her own society, Woolf does not ignore the high potential of ancient rituals to remove from its throne the oppressive burden of religious conventions. Indeed, carnival imagery – as a direct inheritor of those ancient traditions – provided Woolf with a great variety of powerful weapons to enact her destructive parody of established values.

In this sense, the most irreverently blasphemous act significantly occurs during the performance of the Victorian play. Hence, in the middle of Mr. Hardcastle's prayer, a fake donkey embodied by Albert appears on the stage, showing how its “hindquarters [...] became active”, while, at the same time, the priest's homily paradoxically announces “a happy homecoming ¹¹⁰ with bodies refreshed by thy bounty, and minds inspired by thy wisdom” (153-4).

In fact, the inclusion of the ass into the pageant entails a twofold meaning. On the one hand, this reveals the narrator's desire for going beyond the sole mockery and debasement of social conventions to degrade even the traditionally worshipped system of ancient myths and rituals she inherited from Jane Harrison. Hereby, the introduction of the donkey into church would represent a degrading parody of the presence of a sacred animal intended as an offer to the gods.

Yet, on the other hand, it directly points to the “festivals of the ass” described by Frazer. Thus, as a variation of the Festival of Fools, Frazer observes the celebration in France of mock masses which, even though allegedly commemorating the biblical episode of Mary's Flight to Egypt, were yet centred upon the figure of an ass, which was introduced into the church and positioned by the altar. Afterwards, the priest initiated the ceremony, which significantly consisted of mixed 'scraps' from different services, while the intervals between the acts of the mass were spent on drinking. The ceremony ended with the merry mingling of the attendants, which joined the animal in a festive dance, to continue by marching in a procession towards a great theatre opposite the church, where dowdy parodies were performed.

Amongst the buffooneries of the Festival of Fools one of the most remarkable was the introduction of an ass into the church, where various pranks were played with the animal [...] and on [its] entering the sacred edifice [...] a parody of the mass was performed [...] A young girl with a child in her arms rode on the back of the ass in imitation of the flight into Egypt. Escorted by

¹¹⁰ Note the obscene overtone of this word, whose second lexeme may denote the moment of sexual climax.

the clergy and the people she was led in triumph from the cathedral to the parish church of St. Stephen. There she and her ass were introduced into the chancel and stationed on the left side of the altar; and a long mass was performed which consisted of scraps borrowed indiscriminately from the services of many church festivals throughout the year. In the intervals the singers quenched their thirst: the congregation imitated their example; and the ass was fed and watered. The services over, the animal was brought from the chancel into the nave, where the whole congregation, clergy and laity mixed up together, danced round the animal and brayed like asses. Finally, after vespers and compline, the merry procession, led by the precentor and preceded by a huge lantern, defiled through the streets to wind up the day with indecent farces in a great theatre erected opposite the church (1913:335-6).

In the light of this, the pageant in Pointz Hall undoubtedly constitutes a “festival of the ass”. Indeed, Mr. Hardcastle is officiating a mass, when the donkey – even a commonly less noble version of the ass – makes its appearance in the mock church. Though not riding the animal, the presence of a young woman carrying a child is suggested by Isa by the frequent references she makes to her son. Moreover, at the service of parody and debasement, the 'divine' child becomes dubbed by Manresa, often alluded to as “wild child of nature”. Yet, if this pageant ultimately defined by Streatfield as – in resemblance of the ass ceremony – a composite of “(s)craps, orts, and fragments”, is important within the story, no less emphasis is made on the intervals, which actually provide the title for the novel. Indeed, it is during these intervals, as well as in Frazer's narration, that the audience gather together in the Barn, where they have tea. Not by chance, the Barn is portrayed at the beginning of the novel as a Greek temple, right of the same age and stone as the church.

Those who had been to Greece always said it reminded them of a temple [...]
The roof was weathered red-orange; and inside it was a hollow hall, sun-shafted, brown, [...] dark when the doors were shut, but splendidly illuminated when the doors at the end stood open [...] (24).

It is precisely this enhancement of the Barn as a sacred place that dooms it, in the midst of a carnivalistic world, to its own decrowning, whereby its use as a tea-place suggests indeed a form of profanation.

Mr. Hardcastle's speech is later continued by Reverend Streatfield, a confessed “fool” whose sight becomes “the most grotesque and entire” (170-1). Yet, his attempted discourse becomes continually interrupted, as in its French equivalent, by the spontaneous irruption of animal sounds, which overlap his words becoming “painfully audible”(175).

Significantly, once the mock mass is over in Pointz Hall, “a procession” is formed under the implicit guidance of the lamplit in the Victorian play, undoubtedly reminiscent of the lantern in the ass procession. This is followed by dowdy acts which, initiated by the donkey's 'becoming

active', covertly find their continuance through the character of Budge, whose part as a policeman becomes no less than a ridiculous representation of authority. Indeed, his performance entails a grotesquely obscene overtone, suggested by his standing "truncheon in hand" while paradoxically "guarding respectability, and prosperity, and the purity of Victoria's land". In fact, his ridiculous appearance constitutes indeed a patent mockery and decrowning of precisely the purity he tries to preserve, not only of a land which has yet corrupted itself by oppressive conventionalisms incapable of avoiding national disaster. In addition, the figure of Budge, 'truncheon in hand' epitomizes the masculine struggle for preserving the female within the hard carcass that maintains her under male dominance. Indeed, Woolf denounces the prevalence of the ideological apparatus the Victorians developed in order to buttress male control, thus allowing very narrow opportunities for the Victorian middle-class woman. Actually, imbued with engulfing belief, women themselves had come to accept this system of values strictly circumscribing women's roles within marriage. Thus, in her manual for married women – *The Wives of England: Their Relative Duties, Domestic Influence, and Social Obligations* – Sarah Stickney Ellis reminds women of:

[...] the superiority of your husband simply as a man. It is quite possible that you may have talent, with higher attainments, and you may also have been generally more admired, but this has nothing whatever to do with your position as a woman, which is, and must be, inferior to his as man (1843:24).

It is, therefore, through the ridiculous figure of Budge, the policeman - actually identified by his neighbours as a drunkard - that the Victorian attempt for imposing the patriarchal rule, conceived as "God's law as laid down by man" (1981:152), becomes, along with his 'truncheon' as the instrument of his tyranny, absurdly grotesque and devoid of its former meaning.

Furthermore, in resemblance to the merry dance after the mock mass, whereby "clergy and laity mixed up together, danced round the animal and brayed like asses", once the pageant is over, the whole 'congregation' in Pointz Hall converge on the stage. In the midst of the great "jangle" and "din" that presides the merry festival, animals and men alike join in the celebration. Moreover, as in the case of the braying men in its French equivalent, the audience in Pointz Hall experience a dramatic transgression of natural borders, to the extent that "the barriers which should divide Man the Master from the Brute were dissolved" (165).

In the midst of this clerical parody, an extended variant of the Carnival King is represented by what Frazer baptized as "The Bishop of Fools" or "Abbot of Unreason" (1913:312), as the genuine embodiment of such mockery. In the carnival 'market-place' of Pointz Hall, this figure is accurately represented by the character of Reverend Streatfield. Hence, mounting on the soap-box, the clergyman, like 'Queen Bess', prepares for his own downturn. Indeed, "the most grotesque and

entire [...] of all incongruous sights” (170-1), Streatfield is mocked and “laughed at by looking-glasses” from the very moment of his emergence, as the recognized “fool” he himself admits to being (172). Insofar as the priest is a patent fool and the donkey becomes the centre of the religious celebration, it cannot be other quality than the Folly that is to be praised. Thus, it is precisely Hogben's Folly, the field where Pointz Hall stands, that is 'praised' by Miss La Trobe as “the very place for a pageant”, which points to its constituting a clear allusion to Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*.

Yet, the Reverend's role within the pageant goes further. In fact, the emphasis on his wooden nature through his reification into “a piece of traditional church furniture [...] a corner cupboard, or the top beam of a gate”, situates Streatfield, in his attempt for providing a convergence point for the entire pageant, as the ritual maypole around which the whole festival spins. Literally emerged from the ground, the Reverend becomes – as in Harrison's account of May Day rites (1913:78) – the “symbol” of the whole celebration.

Indeed, an actual Spring Festival arises from the celebration of the pageant, which additionally includes, in tune with Harrison's outline of the ritual, its respective King and Queen of the May Day. Certainly, Mrs. Manresa, portrayed from the very beginning as “the Queen of the Festival” is explicitly related to Giles, whom she has pointed as “[her] sulky hero” (96). Moreover, as it corresponds to mock monarchs, Giles, who, at a certain moment, symbolically takes up “the pose of one who bears the burden of the world's woe” (100), suffers the kicking he paradoxically inflicts both on himself and his Queen. Yet, this is not the only occasion on which he becomes the victim of violence. Hence, on him does revert his own stamping on the snake “couched in the grass”, with which he had previously identified himself on admitting: “I'm [...] a flickering, mind-divided little snake in the grass” (67). Moreover, in his depiction as “the top beam of a gate, fashioned by generations of village carpenters after some lost-in-the-mists-of-antiquity model”, Streatfield exactly embodies the 'branch of May' standing by the door in the Spring song that – as Harrison notes – is tuned, precisely as part of the Christian celebrations, in Saffron Walden, indeed another referent of ‘antiquity’:

A branch of May we have brought you,
And at your door it stands¹¹¹;
It is a sprout that is well budded out,
The work of our Lord's hands ¹¹² (1913:59).

Like the ancient maypole, which should retain “a bunch of dark green foliage [...] as a

¹¹¹ My emphasis.

¹¹² Idem.

memento that in it we have to do, not with a dead pole, but with a living tree from the greenwood”(1913:60), Streatfield reveals himself as a mortal human being by the tobacco stains in his forefinger – a fact which actually “mitigated the horror”(171). In her *Ancient Art and Ritual*, Harrison also quotes the description of the Cambridge May Day by Stubbs. According to the Puritan writer, the ritual maypole, after having been ceremonially carried by a yoke of oxen, was followed by men, women and children alike, who worshipped it “with great d(e)votion”. Indeed, Stubbs comes to define the maypole as the “perfect patterne” of a heathen idol, “or rather the thyng itself”.

They have twentie or fortie yoke of oxen, every oxe havynge a sweete nosegaie of flowers tyed on the tippe of his hornes, and these oxen draw home this Maiepoole (this stinckying idoll rather), which is covered all over with flowers and hearbes, bound round aboute with stringes from the top to the bottome, and sometyme painted with variable colours, with two of three hundred men, women, and children, following it with great dovotion. And thus beyng reared up with handkerchiefes and flagges streaming on the toppe, they strewe the ground about, binde greene boughs about it, set up summer haules, bowers, and arbours hard by it. And then fall they to banquet and feast, to leap and daunce aboute it, as the heathen people did at the dedication of their idolles, whereof this is a perfect patterne or rather the thyng itself (1583[1913:58]).

Nevertheless, in tune with the carnival sense of the world pervading *Between the Acts*, the sole attempt for leadership is doomed to appear as “an intolerable constriction, contraction, and reduction to simplified absurdity.” Hereby, Streatfield becomes “an irrelevant forked stake”, merely “a prominent bald branch” which, in opposition to the Cambridge maypole, transported by oxen, is condemned to remain “ignored by the cows”(171).

Yet, even though deprived from his authority, Streatfield still fulfils his function as the carrier of hope and life into the community of Pointz Hall, which eventually gather together in a patently carnivalesque 'messalliance', simultaneously encompassing Budge the policeman and 'Queen Bess', along with the Age of Reason and the foreparts of the donkey, as well as Mrs. Hardcastle and little England. Furthermore, it is after the speech of Streatfield, the “representative spokesman”, that Woolf herself makes explicit her purpose of lighting up a carnivalistic universe which, once the barriers that menace human freedom and equality are eliminated, should bring to a same level – as announced by Mrs. Swithin, on trying to comprehend the pageant's meaning - “(t)he peasants; the kings; the fool and' (she swallowed) 'ourselves?’”(192).

Throughout this chapter, a parallel coincidence with the analysis of *Mrs. Dalloway* has been brought to the fore by pointing to a similar confluence of the paradigms of carnival and Unanimism in Woolf's *Between the Acts*. Hence, as has been demonstrated, a conclusive return to her belief in the collective integration of individuals, in tune with her precious proclamation of an Outsiders' Society, represents Woolf's view of the social panorama on the verge of an international conflict. Thereby even though she displays a more convinced faith in some of the virtues of communities, insofar as these provide a feeling of solidarity against the reality of a fragmented world, a sense of reluctance of a complete sacralization of crowds, remains a constant until the end of her life, in virtue of her permanent awareness of the danger represented by fascist control.

Conclusión

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Tras el análisis efectuado a través de los nueve capítulos de que consta el presente trabajo de investigación, es preciso destacar una serie de aspectos fundamentales desprendidos de dicho estudio. De este modo, a partir de la aplicación de los parámetros del carnaval en cuanto a su incorporación a la literatura, así como de diversas teorías confluyentes que enriquecen dicho análisis, es posible dilucidar algunas inferencias básicas.

En este sentido, uno de los elementos básicos englobados por la perspectiva carnavalesca, tal y como la incorpora Virginia Woolf, consiste en el recurso por parte de la autora a la figura del Loco del Carnaval, el cual adquiere una presencia constante a lo largo de toda la trayectoria narrativa de dicha autora. Asimismo, tal y como corresponde al paradigma carnavalesco la presencia de esta figura en las distintas novelas analizadas se ve confirmada en cuanto que mantiene la ambivalencia propia de su valor carnavalesco. Así, en ocasiones, la citada dualidad aparece encarnada en un mismo personaje. Este es por ejemplo el caso de Sara, en *The Years*, donde la peculiar marca de excentricidad lindante con una sugerida demencia que caracteriza al personaje, aparece íntimamente ligada a su mordaz visión crítica con respecto a las estructuras sociales de profunda opresión patriarcal, al igual que a una oposición radical a los intentos de opresión y dominio por parte de los artífices de la dictadura patriarcal.

No obstante, con mayor frecuencia, llevando a cabo una explotación más a fondo de la dualidad carnavalesca, la esencia inherente a la concepción de la figura expiatoria queda representada a través de personajes implícitamente complementarios, tal y como ocurre en el caso, ampliamente comentado por la crítica, de Clarissa Dalloway y Septimus Smith, o el representado por el binomio constituido por Rachel Vinrace y Terence Hewet en *The Voyage Out*. En este último, la bipolaridad implícita en la noción del chivo expiatorio se ve desdoblada, de modo que cada uno de los miembros de esta estructura diádica encarna distintos aspectos pertenecientes a la ambivalencia destrucción/renovación que conforma la idea central en la imagen de la víctima carnavalesca.

En este respecto, el frecuente empleo de la mencionada figura a partir de su desdoblamiento en dos o más personajes dentro de una novela conlleva, a su vez, una clara tendencia, cuya permanencia constante a lo largo de la trayectoria narrativa de la autora y permite constatar un claro reflejo de la intencionalidad por parte de ésta. Así, en virtud encarnación de los aspectos relativos a la corrupción y declive, y por tanto, susceptibles de ser eliminados, según la concepción

carnavalesca a través, principalmente de personajes masculinos, se observa el uso del paradigma del carnaval por parte de la autora como elemento indispensable a la hora de impulsar la demolición de las estructuras correspondientes a la hegemonía del patriarcado, tal y como se ha expuesto a lo largo del estudio de las distintas novelas.

Por su parte, la predominante relación de los aspectos positivos de la política carnavalesca, concernientes a la posibilidad de regeneración y refertilización de una sociedad profundamente necesitada de transformación, aparecen, mayoritariamente ligados a personajes femeninos, consistentemente considerados a través de las diversas obras de ficción, bajo la concepción carnavalesca de la reproducción y la inagotable capacidad de cambio y regeneración.

Al mismo tiempo, si bien en ciertas ocasiones se observa una clara relación de los personajes femeninos con los aspectos más negativos de la dualidad carnavalesca, como ocurre en el caso de *The Voyage Out*, en que distintas figuras femeninas, entre las que se incluyen Miss Allan, o la anciana Aunt Clara, en todas estas ocasiones, la implicación es la de retratar la persistencia de las estructuras de la tiranía patriarcal a través de los artífices femeninos que no sólo permiten, sino que por añadidura, favorecen la ininterrumpible permanencia de las mismas.

Por otra parte, la concepción de las comunidades se halla marcada por una serie de fluctuaciones. En este sentido, las teorías unanimitas, que ensalzan los beneficios de estos encuentros comunitarios, ejercen una considerable influencia en la concepción de *Mrs. Dalloway*, igualmente determinada por las teorías de corte antropológico relativas a la comunión emotivo-religiosa inherente a las celebraciones del primitivo carnaval. Dicha influencia se explica a partir de la necesidad de encontrar una vía de escape a través de la cohesión social contra la acción opresora de los líderes hegemónicos, así como del encasillamiento a que se ve sujeto el individuo por el sometimiento de las estructuras victorianas.

Esta misma concepción de la comunidad se observa en la última novela de Virginia Woolf. En efecto, el particular contexto que sirve de fondo a la amenaza de un conflicto internacional, en el período de una sociedad aún bajo los efectos de la etapa de posguerra, Woolf opta por la solidaridad entre individuos como único recurso para evitar el estallido final de una guerra mundial. Esto cobra particular importancia en relación al manifiesto pacifista que Woolf llevaría a cabo en *Three Guineas* algunos años antes de la publicación de *Between the Acts*, donde incita en especial a la disolución de barreras y posterior cohesión de la sociedad como único modo de prevenir el conflicto.

Un notable cambio de punto de vista ocurre, sin embargo, hacia 1930, en torno a la

publicación de *The Waves*. De este modo, como consecuencia de los acontecimientos sociopolíticos, y en especial del auge que experimenta el fascismo en este periodo, así como a partir de la influencia de las teorías sobre las masas desarrolladas de forma paralela a la ascensión del nazismo, dicha concepción de la multitud adquiere una dimensión que diverge considerablemente de la adoptada en las obras anteriormente mencionadas. En este sentido, pese a que tradicionalmente existe una tendencia generalizada a interpretar *The Waves* como una novela concebida eminentemente en torno a la exaltación de la comunidad, una conclusión diferente surge a partir del presente análisis. A través de éste, en efecto, se pone de manifiesto el uso pernicioso de la comunidad, el cual, en contra de lo que ocurre en el carnaval, donde la consolidación de la misma se halla motivada por factores de carácter emotivo, sirve como instrumento de control de masas por parte de las autoridades fascistas. Así, si bien se advierte en la novela contra el amalgamamiento de forma artificial de los individuos que integran una sociedad, del mismo modo, los beneficios de la colectividad promulgados por la política del carnaval son ensalzados en tanto que estén promovidos por causas exclusivamente emotivas y voluntarias, con plena libertad para ser modificadas, desintegradas y reunidas de acuerdo con la propia elección personal.

De este modo, según se ha deducido a partir del análisis de las distintas novelas de Virginia Woolf, y de una manera más concreta, a través de la breve conclusión que aquí se incluye, bajo la obra narrativa de la autora objeto del estudio subyace un incesante deseo de efectuar una aniquilación radical de las estructuras que sirven de base a una sociedad victoriana anquilosada en un pasado anacrónico y opresor, marcado por la dictadura del sistema patriarcal. En este sentido, al mismo tiempo que invoca la unión solidaria como medio esencial para la consecución de una renovación y superación de dicho entorno, Woolf mantiene una permanente alerta con respecto al peligro de control masivo por parte de los líderes del poder fascista.

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