CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION
Ezra Pound gave a very provoking title to his volume of critical essays — Make It New. Now Pound is a great name in literature; yet one may very aptly ask: can anything be absolutely 'new' in critical pursuit? Surely, newness does not spring from the blues: in fact, every individual talent has the roots (to go with T.S. Eliot — another great name) in tradition. So the 'new' derives from the old, and the old can always give birth to something new.

This provides the starting point for the present attempt at re-assessing the new technique employed in Virginia Woolf's experimental novels. No doubt, the bulk of Virginia Woolf criticism is already formidable. It is not only that she has been already fairly exhaustively written about: it is equally noteworthy that she herself hasn't left much unsaid about her own experiments with the craft of fiction. Yet there are positive provocations here and there that may well lead to a genuine attempt at revaluation of the points at issue in this momentous area. On the one hand there is F.R. Leavis, asserting that in case of aesthetic writers like Virginia Woolf, form and style are likely to become ends to be sought for themselves, while on the other, we have the master delineator of personal relationships in English fiction, E.M. Forster coming out with an allegation that
for all her probings into the 'inside story' of character, Virginia Woolf just could not 'do' memorable characters. Now these are manifestly provoking observations, and it is a fact that they have led to the present attempt at having another look at the interesting story about Virginia Woolf.

A perusal of the varied critical formulations should convince anyone involved in such a task that in Virginia Woolf's fiction one could well trace diverse influences. These influences comprise an impressive coverage: they include (to take a few notable examples) the influences of William James's theory of duration, of Butler's antithesis of G.E. Moore's philosophy, of Fry's aestheticism and anti-academicism, of Elizabethans, of Russian novelists, of painting, of Proust, and above all, of Sir Leslie Stephen's penetrating intelligence. There were, then, other allied factors of noteworthy consequences, chiefly, her contact with Cambridge talents like Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, Maynard Keynes and so on that strengthened her conviction about the spirit of emancipation from all jaded conventions and fed her innate preferences for the significance of rare, deeper mental states. A concentrated research into the vitals of her major aspects — technique and characterization — should, at least by implication, provide the blueprint of a new approach.
That Virginia Woolf, like Roger Fry, then, thought alike of the essence as well as the methods of art is perfectly clear and locates the line of bearing at the outset. John Hawley Roberts quotes Margaret Fry to show how close Virginia Woolf and Roger Fry were to each other, and goes on to suggest:

And she is perhaps, an answer to the question Fry asked somewhat peevishly as nearly as the first Post-Impressionistic Exhibition in London (1910), why no English novelist took his art seriously. 'Why were they all engrossed in childish problems of photographic representation? ... Mrs Woolf seems to have tried to follow this advice. She did 'fling representation to the winds' and along with it, the established notion of plot.'

Here one point has to be made very clear. Earlier in this chapter, reference was made to E.M. Forster's adverse criticism of Virginia Woolf's characters. But this should not preclude the prospects of appreciating a striking similarity between the two luminaries dominating the twentieth century horizon of fiction. In fact, both Forster and Virginia Woolf aimed throughout their career as novelists at the presentation of the self-contained unity of a work of art. (Significantly, To the Lighthouse stands out as her happiest triumph in this regard, and equally notably, Mrs Ramsay, despite all that Forster

might say to the contrary, remains a memorable character, as memorable as Emma or Agnes or Mrs Moore.) It is interesting then that Virginia Woolf formulated her thesis in her brilliant essay "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown", and her notation for Fry’s idea is Mrs Brown that a novelist should attempt to delineate.Frankly, what is underlying the parallels noted above is the fact that these artists felt profoundly about the roots of art. This, however, is not the place to discuss this aspect in any detail, since here our concern is to lay out the primary propositions.

It is time we returned to the other extreme view on Mrs Woolf’s art held by F.R. Leavis, particularly his idea that with her the chief preoccupation is with elaborating and concentrating on a beautiful style in order to apply it to the chosen theme. Now this argument does not seem to be really helpful as it is an attempt to undermine one facet of reality represented by "the force of drama that takes place in the minds of human beings." The stream of consciousness innovations should be treated as a means to represent an area of reality which most of the great writers who formed the great tradition were

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ignorant of or incapable of doing justice to. Besides, it will be our main endeavour in this thesis to establish that the method in no way is an end in itself, but a means, perhaps the most effective tool to depict the life of mind.

Among the practitioners of this new kind of novel Virginia Woolf may seem to have been gifted with a vision of life, "a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end", a mystical vision of life, a metaphysical reality, a moment's illumination like nirvana, experienced only by a few who are in contact with the naked reality. The high priest of Bloomsbury as Virginia Woolf was she wrote her novels like a poet (about which there is no doubt: "She composed ... like a poet. That is to say, her writing proceeds from the organic development of images growing out of her subject matter"), and a philosopher, whose soul is detached from flesh and blood and from the ordinary world of men and women. Her visionary power like Blake's is immanent. Her fictional world is surrounded by this "semi-transparent" vision of mind;

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her characters Rachel Vinrace in *The Voyage Out*, Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway*, Lily Briscoe and Mrs Ramsay (she is not only visionary but also the vision itself) in *To the Lighthouse* and Bernard in *The Waves* live in a world flooded by the moonlight of her vision, which can be aesthetically touched, like the soft touch of a butterfly. Admittedly, this is not the world of Arnold Bennett, H.G. Wells and John Galsworthy nor of F.R. Leavis, Q.D. Leavis, C.P. Snow, William Cooper, Kingsley Amis, Angus Wilson, Pamela Hansford Johnson, and perhaps many others of the kind. The fault is theirs and not Virginia Woolf's that they fail to immerse themselves in Virginia Woolf's world.

As a novelist Virginia Woolf enjoys a peculiar vision of life and it is by this (more than anything else) that she is distinguished from her contemporaries, Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce etc. despite the fact that they all experimented with more or less similar techniques in their novels. Does not one feel at this point that the Edwardian tools of novel writing were just inadequate to communicate her sense of vision? Honestly, the Edwardian tools were dismissed by Virginia Woolf as not only inadequate but also obsolete. Her vision of life could not be communicated by them. Her feeling about the traditional tools is expressed in the following
terms: "With their simple tools and primitive materials, it might be said, Fielding did well and Jane Austen even better, but compare their opportunities with ours!" She adopts a number of new fictional techniques to convey her own philosophy of life, her own stream of consciousness and she justifies her novelistic innovation by way of employing some of the highly sophisticated literary methods ever known. But her concern with techniques is always secondary compared to her vision. This is a major fact that relates to her stream-of-consciousness novels. Naturally, the scope of this thesis gets extended: we must also examine the diversity of the techniques some of which derive from the already existing ones, like the interior monologues, both direct and indirect, soliloquies and omniscient description, and others are personal innovations like patterns and rhythms and rhetorical devices, while still other techniques are influences from painting, music, cinema, the Symbolist poets and imagists and psychologists and scientists alike.

In Virginia Woolf's case techniques are enriched by an impressive variety. Every novel has a different set of techniques, that distinguish the work from the preceding and successive ones. Therefore Mrs Dalloway

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is obviously different from both *Jacob's Room* and *To the Lighthouse* and again from *The Waves*. The variations and alterations in her case are bound to recur because these are the essential qualities of an original artist, an artist who is endowed with a natural talent for improvisation, such as to raise it to the heights of creative art.

There is yet another fact of literary history which renders a reassessment of the stream-of-consciousness technique necessary and important. It relates to the subsequent condemnation of the stream-of-consciousness novel. Reasons attributed to the fall from grace are many, but the most significant reason is perhaps the aloofness of these technicians; they are dubbed social decadents as they do not seem interested in promoting the social and moral values of man in society. Novels like Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* marked the culmination of experimental fiction and after them no one attempted stream-of-consciousness fiction with that zeal and seriousness. To take one example of the growing resentment among readers, we refer to Pamela Hansford Johnson who comes out with a sarcastic dig: "Writing is not a private game to be played at a private party."

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No wonder, a return to the traditional forms has been effected in the novels of C.P. Snow, Angus Wilson and Kingsley Amis. The return is characterized by their opposition to experiment; they simply do not write traditional novels as Graham Green, Anthony Powell and Evelyn Waugh do, but they are perhaps opposed to the experimentation.

Here surely one positive aspect of the stream-of-consciousness novels needs emphasis: it is the adherents' belief that "there is something permanently interesting in characters itself." It is human nature itself which is psychologically analysed in the stream-of-consciousness fiction. Here Robert Humphrey's view is worth quoting:

The problem of character depiction is central to stream-of-consciousness fiction. The great advantage, and consequently the best justification of this type of novel, rests on its potentialities for presenting character more accurately and more realistically.

Truly speaking what is constantly found in a stream-of-consciousness novel is not description of scenes and characters but characters who are discovered, that is, rendered as they are put against a background

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8 Humphrey, op.cit., p.7.
of unending experiences, in which their spiritual self appears in "moments of heightened consciousness" or sensibility. These moments abound in the novels of Virginia Woolf. Virginia Woolf sees life in terms of visions, moments, and atoms that fall incessantly from moment to moment and as they fall they form a pattern. That is why there is a tight form in all her novels despite the fact that they record the irrational mental meanderings. Virginia Woolf's preoccupation with novel-form has been expressed in *The Voyage Out* when Hewet talks to Rachel:

'What I want to do in writing novels is very much what you want to do when you play the piano. I expect,' he began, turning and speaking over his shoulder. 'We want to find out what's behind things, don't we? .... Things I feel come to me like lights ... I want to combine them ... I want to make figures ...'

Indeed in all her novels she is concerned with 'what's behind things'. *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves* are outstanding cases in point, and should be examined in systematic detail. Of course, her less important novels, particularly from the point of view of the experiment like *Orlando*, *The Years*

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and *Between the Acts* also may deserve some analysis in
the passing, specially for the purposes of underlying the
striking differences in accent and delineation.

For the sake of convenience, however, the present
study is divided into several chapters, which are noted
below:

Chapter I. Introduction

Chapter II. Backgrounds: social, intellectual and
literary

Chapter III. Aspects of the stream-of-consciousness
novel

Chapter IV. The formative years and the *Bloomsbury*
as against the *Edwardians*

Chapter V. Techniques in Virginia Woolf's novels:
anatomy (phases I and II)

Chapter VI. Further dimensions (phase I: comedy and
fantasy: *Orlando* and phase II: the con-
scious and the inside story: *The Waves*)

Chapter VII. The journey's end (phase I: *The Years*
and phase II: *Between the Acts*)

Chapter VIII. Conclusion.