

Abstract

This doctoral thesis focuses on the analogies between Virginia Woolf's "personal philosophy" and Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy, or in his own words "philosophy of organism." The thesis does not claim that Whitehead's thought directly influenced Woolf's fiction, rather, it makes use of a zeitgeist model. The two contemporaries shared the rejection of long-established dualisms, particularly the Cartesian mind-body dualism, the binaries of subject and object, animate and inanimate matter, the human and the nonhuman, and last but not least the individual and the community. Interested in the philosophical enquiry into the problem of reality and the visible world, Woolf redefines the notion of "things" in her fiction and adopts the processist view that objects may be defined as clusters of events, which are not separate from the perceiving subject but interrelated with it. Moreover, Woolf illustrates her interest in the natural world in most of her works and often suggests that what we normally think to be inert and lifeless matter, may, in fact, also have some proto-conscious, or proto-experiential, qualities like Whitehead's "actual occasions." The second part of the thesis focuses on Woolf's attempt to overcome one's individual identity in favour of adopting a more inclusive and collective "we" in her late fiction, which is strikingly similar to Whitehead's philosophy of organism suggesting that all existence in the universe is potentially interconnected in the process of concrescence, therefore, each entity has some value for itself and for the others. In a similar vein, Woolf embraces a moral philosophy in her late oeuvre, where she highlights the value of each individual because the value of the whole derives from the collective creativity of its parts. Moreover, Woolf and Whitehead both criticized anthropocentrism and destructive human action vis-à-vis the nonhuman environment, which is analysed in the last chapter of this thesis.