Chapter V

Explorations of the Female Psyche: Woolf and Weldon

‘Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane
In some untrodden region of my mind,
Where branches thoughts, new-grown with pleasant pain,
Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind:

And in the midst of this wide quietness
A rosy sanctuary will I dress
With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain,
With buds and bells, and stars without a name.
With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,
Who, breeding flowers, will never breed the same:
And there shall be for thee all soft delight
That shadowy thought can win,...’

(“Ode to Psyche”--- John Keats)

‘Psyche’ in ordinary English means ‘Soul’. The legend of Psyche itself is
told in Cupid and Psyche, an allegorical episode in the tale of the Golden Ass of
Puleius (in the middle of the second century A.D.). In the ode however, ‘psyche’
is the quintessence of Keats’s conception of love and beauty— both of which
were to him a passion and a religion. Moreover, the complex image accumulated
from ‘natural’ descriptions, is being offered as a mental state from which
calculation, anxiety and deliberate activity are shut out. Thus, the ‘wide quietness’
of the valley symbolises a mood in which the soul will be able to breathe freely,
and in which poetry, here defined as ‘the wreath’d trellis of a working brain’ may
be coaxed to put forth its buds and bells and nameless stars. The soul is therefore,
promised a rich indolence which will safeguard its natural gift for delight and will
be disposed to welcome all the resources of poetic imagination.
The connection between literature and psychology is an ancient one. The classic locus is Aristotle’s series of attempts to account for the effects of tragedy and his deployment of the term ‘catharsis’. Such a play as Hamlet has traditionally been seen as offering us an inward account of the psychological consequences of chronic circumstantial dilemma.

With the rise of the novel in the eighteenth-century, a new dimension of psychological intensity came on to the literary agenda. For example, Pamela, in the eponymous Richardson novel, supplied the readers with a set of insights into a mind; but a mind which demanded to be read simultaneously as typical of a particular historical moment, the rise of individualism as an accompaniment of the social transition to capitalism. In this way, the whole structure of the mind’s relation to society and nature became the problematic site on which the literary is constructed.

In his definition of ‘psychological criticism’, M.H. Abrams goes further to establish the link between the author and the subject matter:

Psychological criticism deals with a work of literature primarily as an expression, in fictional form, of the state of mind and the structure of personality of the individual author.\(^1\)

This approach emerged in the early decades of the nineteenth-century and was provided a crucial locus in Biographia Literaria, following on Immanuel Kant’s classifications of mental activity. Coleridge’s principal contributions are in giving an account of the kind of activity in which the poet engages, and in fitting this into a hierarchy of mental activities, which is broadly termed ‘Imagination’.

Coleridge conceived of ‘Imagination’ semi-theologically, comparing the task of the poet with the divine creativity. It was also Coleridge who provided the first useful coinings of the word ‘unconscious’, paralleling Hegel’s efforts to
detect the mind’s mode of recapitulating past history. This interest in the creative urge continues through Shelley, and is later given an added twist by Darwin’s problematic assertion of human kinship with the animals: problematic because it implies the possible operation within the mind of forces beyond individual or species control.

Nevertheless, during the Romantic Period, we find vividly practised all three variants of the critical procedures (still current today) that are based on the assumption that a work of literature is correlated with its author’s distinctive mental and emotional traits, viz.: (1) reference to the author’s personality in order to explain and interpret a literary work; (2) reference to literary works in order to establish biographically, the personality of the author; and (3) the mode of reading a literary work specifically as a way of experiencing the distinctive subjectivity, or consciousness, of its author. In *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (1993), M.H. Abrams refers to John Keble’s ‘proto-Freudian’ literary theory as proposed in a series of Latin lectures *On the Healing Power of Poetry*— (published in 1844, but delivered more than ten years earlier):

"Poetry," Keble claimed, "is the indirect expression... of some overpowering emotion, or ruling taste, or feeling, the direct indulgence whereof is somehow repressed"; this repression is imposed by the author’s sentiments of "reticence" and "shame"; the conflict between the need for expression and the compulsion to repress such self-revelation is resolved by the poet’s ability to give "healing relief to secret mental emotion, yet without detriment to modest reserve" by a literary "art which under certain veils and disguises... reveals the fervent emotions of the mind"; and this disguised mode of self-expression serves as "a safety valve, preserving men from madness." ²

Psychological speculation in English criticism continued through the ‘appreciative’ but subtle essays of Swinburne and Pater, and into T.S. Eliot’s major work on the relations between the writing of poetry and the presence of the ‘Tradition’. But all of this was largely overtaken by the work of Freud, whose
evolution of psychoanalysis as a technique which eventually generated a 'metapsychology', fundamentally altered the field of speculation. Freud's brief comment on the working of the artist's imagination at the end of the twenty-third lecture of his Introduction to Psychoanalysis (1920), supplemented by relevant passages in the other lectures in that book, set forth the theoretical framework of what is sometimes called 'classical' psychoanalytic criticism: literature and the other arts, like dreams and neurotic symptoms, consist of the imagined, or fantasied, fulfilment of wishes that are either denied by reality or are prohibited by the social standards of morality and propriety.

The chief mechanisms, according to Abrams, that effect these disguises of unconscious wishes are— (1) 'condensation'--- the omission of parts of the unconscious material and the fusion of several unconscious elements into a single entity; (2) 'displacement'--- the substitution for an unconscious subject of desire by one that is acceptable to the conscious mind; and (3) 'symbolism'--- the representation of repressed, mainly sexual, objects of desire by nonsexual objects which resemble them or are associated with them in prior experience. The disguised fantasies that are evident to consciousness constitute the 'manifest' content of a dream or work of literature; the unconscious wishes that find a semblance of satisfaction in this distorted form are the 'latent' content.

In his work Civilisation and its Discontents (1930), Freud compares the unconscious to an ancient city, but one where all the preceding versions of that city continue to exist, superimposed one upon another: from the unconscious nothing ever goes away. The forms in which we become aware of these suppressed areas of the psyche are linguistic; for language, according to Freud, is a double structure i.e. while we think we speak what we mean, something else is
always speaking through us. Literature is deeply implicated in this double structuring: Freud says that much of what he has discovered was already known to us in the works of Goethe and the great German writers, because the great artist has privileged access to unknown realms.

Also present in the unconscious of every individual, according to Freud, are residual traces of prior stages of psychosexual development, from earliest infancy onward, which have been outgrown, but remain as ‘fixations’ in the unconscious of the adult. When triggered by some later event in adult life, a repressed wish is revived and motivates a fantasy, in disguised form, of a satisfaction that is modelled on the way that the wish had been gratified in infancy or early childhood. Therefore, the chief enterprise of the psychoanalytic critic, in a way that parallels the enterprise of the psychoanalyst as a therapist, is to reveal the true content, and also to explain the effect on the reader, of a literary work by translating its manifest elements into the unconscious determinants that constitute their suppressed meanings.

Other Freudian insights include the supposition that the interplay of characters in a literary work can be read as an interplay between elements in the psyche; and in his later works, Freud begins to suggest that psychoanalytic diagnosis can be applied to whole cultural formations as to individual pieces of discourse.

On the other hand, Freud’s dissident disciple Jung (in his works *Contributions to Analytic Psychology*, 1928 and *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, 1933), concentrates not on the individual unconscious, but on what he calls the ‘collective unconscious,’ shared by all individuals in all cultures, which he regards as the repository of ‘racial memories’ and of primordial images and
patterns of experience that he calls archetypes. He does not, like Freud, view literature as a disguised form of libidinal wish-fulfilment that parallels the fantasies of a neurotic personality. Instead, Jung regards great literature as like the myths whose patterns recur in diverse cultures, an expression of the archetypes of the collective unconscious.

This 'cultural transcendentalism' which became a phenomenon of the 1960s, also took on board the concepts of 'structuralism', offering new ways of describing the displacement of the subject. The most prominent exponent has been Jacques Lacan whose central ideas can be found in Écrits (1977) and The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis (1977). Language, he claims, is the major force through which the human individual is constituted as a structured, gendered subject. Lacan reformulates Freud's views of the early stages of psychosexual development and the formation of the Oedipus complex into a distinction between the pre-linguistic stage that he calls the 'imaginary' and the stage after the acquisition of language that he calls the 'symbolic'. In the imaginary stage there is no clear distinction between the subject and an object, or between the self and others. When it enters the symbolic stage, the infant subject assimilates the inherited system of linguistic differences, and thereby learns to accept its pre-determined 'position' in such linguistic oppositions as male/female, father/son, mother/daughter. Thus, the entry upon language is a simultaneous submission to social authority, in which the individual passes under the 'name of the Father' and is coloured with patriarchy at the very moment of emergence from undifferentiation. As Simone de Beauvoir says of 'woman' defining herself on account of her own position in a male-dominated society:

Woman can be defined by her consciousness of her own femininity no more satisfactorily that by saying that she is a female, for she acquires this
consciousness under circumstances dependent upon the society of which she is a member. 3

Lacan’s works have been followed to cultural conclusions by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, 1977), but taken up more particularly by ‘Feminist Criticism’. Kate Millett’s account of the role of the psychoanalytic institution is the most detailed, and probably the hardest to resist. She opines that, it was because he himself felt threatened by them, that Freud had set out to disarm the feminists by invoking the concept of ‘penis-envy’ in the little girl which gradually develops into feelings of insecurity and jealousy when she grows up into a woman. Millet engagingly ridicules all this and, temporarily at least, renders Freud unreadable for feminists.

On the other hand, Juliet Mitchell’s reading of Freud in Psychoanalysis and Feminism (1974) owes something to the work of Jacques Lacan, in that Mitchell acknowledges Freud’s pessimistic account of women as a description of a particular culture, and not an interpretation of a universal human nature. But what is radical for feminism in Freud is the theory of undifferentiated infant sexuality: that the initial object of desire for little girls as well as little boys is the mother. The Oedipus complex represents the entry into a specific culture and thus into the gender roles defined by that culture. Psychoanalysis, Mitchell urges, explains how we acquire sexual identity by repressing desires which are culturally unacceptable; it does not require us to believe that sexual identity is synonymous with anatomy.

Jacqueline Rose, takes Mitchell’s position a stage further by arguing that psychoanalysis provides a theory of sexual identity as culturally enjoined and constantly resisted. The complexity of undifferentiated sexual desire is repressed when the child learns to identify itself as either masculine or feminine. Anatomy
is not the source of sexual difference, but its reductive figure, its representation. But for these reasons the identification required by culture can never be complete.

In the section entitled “Gender, Self, and Social Theory” (Part II) in *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (1989), Nancy J. Chodorow further reiterates this view by opining that it is men who are traumatised by the problems of core gender identity and masculinity, and are ‘bound up with the masculine sense of self’ in a way that core gender identity and femininity are not for women. This is because it is women who mother them, that maleness in men becomes more problematic than femaleness in women, creating as a result, difficulties with a sense of separateness and autonomy. Girls, on the other hand, grow up with a sense of continuity and similarity to their mother, a ‘relational connection to the world’. According to Chodorow, conflicts concerning the core gender identity develops later in life when girls are confronted by their ‘identification with a negatively valued gender category, and an ambivalently experienced maternal figure, whose mothering and femininity, often conflictual for the mother herself, are accessible, but devalued.’ Thus, one finds that the primary sense of gendered self that emerges in earliest development constantly challenges and threatens men, and gives a certain ‘potential psychological security,’ even liberation, to women. But because men have power and cultural hegemony in society, they use this hegemony to appropriate and transform these experiences.

Therefore, as if as a consequence, the second current of feminist literary criticism (initiated by Ellen Moers’s *Literary Women*, Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of their Own*, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic*), grew up alongside and in response to the analysis of patriarchal culture. This, as already mentioned in Chapter I (pp. 24-26), was concerned with women's
writing, and specifically with writing as a mode of resistance. While Showalter's book is deemed as perhaps the most influential of the accounts of women's writing in its difference from men's, Gilbert and Gubar present women's resistance to social and literary constraint in terms of a theory of the anxiety of patriarchal influence. On the other hand, Moers's *Literary Women* is a contribution to cultural history in its analysis of the way that the exclusion of women from so many aspects of social and political life was precisely what propelled them into a form of utterance requiring no formal professional training and no special equipment. Also, women's writings became not simply a struggle against patriarchy but was really one of patriarchy's unintended consequences.

These different modes of feminist criticism thus bring two major aspects to the fore. The first is that the patriarchal account of women's lives was false; that motherhood is not inevitably a serene experience; housework is not necessarily fulfilling; clitoral orgasm is not immature. On the other hand, the construction of a feminine subculture, a form of writing which is essentially different from men's paradoxically leaves things as they are, i.e. with women eternally confined to a separate sphere, or to lead to a politics of separatism, which despairs of changing patriarchy and settles instead for an alternative space on the edges of it.

Therefore, as discussed earlier in Chapter II (pp. 63-65), the issue which still continues to disturb us, is 'whether the sex of an author determines the sexuality of a text'. The issue is as cantankerous as to raise misgivings even in the most formidable of women writers. Thus, we find Woolf saying:

The women who wished to be taken for men in what they wrote were certainly common enough; and if they have given place to the women who wish to be taken for women the change is hardly for the better, since any emphasis, either of pride or of shame, laid consciously upon the sex of a
writer is not only irritating but superfluous. As Mr. Brimley Johnson again and again remarks, a woman's writing is always feminine; it cannot help being feminine; at its best it is most feminine:

Even so, despite her attempted fluidity of sexual identification (as in Orlando), Woolf the author, has to 'battle with a certain phantom':

And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of a famous poem, The Angel in the House. It was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her.

The struggle however, fails to cease even after the killing of the Angel, for the woman writer is now haunted by her own passions hitherto unexpressed:

To speak without figure she had thought of something, something about the body, about the passions which it was unfitting for her as a woman to say. Men, her reason told her, would be shocked. The consciousness of what men will say of a woman who speaks the truth about her passions had roused her from her artist's state of unconsciousness. She could write no more. The trance was over. Her imagination could work no longer. This I believe to be a very common experience with women writers---they are impeded by the extreme conventionality of the other sex.

Thus, though she need not kill herself like Judith Shakespeare out of agony, the woman author must still confront and fight 'many ghosts' and 'many prejudices' which constantly come in the way of spontaneous creation---and as Woolf indicates, the 'sexual' is 'blackened out' for women because of the need to preserve 'chastity and modesty', for which a process of censorship has been imposed upon women for so many generations that it has become habitual, a kind of instinct. Thus, even to speak of the sexual was akin to the loss of a fetishized virginity: to write was to fall. This therefore, may provide ample scope to the 'anti-feminist' to claim that the sex of the author determines the sex of the text.

In Literature and Gender (1996), Lizbeth Goodman, Helen Small and Mary Jacobus however, emphasize on the impact of gender-based oppression on women's views of themselves and their ways of representing themselves in
writing. Goodman especially speaks of the theme of 'madness' in literature which she feels is intrinsically gendered despite the fact that 'madness' itself is not exclusively female terrain and cites the example of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (already mentioned in Chapter IV). The story is about a woman taken to live in a rented house in which she does not feel comfortable, persuaded to spend most of her time in a room she does not like (with barred windows and a peeling, faded yellow wallpaper). She is forbidden to write. As the story progresses, the woman loses her grip on the world outside her room and at the story's end, she is 'mad', or at least appears to be so. Significantly, the story is told by the woman, a nameless first person narrator.

On the other hand, Ernest Hemingway is not routinely discussed as 'mad', and his notorious suicide tends to be read as a conflict between the masculine ideal created in his fiction and the life of the artist. Thus, the suicides of Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath are linked to depression, desperation and neurosis, and both also wrote about madness. Sylvia Plath's semi-autobiographical novel, The Bell Jar (1963), describes a young woman's nervous breakdown and her experience of institutionalisation. Her poem "Lady Lazarus", too, is very explicit about madness and suicide attempts, 'dying as an art'. Even Louisa May Alcott, in spite of her sanctified image as 'the children's friend' had struggles with what she described as 'moods'. Alcott did not kill herself, but rather projected her feelings of depression and desperation onto her characters and into her diaries and letters. In her novel Moods (1865), and in her diaries, she wrote about depressions connected to the struggle to balance artistic creativity with domesticity and associated expectations of women's roles and behaviour.
Some female authors and critics have, however, offered a more positive view of madness. Debilitating though mental illness is, women have occasionally found that the experience of losing and having to remake their identity gave them a hard-won independence from conventional ways of seeing the world and of using language. Janet Frame, for example, has written of her own time in a psychiatric hospital that 'There was a personal, geographical, even linguistic exclusiveness in this community of the insane':

If the world of the mad were the world where I now officially belonged (lifelong disease, no cure, no hope), then I would use it to survive, I would excel in it. I sensed that it did not exclude my being a poet.

(Frame, An Angel at my Table, 1984, p.79)  

One result of this ongoing history of representing madness as a 'female malady' is that there are more firmly established literary conventions for representing mad women than mad men. In medicine, as in literature, women have long been seen as more biologically predisposed than men to madness. In fact, the word 'hysteria' (derived from the Greek word 'hystera' meaning 'womb') was commonly associated with women's 'madness' in the nineteenth-century: Early medical writers and doctors believed that the womb exerted a powerful indirect influence on the mind, giving rise to physical and mental disturbance. They represented the female body as being highly vulnerable to physical and psychological derangement because of the delicacy of the female reproductive system. However, it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that medical text books, advice manuals and novels, projected images of young women succumbing to the strains of their sex---fainting, giving way to uncontrollable weeping and phantom pains. In extreme cases, it was believed that hysteria could lead to mania, producing violent, even murderous or suicidal rages.
In literature, the more romantically inclined ‘conventional’ stories about madwomen depicted them as ‘still lovely in ruin’: Shakespeare’s Ophelia, being one of the most famous who is usually portrayed like Tennyson’s Lady of Shalott, as beautiful, pathetic and seductive (see Plates VI, VII, pp.244, 245). Conversely, the subject of male insanity has often led writers to produce highly innovative work, probing the nature of psychological stability and man’s understanding of the world as in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Tennyson’s *Maud*.

Much of the conventional writing about madwomen produced in the past has, of course, been written by women, many of whom were quite as prepared as male writers to eroticise female insanity. But even when women described insanity in completely conventional ways, the fact that they were women altered the meanings of the conventions because women were taking control of their own representation with regard to madness. Thus, when asked why she wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper”, Perkins Gilman replied:

> For many years I suffered from a severe and continuous nervous breakdown tending to melancholia— and beyond. During about the third year of this trouble I went, in devout faith... to a noted specialist in nervous diseases, the best known in the country. This wise man put me to bed and applied the rest cure,... and sent me home with solemn advice to ‘live as domestic a life as far as possible’, to ‘have but two hours’ intellectual life a day’, and ‘never to touch pen, brush or pencil again as long as I lived’. This was in 1887.

> I went home and obeyed those directions for some three months, and came so near the border line of utter mental ruin that I could see over.

> Then, using the remnants of intelligence that remained,... I cast the noted specialist’s advice to the winds and went to work again— work, the normal life of every human being; work, in which is joy and growth and service, without which one is a pauper and a parasite; ultimately recovering some measure of power.

> Being naturally moved to rejoicing by this narrow escape, I wrote ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’,... 9

Likewise, the story too, is a portrayal of the heroine’s forced banishment from the procreative process of writing by her husband, and by a culture, for whom the
'pen' is the instrument of 'male' generative power. It is relevant to note Gerard Manley Hopkins’s comment in a letter to R.W. Dixon in 1886 regarding his theory of poetry that—the artist’s ‘most essential quality’ is ‘masterly execution, which is a kind of male gift, and especially marks off men from women, the begetting of one’s thought on paper, on verse or whatever the matter is.'

But can we be merely content in interpreting the writings of female authors like Woolf as solely reliant on the conflict between creative imagination and social roles? Let us consider the case of Mrs. Dalloway which Giovanna Pompele in “Mrs. Dalloway as Trauma Narrative” refers to as ‘a vehement indictment of psychiatry and psychiatric incarceration.’ In the novel, shell-shocked from fighting in the Great War, Septimus suffers from hallucinations and paranoia. When the renowned nerve specialist Sir William Bradshaw proposes that he will be picked up from his house that very evening, both Septimus and his wife Rezia are dismayed. Later that night, upon hearing people at the door, Septimus, terrified, jumps from a window and finds death on the spikes of a railing below.

Though the story of Septimus is the one that stands out by failing to be connected to the others, all of which centre around the personal and social life of Clarissa Dalloway, there is discernible a bond between Septimus and Clarissa in their complementary manifestations of madness or post-traumatic symptoms, and in their antagonistic attitude to the demands of the status quo. In her essay “Reinventing Grief Work: Virginia Woolf’s Feminist Representations of Mourning in Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse”, Susan Bennett Smith claims that Septimus and Clarissa are similar in that they are both mourning someone they have lost—Septimus, his dead comrade Evans, Clarissa, the friends of her
youth Peter and Sally, who, though alive, 'had been lost to her for many years'.

Also, one may go back as far as Clarissa’s early childhood which suggests a tableau of female loss: a dead mother, a dead sister, whose hobby of pressing flowers beneath Littre’s dictionary suggests to Peter Walsh the cultural oppression of women. On the other hand, Nancy Toppin Bazin in *Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision* (1973) is of the opinion that, both Septimus and Clarissa represent one of the psychic moods of bipolar disorder which are ‘genderized’ in the novel:

> Although each shares to some extent the vision of the other, Clarissa’s is predominantly feminine and manic, whereas Septimus’ is predominantly masculine and depressive. 11

Nevertheless, other than solely conceptualising Septimus’ and Clarissa’s psychic pain as results of sexual repression, one can claim that the neuroses that afflict these characters originate in a traumatic event rather than in sexual repression. Thus, both Septimus and Clarissa suffer the traumatic repercussions of having witnessed the violent death of a loved one— Evans (in the case of Septimus) and Sylvia (in Clarissa’s case).

In a way again, the novel is a vehement indictment of psychiatry and psychiatric incarceration— probably the outcome of Woolf’s several brief stays in a rest home. Restrictions upon her writing (how much time she spent writing was always a contentious issue between Virginia, Leonard and the doctors), pressure over eating more and regularly and getting enough rest, a sense of herself as psychologically fragile and prone to fits of madness, Leonard’s and other people’s concerned observation of her— all of this must have given Woolf a vivid enough sense of the way psychiatry impacted and altered a woman’s life. Germaine Greer goes further in regarding psychiatry (as embodied in Sir William Bradshaw in
As far as the woman is concerned, patriarchy is an extraordinary confidence trick: the unsuspecting creature seeks aid because she feels unhappy, anxious and confused, and psychology persuades her to seek the cause in herself. The person is easier to change than the status quo which represents a higher value in the psychologist’s optimistic philosophy. If all else fails largactil, shock treatment, hypnosis and other forms of ‘therapy’ will buttress the claim of society. Psychologists cannot fix the world so they fix women. 12

In an article published in 2005 entitled “A Perfect Madness”, Edison Miyawaki makes a matter-of-fact comment on the actual ineffectiveness of psychiatric treatment as it were:

William James, for one, arguably the best scientific psychologist of his time, wrote in 1890 (his italics): “The great snare of the psychologist is the confusion of his own standpoint with that of the mental fact about which he is making report.” What he called the psychologist’s fallacy can be stated simply: when a psychologist, or any one else for that matter, tells you what is on your mind, it’s entirely possible that all you hear is what’s on his mind, projected onto yours.13

In a letter (dated 28 July 1910) to Vanessa on the occasion of her first stay at Burley, Virginia wrote:

... But I really don’t think I can stand much more of this...

However, what I mean is that I shall soon have to jump out of a window. The ugliness of the house is almost inexplicable— having white, and mottled green and red. Then there is all the eating and drinking and being shut up in the dark. 14

This is applicable for not merely women but also those men whose intense sensitivity makes them somewhat psychologically vulnerable and ‘effeminate’ and the author’s desire to ‘jump out of a window’ out of helpless anger and frustration at being incarcerated, is a chilling premonition to Septimus’s death in a novel published fifteen years later. The only ‘survivors’ are people like Lady Bradshaw who have been moulded into models of femininity:
Fifteen years ago she had gone under. It was nothing you could put your finger on; there had been no scene; no snap; only the slow sinking, waterlogged, of her will into his. Sweet was her smile, swift her submission... Once, long ago, she had caught salmon freely; now, quick to minister to the craving which lit her husband’s eye so oilily for dominion, for power, she cramped, squeezed, pared, pruned, drew back, peeped through. 15

Nevertheless, the narrative may be said to evolve out of the individual psyche of Clarissa Dalloway and enter an all-pervasive dimension which flows over Clarissa and helps her to ‘surmount’ petty mundaneness like ‘that hatred, that monster’ which she felt for Miss Kilman; which in the opinion of Laxmi Parasuram (in Virginia Woolf: The Emerging Reality, 1978) makes ‘spatial reality’ (which requires a work to be seen all at once in a single cohering perspective) all the more significant:

An examination of the spatial reality within the novel will be found to refer both outwards to cosmic dimensions and inwards to individual psyche. The interior monologues of an imagery-strewn individual psyche fumble and evolve towards cosmic dimensions, and in so doing, intricate patterns of relationship are established with the details of spatial reality (setting, objects, etc.). It is these same details that suggest cosmic dimensions within the narrative frame. Such a double burden of reference makes the spatial reality within the novel very important, ... 16

It was George Egerton’s impressionistic narratives (as her collections of stories Symphonies, 1887, and Fantasias, 1898, and the strange, fragmentary novel, The Wheel of God, 1898) with their self-conscious focus on the female psyche which may have been said to anticipate the development of the fiction of feminine self-consciousness by Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf. In “A Keynote to Keynotes” (Ten Contemporaries, 1932) Egerton writes:

I realised that in literature, everything had been better done by man than woman could have hoped to emulate. There was only one small plot to tell: the terra incognita of herself, as she knew herself to be, not as man liked to imagine her— in a word to give herself away, as man had given himself in his writing. 17
Though one may criticise Egerton’s view as constricting upon the female author, it was in the hands of Richardson and Woolf and countless other women novelists who came after them, that ‘one small plot’ seems to have proved capable of almost infinite expansion.

Therefore, Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, which centres around the trip to the lighthouse offers various symbolic interpretations which are assigned to the lighthouse itself:

Thus for H.K. Russell, it is the feminine creative principle; to Joan Bennett, it is the rhythm of joy and sorrow; and to F.L. Overcash, it is a combination of Eden, Heaven, and Trinity. David Daiches calls it “a symbol of the individual who is at once a unique being and a part of the flux of history” and points out that “to reach the lighthouse is, in a sense, to make contact with a truth outside oneself, to surrender the uniqueness of one’s ego to an impersonal reality.”

But what is more ‘determining’ in the book is the dominance of Mrs. Ramsay who has been variously interpreted as the ‘Great Mother’ and/or ‘Terrible Mother’, a Madonna and/or anti-Madonna, and Demeter to Lily’s Persephone. The reference is even more explicit in relation to Mrs. Ramsay’s eldest daughter, Prue, whose death due to some illness connected with childbirth makes Lily think of her retrospectively as Persephone, letting fall her basket of flowers in deference to Demeter/Mrs. Ramsay’s will:

She let her flowers fall from her basket, scattered and tumbled them on to the grass and, reluctantly and hesitatingly, but without question or complaint—had she not the faculty of obedience to perfection?—went too. Down fields, across valleys, white, flower-strewn... together, Mrs Ramsay walking rather fast in front, as if she expected to meet someone round the corner.

Chiefly however (along with Woolf’s mother, Julia Stephen, who inspired the fictional portrait), Mrs. Ramsay is equalled with ‘the Angel in the House’ who is ‘so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own’. Mrs. Ramsay’s consciousness therefore, rests on contrariness as she worries about Minta being...
late, in her disturbance over her husband's sense of inferiority, in her efforts to understand Tansley, as she orders the cook, in her awareness of the wedge-shaped core of darkness within herself, and in her renewed attempts to make a whole out of the disparate elements around her— which Erich Auerbach calls 'the multipersonal representation of consciousness'.

This is why, the female experience of orgasm is evoked very strongly using the suggestive power of imagery and elaborate syntax. The 'exquisite' moment is connected with veiling and not looking: it exists without reference to male demand or the male gaze. Mrs. Ramsay is alone: the ecstatic experience is created as she looks at the lighthouse beam, especially as she gazes at the third stroke, which is 'so much her, yet so little her':

For all that she thought, watching it with fascination, hypnotised, as if it were stroking with its silver fingers some sealed vessel in her brain whose bursting would flood her with delight, she had known happiness, exquisite happiness, intense happiness, and it silvered the rough waves a little more brightly, as daylight faded, and the blue went out of the sea and it rolled in waves of pure lemon which curved and swelled and broke upon the beach and the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind and she felt, It is enough! It is enough! He turned and saw her...

But unfortunately as in *Mrs. Dalloway*, it is again the male gaze which interrupts and checks the moment of ecstasy.

On the other hand, freshened by an influx of feminist reading from the mid-1970s, the figure of Lily Briscoe has been more intensely scrutinised as the female artist-figure who is actually a surrogate for Woolf herself. Feminist approaches have viewed Lily as representing the 'new woman' and a new order of values (women entering the professions, achieving independence), in contrast to Mrs. Ramsay who exemplifies the siren call of marriage and motherhood that threaten Lily's autonomy.
But more particularly, the novel may be said to be a Kunstlerroman or ‘liberation fable’ with Lily as the central character and the gradual growth of her independent vision. Although Woolf filters through Lily much of her critique of gender stereotypes, domination, and heterosexual exclusivity, the assumption that Lily’s consciousness provides the novel’s most reliable perspective (‘a brush, the one dependable thing in a world of strife, ruin, chaos’) undermines a more inclusive feminist critique comprising not only gender, but the relation of intellectual productivity to class. Critics have amply demonstrated the ambiguities with which a woman writing ‘thinks back through her mother’, but in opposing artist and mother, or emphasizing ‘the virgin-artist’s need’ to achieve distance, to separate from the mother (Mrs. Ramsay) and ‘reduce’ her to the status of ‘object’ ‘within the superior sphere of art’, they plant Lily squarely within a male ‘modernist tradition of exile, alienation, and refusal of social roles--- the non serviam of the classic artist hero, Stephen Dedalus’. Nevertheless, the consciousness of a suppressed desire still remains inexpressible despite immense stress:

One could not say what one meant. So now she laid her brushes neatly in the box, side by side, and said to William Bankes: ‘It suddenly gets cold. The sun seems to give less heat,’ she said, looking about her, for it was bright enough, the grass still a soft deep green, the house starred in its greenery with purple passion flowers and rooks dropping cool cries from the high blue. But something moved, flashed, turned a silver wing in the air. It was September, after all, the middle of September, and past six in the evening.

In The Reproduction of Mothering (1978), Nancy J. Chodorow feels that it was the development of industrial capitalism in the west which entailed that women’s role in the family become increasingly concerned with personal relations and psychological stability. Therefore, ‘mothering’ became a
psychologically based role, consisting in psychological and personal experience of self in relation to child or children.

Thus, both Clarissa Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay are simultaneously aware of their maternal omnipotence and expectations of women’s unique self-sacrificing qualities. However, while Mrs. Ramsay tries to impose traditional gender roles and heterosexual orientation (which reproduce the family and marriage), Mrs. Dalloway provides ample room to her daughter Elizabeth to develop as an autonomous being, free from the artifice of drawing rooms and parlours. In this context, I would especially like to mention Robin Lippincott’s *Mr. Dalloway: A Novella* (1999) which critics as Gérard Genette have considered to be a ‘continuation’ of the process of communing with others and the world through Mrs. Dalloway by transferring this eagerness for continuum onto Richard Dalloway himself. Thus, Richard’s deepest understanding of his continuousness in Lippincott’s book occurs as he prepares to lead Clarissa to the train for their trip to watch the solar eclipse:

[He] wanted nothing less than to take Clarissa and Elizabeth and their friends and to bring them out of the drawing rooms and the parlours, out of their houses, out of doors, away from all that artifice, and then—somehow as one, as a party of people— to connect them en masse, with the natural world, something larger than themselves, something more than merely the who, what, when, where, and how of their meagre day-to-day existences, something bigger and more profound. And that something, he supposed now, was nothing less than the universe itself.  

Just as Clarissa tries to offer ‘freedom’ to Elizabeth through her own moments of revelation, Richard endeavours to offer his wife and daughter release from mundane concerns by making them partake of his communal experience by taking upon himself the role of the beneficent mother. But like Clarissa in Woolf’s novel, Lippincott’s Richard experiences the moments of consciousness as tenuous and fleeting.
Nevertheless, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, as we have seen, propounds that it is the entry of the subject into the existing symbolic order which imposes upon it the awareness of sexual difference. This is why, in such an 'order' either 'woman' does not exist, or 'she' is not represented/representable. Cixous and other contemporary feminists have countered this by attempting to affirm women's positive difference from men, and by attempting to articulate a specifically feminine subjectivity.

Woolf in her early works, seems to be similarly concerned to insert feminine difference into a culture which is psychologically indifferent, in Irigaray's phrase, i.e. which does not recognise (sexual) difference. One of Woolf's means of doing this was therefore, to focus on the female mind, whose vision is normally repressed within the phallocentric symbolic order, and so the invocation of the female mind (as well as the female body) puts pressure on the limits of the conventional symbolic order. For this, Woolf's practise was to engender and nurture reference to past incidents and facts within the momentary glow of the consciousness of her characters which though last no more than a few fleeting moments, actually evolve a harmonious design out of disparate elements, which promises sustenance over a long period of time if not upto eternity.

It is however, her last novel Between the Acts (published posthumously),-- which Philip Toynbee praises as signifying 'a new beginning', which views life as a macrocosm as associated with the expanse of the countryside. Woolf was reading Freud during the years she worked on Between the Acts (1939-40) and rewrites the Oedipus complex by situating both love and hatred in the daughter for her dominating father, which is the outcome of gender polarities. Therefore Isa Oliver feels love for the gentleman farmer Mr. Haines, and hatred for her husband
Giles, the stockbroker, whom she married when she thought she had a glimpse of love. During the same interval in which Giles kills the snake and toad in a fit of 'prehistoric barbarism', Isa elaborates the pageant's musical refrain:

"Dispersed are we.... All is over. The wave has broken. Left us stranded, high and dry. Single, separate on the shingle". 26

Isa's two lives, interior and exterior, are almost perfectly disjunct. On the surface she is a good and useful wife, quite competent with cooks; on the surface she feels perfunctory love for her husband; a little lower she is distressed by Giles's infidelities and contemplates her own; at the core there wells the irreconcilable night.

There is the agonising awareness of the disintegration of the contemporary social fabric, which also refuses integration under the aegis of father while simultaneously lamenting the loss of a concept of mothering that could serve as an alternative sense of unity. The sense of being land-locked in Pointz Hall nevertheless, gives desire for dissolution which incorporates a desire for a return into a female origin:

'Let me turn away,' she murmured, turning, 'from the array'--- she looked desolately round her--- 'of china faces, glazed and hard. Down the ride, that leads under the nut tree and the may tree, away, till I come to the wishing well'... 'But what wish should I drop in the well?'... 'That the waters should cover me,'... 'of the wishing well.' 27

Water here, is not merely a symbol of wish-fulfilment for Isa, but functions as a figure of a longed-for mother whose return might undo separation.

The only relief which comes is in the form of the sudden providential shower that restores the human community in a moment of collective lament that both articulates and heals the pain of isolation. The shower also gratifies a powerful unstated desire of Miss La Trobe, to 'expose' her audience, 'to douche them, with present-time reality' and to simultaneously restore in them the illusion
of collectivity her play/art both requires and denies. Moreover, by recapitulating ‘our island’s history’, from the rupture of birth through “The Present Time. Ourselves,” La Trobe’s pageant offers a painful version of the narrative of alienation whose positive articulation had emerged through Lily Briscoe. La Trobe adapts the plot of separation to the history of England, represented through The Age of Reason by and as women (as female child, a young girl, Queen Elizabeth, Reason herself), allegorised next as a Victorian constable directing the traffic of empire (a deliberate choice of gender to represent an age traditionally personified by its queen), and finally incarnate in the ‘scraps, orts, and fragments’ that constitute the present day. It is a process that posits a maternal origin and moment of mother-infant unity; but there is no longer any possibility of recovering them, for the mother of infancy is always already incorporated by the father as Persephone has to spend two thirds or one half of every year with Hades, and Demeter must return to her husband Zeus (albeit through the agency of Rhea, the mother of Demeter and grandmother of Persephone).

Finally, the pageant dramatizes the futility of further enactment of this matricentric plot and points toward the father-daughter plot that Miss La Trobe embraces as the subject of her next play:

“It would be midnight; there would be two figures, half concealed by a rock. The curtain would rise,”

--- predicting and assimilating Isa’s final scene with Giles:

Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night.

... The great hooded chairs had become enormous. And Giles too. And Isa too against the window. The window was all sky without colour. The house had lost its shelter. It was night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks.
As asserted by Polly Toynbee, the end of the novel marks a beginning that recasts origins. The final scene is an erotic depiction of primal sexual fusion and separation, to night and warring copulation, a moment both prior and subsequent to birth—which denotes implicitly the superiority of the man/father.

In a recent work entitled *My Madness Saved Me: The Madness and Marriage of Virginia Woolf* (2006), the author Thomas Szasz counters the three ways in which Virginia Woolf is regularly portrayed—as a victim of mental illness, or psychiatry, or her husband. Arguing from the viewpoint of psychopathology, Dr. Szasz asks, 'Was her alleged manic-depression an intentional medical illness or an intentional hysterical strategem?' While amplifying the shadows glimpsed behind Virginia and Leonard's window-box marriage, Szasz finds Virginia to be 'an intelligent and self-assertive person, a moral agent who used mental illness, psychiatry and her husband to fashion for herself a life of her own choosing... [Madness] was her property, her treasure, her identity... she transformed [it] into the triumph of literary-psychiatric immortality.' But again, Szasz points out that if Virginia emasculated Leonard by her flouted definition of marriage, he in turn controlled her putative desire for children. Submitting to his strict monitoring, even her access to reading and writing that might over-stimulate her nerves, she became again the dutiful daughter, he the beloved father.

Likewise, in Woolf's novel, the contradictory emotions which Isa feels towards her husband throws up the disturbing question of what it is that a woman wants, and the feminine desire becomes all the more manifest in the often bleak and even shocking situations in which women increasingly find themselves, as in
the stories of Sarah Fyge Egerton and Jean Rhys in the 1920s and 1930s. In “The Psychology of Feminism” (Blackwood’s, 1897), Hugh Stutfield writes:

The Soul of Woman, its Sphinx-like ambiguities and complexities, its manifold contradictions, its sorrows and joys, its vagrant fancies and never-to-be-satisfied longings, furnish the literary analyst of these days with inexhaustible material. Above all do the sex-problem novelists and the introspective biographer and essayist revel in the theme. Psychology... is their never-ending delight; and modern woman, who if we may believe those who claim to know most about her, is a sort of walking enigma, is their chief subject of investigation. Her ego, that mysterious entity of which she is now only just becoming conscious, is said to remain a *terra incognita* even to herself; but they are determined to explore its innermost recesses. The pioneers of this formidable undertaking must of necessity be women. Man, great, clumsy, comical creature that he is, knows nothing of the inner springs of the modern Eve’s complicated nature. He sees everything in her, we are told, without comprehending anything, and the worst of it is that he cannot even express his ignorance in good English. Man possesses brute force, woman divine influence, and her nature is in closer relation with the infinite than the masculine mind. He is an ‘utter failure’, while her womanhood ‘almost guarantees to her a knowledge of the eternal verities’, which he can only hope partially to attain to through woman.31

The underlying irony not only betrays the conflict between ‘masculine’ objectivity and ‘feminine’ interiority, but resists the attempt by women writers to reclaim the authority of their own experience.

Nevertheless, as Fay Weldon says, God, ‘the bearded patriarch has been replaced by Mother-Goddess Nature’, in the new world. But ‘freedom’ also entails a new kind of exploitation and victimisation of the woman:

Now it is assumed that somehow, what with the washing machine, the microwave, the vacuum cleaner, and this strange thing called childcare, which is another woman looking after her child for less than the mother earns, she will be able to manage both. And she can, just about, and often wants to, and often has to. And it can be hard. We have paid a heavy price for our emancipation,...32

Thus, whether financially dependent or not, the women in Weldon’s stories, as in the novels of Egerton and Rhys, focus on bored, trapped, fallen, impoverished, struggling women. Weldon reveals women’s relationship with inarticulate, dense, imperceptive, careless, and sometimes unfaithful, brutal and exploitative men.
She makes much use of interior monologues, dreams, reverie, and other forms of interiority. The recording of events and the description of outward circumstances are almost always a means of suggesting inner realities, especially the inner realities of women’s experiences and desires.

But on the other hand, the novelist never forgets to mention the demands made on women by a male-dominated society, and hence her deliberate employment of different fictional structures: allegory, fairy tales, science fiction, suspense, romance novels, ghost stories— which lend credibility to the drastic measures of revenge, however outrageous, undertaken by the heroines. Moreover, to project the fragmentary status of the women’s selves, the novels themselves, come in the form of pastiche with fragments of dialogues and monologues, a shifting of multiple narrators, and an interweaving of past and present events that undoes chronology.

Hence, it is due to the depiction of the fragmented self that the point of view is seldom singular in Weldon’s work and involves the perception of more than one woman, or of the multiple selves lying latent within one woman which emerge during crisis. Thus, the title of the novel *Down Among the Women* is repeated throughout the story as a collective refrain by the socially and economically inferior female characters who have little opportunity to rise above their situation:

> Down among the women. What a place to be! Yet here we all are by accident of birth, sprouted breasts and bellies, as cyclical of nature as our timekeeper the moon— and down here among the women we have no option but to stay.  

Most of the time, women are aware of being biologically trapped within their own bodies, of being physically mishandled and mentally abused by self-serving men,
and in return getting blamed for the men's perversities. Therefore, in *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Allan tells Susan:

[M]y intentions toward you are entirely dishonourable.... This diet weakens me. You are taking monstrous advantage of a poor weak hungry man. I never thought to be an adulterer. 34

As a result, in an attempt to create a better life for themselves and their children, to rise above their oppressed position, Weldon's women adopt subversive measures, thus making them ambivalent. Thus, in *Down Among the Women* the experienced Wanda stands out as an early feminist (like Esther in *The Fat Woman's Joke*) whose lack of concern for conventional female roles is evident in her bawdy language as she tells Scarlet:

There is more to a woman... than her tits, her arse and her cunt, although your father was never really convinced. 35

It is however, Scarlet's friends--- Jocelyn, Helen, Sylvia and Audrey--- who provide multiple judgements on Scarlet's supposed loose morals, and also in their growing awareness of the unfair social position of women. But despite differences, the women genuinely care for one another, and the fact that the novel is written from the point of view of one of the friends Jocelyn, suggests that women can find sympathy for one another, even though it is difficult to maintain female friendship in a society that promotes competition among women.

*Female Friends* follows the same technique of merging the fates of three women--- Chloe, Marjorie and Grace--- but focuses on Chloe and her perception of events which are at times chillingly honest:

We women, we beggars, we scrubbers and dusters, we do the best we can for us and ours. We are divided amongst ourselves. We have to be, for survival's sake.36

Nevertheless, in both novels, the writer places considerable emphasis on antagonisms and rivalries among women which becomes the source of
disintegration. The latter novel contains numerous examples of discords erupting between married and unmarried women, women with children and women who are child-free. These, as Adrienne Rich and other theorists point out, constitute typical sources of antagonism in a phallocratie culture. This is the contradictions and compromises between feminist principles of collectivity and equal opportunity, on the one hand, and capitalist principles of competition, commercialism and individual enterprise on the other, which hardly provides excuse to Doris Lessing who embarks upon a scathing attack on women in her “Preface to The Golden Notebook” (1962):

Women are the cowards they are because they have been semi-slaves for so long. The number of women prepared to stand up for what they really think, feel, experience with a man they are in love with is still small. Most women will still run like little dogs with stones thrown at them when a man says: You are unfeminine, aggressive, you are unmanning me.  

--- and such cowardice has been, as Lessing opines, responsible behind a section of women accusing the suffragettes as ‘defeminized, masculine, brutalised.’

The tumult and fragmentation in the women’s lives become all the more manifest in The Cloning of Joanna May in which the splitting of Joanna’s identity, which she refers to as the ‘I’, unsettles her view of selfhood:

Our little shard, our little divine shred of identity, so precariously held, is altogether lost as we join the oneness that is audience. My clones and I. After I found out about the clones I began to worry a lot about ‘I’.  

Joanna’s commentary obliquely depicts a postmodern society as enamoured by reproductions, replicas of the individual beneath layers of images and ersatz messages. On the other hand, Joanna’s husband Carl May tries to kill Joanna’s selfhood by creating those identical to her:

... I want to amuse myself. I can make a thousand thousand of you if I choose, fragment all living things and re-create them. I can splice a gene or two, can make you walk with a monkey’s head or run on a bitch’s legs
or see through the eyes of a newt: I can entertain myself by making you whatever I feel like, and as I feel like so shall I do. 39

However, the surfacing of her multifarious forms enables Joanna to counter Carl’s destructive urges, and indeed, Joanna’s response to Carl’s threats sounds the clarion call of rebellion for all women who are trying to piece together their disintegrated selves/lives:

And then Joanna May just laughed and said do what you like but you can’t catch me, you’ll never catch me, I am myself. Nail me and alter me, fix me and distort me, I’ll still have windows on the world to make it what I decide. I’ll be myself. Multiply me and multiply my soul: divide me, split me; you just make more of me, not less. I will look out from more and different windows, that’s all you will have done, and I will watch the world go by in all its multifarious forms, and there will be no end to my seeing. I will lift up my heart to the hills, that’s all, to glorify a maker who is not you. I should carry on if I were you, cloning and meddling, you might end up doing more good than harm, in spite of yourself, if only by mistake. 40

Such overt protestations and defiance may remind one of Satan’s loud contempt—‘...out of good still to find means of evil’—in Book I of John Milton’s Paradise Lost (1667), though in Joanna May, it is a subversion of the ‘man made language’ uttered by Satan for here not only is the speaker Joanna herself, but because her words carry different meanings.

The novel Splitting (which was nominated for the Whitbread Prize), extends the metaphor of the fragmented identity of women, by playing with the idea of the multiple personalities of Lady Angelica Rice. Formerly a rock singer, Angelica takes on the role of a proper English wife after marriage. This persona has the effect of hiding not only the former Angelica, but all the counterparts that make up her identity. After being cast out by her husband, Angelica initially tries to ignore the voices of her multiple selves when they emerge:

She has tried to incorporate these bickering women, these alter egos, back into herself; now she tries to regain her sense of self, but she can’t. She must listen to them, and answer them. 41
Central to the emerging personalities is Jelly White, the efficient, organised secretary who begins to interfere with the correspondence between her lawyer and Brian. Besides Lady Rice and Jelly, there is Angel, the sex-crazed one who unabashedly seduces the chauffeur Ram, and Ajax, a male counterpart. Through subterfuge Angelica, with the help of Jelly, reclaims her rights as a divorcée, acquiring a generous settlement and running off with Ram.

It is through splitting apart that Angelica is able to unify her disparate identities in order to counter the male world, and thus emerges a new woman, pieced back together, fully intact. In fact, this ‘grasping out for… wholeness’ which can acknowledge both fragmentation and the golden possibility of the final ‘unity’, is also discernible in Doris Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook* whose extraordinary shape is explained in the preface:

... it is divided into five sections and separated by stages of the four Notebooks, Black, Red, Yellow and Blue. The Notebooks are kept by Anna Wulf... She keeps four, and not one because, as she recognises, she has to separate things off from each other, out of fear of chaos, of formlessness—of breakdown... In the inner Golden Notebook, things have come together, the divisions have broken down, there is formlessness with the end of fragmentation— the triumph of the second theme, which is that of unity.42

George Kisker however, opines that the ‘splitting of the personality is the climax of repeated failures of personal adjustment and integration’ and offers the following psychological background to the rare condition of multiple personalities:

Pierre Janet was one of the first to show that consciousness is sometimes split into a number of more or less independent streams, and that at least some forms of personality disorganisation can be explained in terms of this splitting of consciousness, or dissociation. Such dissociation arises when deep-lying unconscious impulses are reinforced at the conscious level and seek to express themselves. In some individuals, for reasons which are not completely clear, these fugitive impulses take the form of a secondary personality and assume a semi-independent existence. The dissociative reaction is the basis for a wide variety of neurotic sleep,
In *Orlando* too, Virginia Woolf addresses the same issue of the multiplicity of the self:

...how many different people are there not— Heaven help us— all having lodgement at one time or another in the human spirit? Some say two thousand and fifty-two... [Orlando] had a great variety of selves to call upon, far more than we have been able to find room for, since a biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may well have as many thousand.

Nevertheless, narrative dispersal (caused by split personality) and multiple perspectives serve to substantiate the female author's recapitulation of different points of view, and also shows how despite different circumstances, the suffering of one woman is not dissimilar to that of others. Moreover, the uncertainty of mind is communicated by the way a woman's thoughts flit from subject to subject, so that at times, the narrative alternates between present-tense transcription of immediate thought or experience, and recording of disorderly memories, sometimes in the present tense, sometimes the past. For example, in *Worst Fears*, the ambiguity of events is heightened by Weldon's depiction of Alexandra's imperfect and confused perceptions as she tries to come in terms with her 'worst fears' concerning the infidelity/fidelity of her dead husband Ned:

Alexandra sat in suspension. She had a vision of herself as a particle in a test-tube of viscous liquid which drifted neither up nor down, but was obliged by the laws of nature to stay exactly where it was. She found it was easier to have an idea of herself as something inorganic than organic. This was Tuesday afternoon. Ned had died on the Saturday night. Alexandra had not been there when he died. She had been in London, 130 miles away, recovering from an evening on stage, as Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Since then, wherever she was, Alexandra had been drifting in and out of this state of suspension. She supposed it was shock.

This disruption of chronological order, and mixing of musing with interior monologue, memory, and stream of consciousness, are also essential ingredients.

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43 amnesia, automatic behaviour, multiple personality, and similar conditions.
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to the continuity of Woolf’s interior monologues, as well as the techniques developed by Jean Rhys, Eva Figes, Anita Brookner and others, which are specially adapted to the presentation of loneliness and uncertainty in women’s lives. Also, it is rare to find a writer as Fay who succeeds in combining a focus on the psychological complexities of female subjectivity with the overtly political themes of collective feminist struggle and women’s community (as found in *Down Among the Women* and *Female Friends*).

In any case, the final ‘unity’ which emerges from chaos, disorganisation and non-transparency, signifies a ‘new space’— a space of the unknown, over which the male-dominated ‘master narrative’ has lost control. It is perhaps, the utopian space identified by Julia Kristeva (and already mentioned in Chapter II) as the terrain on which the sexual opposition man/woman is undone and in which ‘the very notion of identity is challenged’. This is particularly applicable to Woolf’s novels in which the rigidly controlled and controlling, rationalist post-war world of England (as represented in *Mrs. Dalloway* by the tolling of Big Ben and the repressive behaviour of Bradshaw) is shown to be undercut by ghostly hauntings (the memory of Sally’s kiss, the figure of Evans) that unsettle the official culture of ‘regulation and control’ and allow space for a ‘utopian alternative’, a space for the irrational, the feminine, a world released from the hegemony of heterosexuality and the rigid structures of the public world which endorses the rational, the masculine and the separate.

On the other hand however, Finuala Dowling points out the fact that at the end of the novel *Splitting*, Angel acknowledges that it could be only Ajax who could hold the narrative together:

He’s the one who tells our narrative; he has to, or else it’s anarchy in here. He sorts us out and splits us up... it’s desperate in here. 46
This indicates the implicit tension between the male narrative which relies on logical sequence and a female sundering into multiple texts and justifies the query—‘How many women can you fit into one body?’—as found on the cover advertising on Flamingo’s paperback edition of Splitting. This is perhaps why Lorna Sage (in Women in the House of Fiction, 1992) accuses Weldon’s plots as being ‘invariably partisan’ in refusing to see women as experts in continuity or communion and hence, unable to acquire the ‘space’ which makes her little more than ‘a didactic deconstructor’ and a parodist.

Nevertheless, the female protagonists created in the fiction of Woolf and Weldon, reveal the social construction of a ‘feminine consciousness’. Through the fictional devices of falling in love, leading sordid married lives, or fighting humiliating divorce suits, their dialectic of the self and the world, is grounded in their experience of personal, emotional disappointment. As they explore the ‘self’, they introspectively mirror the restrictive inhibitions experienced by women due to their own and society’s attitudes towards them. By focussing on the nuances of human relationships, as experienced and felt by the sensitive female characters, their novels raise pertinent feminist issues for a new way of knowing themselves, their world, and the need for a new ethical order of meanings and values.

Finally, the purpose is to offer an implicit female resistance to relationally indifferent and dehumanising stances in the patriarchal social structure. Thus, the ‘I’ in Weldon’s novels may be anyone, including the author herself or one of her characters, and the voice keeps changing its tune— from the personal, sincere, conventional to bawdy and even ruthless. Also, because the elusive ‘I’ is always female, she contributes to the feminist cause by dismissing conventional
categories that restrict women’s lives. As Teresa Ebert says in “The ‘Difference’ of Postmodern Feminism”:

...disrupting the clarity and certainty of meaning, dehierarchizing binary oppositions, inscribing the difference within, celebrating undecidability, and speaking woman’s unrepresentable excess (her jouissance) through such textual strategies as deconstruction, mimicry, parody, pastiche, free association, and so on, are all subversive acts: they denaturalise and expose the illusion of identity and certainty on which the regime of patriarchal representation rests.47

Thus, while Woolf’s experimentation and inconclusiveness, her irony and her ambiguity, her sense of the contiguity and contingency of life and its meaning, its evanescence and its moments of illumination stem from her characters’ psychical destabilisation, multiplicity and fluidity in the backdrop of a post-war world resulting in the plurality of ways in which her works might be approached, the variety of themes (often bizarre) in Weldon’s novels and the manifold contradictions inherent in her characters offer newer and quirkier possibilities of human behaviour as well as to the overall scope of the novel itself.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


2. Ibid., p.264.


6. Ibid., p.3.

7. Ibid., p.7.


9. Ibid., p.126.


22. Ibid., p.170.


27. Ibid., pp.63-64.

28. Ibid., p.124.

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29. Ibid., pp.129-130.
40. Ibid., p.110.