CHAPTER II: VIRGINIA WOOLF'S STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS TECHNIQUE IN ITS INFANCY
Virginia Woolf shared the restless experimentalism of her time. She consciously developed a view of fictional art which would enable her to deal with it. She considered it a deep personal need to develop a kind of fiction which would render persuasively the quality of her own personal insights into experience. The quality she means is concerned with the moods, intuitions, blending of memories, sudden awareness of the symbolic in the real, that suggest how the inner life is really lived. This subjective reality came to be identified with the technique rather loosely called stream of consciousness. Virginia Woolf advanced the frontiers of the English Novel by adopting this revolutionary technique for the expression of her vision of life and human nature. She used stream of consciousness technique to get close to the mind of her characters, and express exactly the impact of life on their personality. Her skill in the use of the technique, she learned from James Joyce. And her technique underwent a gradual evolution till almost perfection was attained. Virginia Woolf's contribution to the stream of consciousness novel is of far reaching significance. It is she who imparted form and discipline to it and thus made it a popularly accepted art form.

Virginia Woolf was not one of the architects of the stream of consciousness novel. She read Joyce, Proust and
Dorothy Richardson and absorbed their lesson. "Her peculiar contribution to the novel of subjectivity lay in her awareness almost from the first that she could obtain given effects of experience by a constant search for the condition of poetry." ¹ Virginia Woolf's purely literary education would have provided a handicap, had she attempted to create characters in the traditional manner by building up from outside. Experience of life came to her filtered through great literature and witty conversation. Her first novel The Voyage Out, published in 1915 is wholly a conventional book in content and traditional expository style. The Voyage Out and Night and Day, according to her own classification are novels of fact. With carefully thought out plots, cleverly contrived incidents, and well delineated characters, these are, as Katherine Mansfield says 'in the tradition of the English Novel'. ² In contrast to Jacob Flanders in Jacob's Room, Clarissa Jolloway in Mrs. Jolloway, Mrs. Ramsay in To The Lighthouse, and Bernard in The Waves, whose characters one gleans from their thoughts and feelings or from the thoughts and reactions of other

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characters, the characters of Willoughby, Rachel, and Dalloway in *The Voyage Out* and that of Mr. Gilbery, Katharine, and Mary in *Night and Day*, are delineated in the conventional manner of Jane Austen, George Eliot, H.G. Wells and Arnold Bennett.

Both *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* have a story which moves in time from the beginning of the book to the end, characters who are described both in outward appearance and inward thought and feeling by the narrator, and a plot in which they act on one another and develop until a final conclusion or resolution is reached. *The Voyage Out* is by far more interesting than *Night and Day* in spite of certain obvious faults of structure and characterization. It attains 'a visionary and poetic quality that foreshadows the novels of Virginia Woolf's maturity'. This first novel has several strikingly unusual features. Its most extraordinary feature is that it ends with the apparently causeless and meaningless death of the young virginal heroine, Rachel Vinrace, whom we first meet when she is about to embark on a voyage to South America. She goes in one of her father's ships and her death occurs just after she has discovered the supreme happiness of

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love. When the party which includes her aunt and uncle, arrive at their destination, they find staying in the same seaside town a number of English people. They come in particular contact with two young men who are close friends: Terence Hewet, a would be novelist and John Hirst, ugly, intellectually arrogant, no social charmer but with a sincere passion for truth. He is, in fact, rather a Bloomsbury character. Terence and Rachel begin to feel an attraction for one another, but both have a strong resistance to being too closely involved emotionally with another human being. Terence wants to go on writing his novel, Rachel loves her inviolate existence, her solitude and her music. This is a situation Virginia Woolf never explores again in her later novels. An especially interesting undercurrent is the relationship between Rachel and her aunt Helen who appears at first to be selflessly devoted to her niece. When the story progresses, one senses that this devotion has a strong element of jealous possession. There is a scene where Rachel and Terence discover at last they love one another, in which Helen appears to fall on Rachel and wrestle with her on the ground Virginia Woolf has rewritten the passage again and again slightly changing its implication in each version. Scattered throughout The Voyage Out are first hints, intimations of themes that become more dominant in the later novels. It defuses a 'sense of the beauty of natural scene':

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4 Ibid.
'the awareness of the deep, prehistoric past'. The novel has a deep concern with marriage, its value and meaning in life. The Voyage Out leaves one with the sense of many questions about human life and society posed. It is answered only, if at all, in riddles and movements of intense poetic suggestion. Light, tone, colour play through her cadenced works in a constant search for mood and with no attempt to impart an individual character to the style of thought. The writing creates with natural assurance and ease, an intelligent and amused insight into society and its manners, with all that implies for the direct and precise observation of character, speech and behaviour in social relations. It brings alive too a profoundly searching concern for ultimate meanings and values. In these respects, it places itself in the line of George Eliot and Henry James. Nevertheless it has to be mentioned that the novel is immature. Its immaturity manifests in its imperfect form. It is not a coherent and organic whole. It is, for the most part, simply a series of satiric observations of modern living.
principles of the novel as she finds them and adopts them to her own vision. Characters are described and then gradually made better known to the reader by their sayings and doings. They are related to one another by a series of events leading to a climax. Both The Voyage Out and Night and Day are love stories. But it is not the width and variety of the human comedy, nor the idiosyncrasies of human character that interest her, it is the deep and simple human experiences, love, happiness, beauty, loneliness and death. In The Voyage Out, love and death close the story.

Night and Day is a rich and fascinating book in which the new wine of her individual vision of life is imperfectly contained within the old bottle of the traditional form. 7 The love theme is paramount in the novel. There are five lovers, Katharine Hilbery, Ralph Denham, William Rodney, Cassandra Otway, and Mary Datchet. In the traditional way, the story 'complicates and explicates with one another'. 8 In character sketch Night and Day resembles Jane Austen's Emma. The similarity of style in them, becomes apparent when the character sketch of Katharine in Night and Day is compared with that of Harriet in Emma. Describing Harriet, Jane Austen says: "Harriet certainly was not clever, but

8 Ibid.
she had a sweet, docile, grateful disposition, was totally free from conceit; and only desiring to be guided by any one she looked up to." 9 Virginia Woolf, delineating the character of Katharine writes:

She had the quick, impulsive movements of her mother, the lips parting often to speak, and closing again; and the dark oval eyes of her father brimming with light upon a basis of sadness, or, since she was too young to have acquired a sorrowful point of view, one might say that the basis was not sadness so much as a spirit given to contemplation and self-control. Judging by her hair, her colouring, and the shape of her features, she was striking, if not actually beautiful. 10

N.C. Thakur has rightly remarked that 'in the pairing of its characters for marriage, too, Night and Day follows a traditional pattern'. 11 Katharine is engaged to Rodney, but breaking that engagement marries Ralph. Ralph proposes to Mary, is refused by her, and marries Katharine. Rodney is first engaged to Katharine, then falls in love with Cassandra, turns away from her and wants to marry Katharine. On being refused by Katharine, he is happy to marry Cassandra.

The story is set in England. Different groups of characters live the life of action or contemplation. Around Mary Datchet moves the circle of those who try to ameliorate the social structure; while around Katharine Hilbery moves

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the circle of poets, scholars, philosophers, or women whose art is the art of civilized living. On this wider canvas, the author paints the scene itself, not only its effects in consciousness; the cultured and elegant home of the Hilberys contrasted with the gentle poverty of the Denhams; the overcrowded town house of the Denhams contrasted with Mary Datchet's rural vicarage home. The reader's attention is divided between this diversity of environment and of endeavour, which illustrates and the other, deeper theme, the life experience of five people whose interrelations make up the pattern of the story. In the novel Virginia Woolf committed herself to an 'attempt to achieve a form for the free and enlightened soul within the conventions and commonplaces of civilized society'. 12

Night and Day is a leisurely and readable novel. Full of sensitive feeling and acute social observation, it has scarcely any of the poetic overtones of The Voyage Out. Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary, Thursday March 27th, 1919, "In my own opinion Night and Day is a much more mature and finished and satisfactory book." 13

After the publication of Night and Day in 1919, Virginia Woolf was slowly finding a dissatisfaction with the current


form of the novel as represented by the novels of Arnold Bennett. Thus she writes:

Can it be that, owing to one of those little deviations which the human spirit seems to make from time to time, Mr. Bennett has come down with his magnificent apparatus for catching life just an inch or two on the wrong side? Life escapes; and perhaps without life nothing else is worthwhile. It is a confession of vagueness to have to make use of such a figure as this, but we scarcely better the matter by speaking, as critics are prone to do, of reality. 14

The novelist designs his book to present life as he sees and understands it. The convention of plot and interrelated characters is a means of imposing order on the flux and chaos of experience. Order and relation may or may not exist elsewhere, but they undoubtedly exist in the mind of man. The form of the novel which prevailed in the first quarter of this century seemed to falsify her experience. But for every form that is defied, new forms or conventions arise because the human mind is so constituted that it cannot deal with chaos, it sees only what is selected or arranged. Virginia Woolf set herself to destroy the current form of the novel and was then driven to invent one which would express her own vision of life. When Virginia Woolf became fully conscious that the traditional method of characterization could not interpret her own vision of human beings, she sought for other means

of communicating it.

A study of Virginia Woolf's later novels shows that her subject is what the mind receives on an ordinary day. Out of these myriad impressions, she selects and thus recreates. She selects and organizes and thus imparts a disciplined form to her novels. This form enables her to move from mind to mind without any confusion, to present the diversity of experience within a single design. She wants to convey a sense of the strangeness of life, of its truth and beauty. For this purpose she found for her novel a form akin to 'poetic form'. In her famous essay "Modern Fiction", Virginia Woolf gives her account of what she believed should be the material of the novel of subjectivity.

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions — trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moments of importance came not here but there; so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it. Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a
luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. 15

Virginia Woolf published her third novel, *Jacob's Room* in 1922. "This is the first novel which wholly rejects the old method. But in this novel her new technique is not yet used with care and assurance, she was later to acquire. The primary distinction of *Jacob's Room* is that in this novel 'for the first time Virginia Woolf caught both her society and her sense of the soul in a unified vision, and from a point of view and with an emphasis that were fully hers'. 16 And the first thing one notices about *Jacob's Room* is the radical change that has taken place in Virginia Woolf's technique since her first two novels *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*. In *Jacob's Room*, there is in fact, very little use of stream of consciousness as yet; but though there is still a story of the most skeletal kind, there is no plot; and all the conventional transitions from one place or time to another have been abolished. Here changing from one character to another, from one episode to another, the author wastes no time at all. She gives out a series of impressionistic flashes, the light of her narrative moving with astonishing speed and suddenness from one point of

\[\text{15} \quad \text{Ibid., p. 189.}\]
\[\text{16} \quad \text{A. D. Moody, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 15.}\]
fragmented thought or observation to another, and thus builds up her total impression in a dialogue.

In *Jacob's Room*, Virginia Woolf sets out to relate the life and death of Jacob Flanders; but whereas the traditional novelist would have given a direct description of Jacob himself, his progress through a series of well defined incidents and his relations with a series of well defined characters, here one finds that what the reader is given, is an impression of the significance of Jacob's personality which is allowed to emerge from a statement of a few incidents taken from different stages of his life, - a scene from a childhood holiday in Cornwall, a few conversations at Cambridge, another holiday sailing off the Scillies and staying with the Durrants again in Cornwall, an inconsequential series of parties, conversations and love-affairs in London, where Jacob is doing some undefined work, a trip to Greece and another love-affair, and sudden death in war. Nor are these incidents the only or the important means by which we learn more of Jacob. What he himself thinks and says is important, but more important are the thoughts and feelings of other people whose orbits of life impinge upon his own, however slight the impact may be. The highlights of *Jacob's Room* are not moments of revelation about character, or moments of drama in the development of character, but moments of poetic vision. For example Virginia Woolf writes on Cambridge, in
a famous passage:

They say the sky is the same everywhere. Travellers, the shipwrecked, exiles, and the dying draw comfort from the thought, and no doubt if you are of a mystical tendency, consolation, and even explanation, shower down from the unbroken surface. But above Cambridge — anyhow above the roof of King's College Chapel — there is a difference. Out at sea a great city will cast a brightness into the night. Is it fanciful to suppose the sky washed into the crevices of King's College Chapel, lighter, thinner, more sparkling than the sky elsewhere? Does Cambridge burn not only into the night, but into the day? 17

Jacob's Room is perhaps the saddest of Virginia Woolf's novels, even more sad than The Voyage Out in which Rachel dies in the prime of her life shortly after becoming conscious of the beauties and pleasures of life. Her death is not depressing, because it does not convey a sense of frustration, or of life wantonly destroyed, indeed it explains life and reality. It is through Rachel's death that Terence realizes union and perfect happiness. But Jacob's death is like that of 'flies killed by wanton boys'. It portrays the gnawing fear which one of the characters in 'A Society' expresses the horror of bearing children to see them killed. Virginia Woolf felt acutely the frustrating effects of war. This is evident from the entries in her diary. On 25th October 1920, she writes: "Why is life so tragic; so like

a little strip of pavement over an abyss. I look down; I feel giddy; I wonder how I am ever to walk to the end." 18

She often questioned herself about life. She thought of different things that could be the cause of it. She had no children; lived away from friends; sometimes failed to write well; spent too much money on food; pocket money not allowing much. She rejected them all and came to the conclusion that

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\text{It's life, I think sometimes, for us in our generation so tragic - no newspaper placard without its shriek of agony from someone. McSwiney this afternoon and violence in Ireland; or it will be the strike. Unhappiness is everywhere; just beyond the door; or stupidity, which is worse.} \quad 19
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This is how she felt about life, when Jacob's Room was on its way taking its form. Virginia Woolf's own fears about life is reflected in the first chapter of the novel.

Betty Flanders is a widow, and like all widows, as Mrs. Jarvis, the rector's wife thinks, she is 'lonely' and 'unprotected' poor creature who has lost the fortress of marriage, and is burdened with the upbringing of her three sons. "Slowly welling from the point of her gold nib, pale blue ink dissolved the full stop; for there her pen struck;

18 Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, p. 29.
19 Ibid.
her eyes fixed, and tears slowly filled them. The entire bay quivered; the lighthouse wobbled; and she had the illusion that the mast of Mr. Connor's little yacht was bending like a wax candle in the sun." 20

To a widow like Betty Flanders all the world appears to have gone crooked to the point of breaking asunder. She is, therefore, uncomfortably apprehensive and abruptly finishing her letter to Captain Barfoot, she sets out in search of Jacob who has wandered away on the beach. This sense of dread and fright that Mrs. Flanders feels, runs through the first section of Jacob's Room. At the very instant that Betty Flanders feels uneasy regarding the safety of Jacob, Charles Steel, who has been trying to include her in his landscape painting, experiences another type of horror. He is afraid that Betty would get up and start moving in search of her son, and thus spoil his picture. He tries to hurry, but at the very moment as he looks up he sees 'to his horror a cloud over the bay'. 21

Simultaneously, one gets a peep into the frightened mind of Jacob himself. While playing on the beach, Jacob sees a man and woman 'stretched motionless, with their heads on pocket-handkerchiefs side by side, within a few feet of the sea'. 22 To his young frightened mind they look to be

20 Virginia Woolf, Jacob's Room, p. 5.
21 Ibid., p. 7.
22 Ibid.
'enormous'. He is terrified, and seized with childish panic, he takes to his heels, sobbing. The sense of fear Virginia Woolf lodges in the minds of these three characters is heightened to the point of weirdness by externalising it in terms of outward scenes and atmosphere. When Archer shouts 'Jacob! Jacob!', 'The voice had an extraordinary sadness. Pure from all body, pure from all passion, going out into the world, solitary, unanswered, breaking against rocks - so it sounded.' 23 The 'solitary', 'unanswered', breaking against the rocks sound with its 'extraordinary sadness', evokes a peculiar kind of uneasiness in the mind of the reader. This effect Virginia Woolf amplifies by using images of instability and weakness. In the same page of the book, the 'hollow full of water', the 'sandy bottom', and the 'weakly' legged 'crab' suggesting instability and weakness add to the sense of Mrs Flanders' helplessness which Virginia Woolf is trying to convey. Later on in the book Virginia Woolf evokes Jacob's state of mind that is lost, cold, and emotionally dead, by employing symbols of snow, clumps of withered grass, a black shiver, the sullen sky, a mournful cry, and the land appearing to lie dead.

Virginia Woolf seems to believe that modern civilization is an outward show of inward emptiness. As inner emptiness often breeds a morbid hankering after sensational excitement

23 Ibid.
and sensual pleasures, life becomes restless. There is neither peace nor piety left. London where Jacob goes after Cambridge, becomes a symbol of the futility and barrenness of modern civilization. In Jacob's Room the sordid life of the metropolis is represented by Florinda, Lauretta, Fanny, the arguing Jew and the confidante of Florinda, and madam - the prostitutes and the bawdy matrons of London. Jacob like D.H. Lawrence who went to Mexico, leaves for Paris, Italy, and Greece in search of a better civilization. In Greece Jacob stretched on the mountain top and enjoyed himself immensely. Jacob wrote Bonamy that he intended to come to Greece every year. "It is the only chance I can see of protecting oneself from civilization." 24

Jacob in the novel is not a character in the usual sense of having significance as an individual identity - the sense in which Rachel Vinrace and Katharine Hilbery were characters. Jacob's existence is defined altogether by his participation in the life of his world, by his objective presence there. This is so much the case that he is scarcely at all a personality in his own right, but is rather a personality for the culture of the educated classes in the decade which culminated in the First World War. This is the measure of Virginia Woolf's success in integrating her personal ideal of life with her actual experience of the world. In Jacob's Room

24 Virginia Woolf, Jacob's Room, p. 145.
she is concerned with the quality of life not simply of the individual but of a whole culture. Her vital concern is to probe beneath the veneer put upon her civilization by convention, commerce and to realize what she can of its inward life.

In Virginia Woolf, there is a ceaseless preoccupation with time. She continued her interest in experimenting with the devices of memory, flash-back and foreshortening. Virginia Woolf found traditional time sequence inadequate and insufficient in so far as rendering of characters is concerned. And for her a full rendering of character meant the display of the inner lives of her characters. In this she was influenced by other contemporary writers, particularly by James Joyce and Marcel Proust. It appears that Joyce's fluidity of prose style, his deliberate disregard for traditional time sequence and his method of associative writing had left a permanent impression on Virginia Woolf's style and technique. She made repeated reference to Proust whom she read in original French. Joyce handled interior monologue in a novel manner, he presented consciousness through a mixture of introspection and anticipation in character themselves. He emancipated novelistic plot and characterization completely from traditional shackles of time. Proust's continual preoccupation with the nature and quality of experience in 'time', his interpretation of the Bergsonian
concept of 'duration' and his capacity in the words of Clive Bell, 'to fill and colour the bubble of present time with a vision of the past,' all these influenced Virginia Woolf. And in Jacob's Room she has already formulated her own technique and stylistic method and in her later novels, she succeeded in employing them in the fullest possible way. Thus the publication of Jacob's Room in 1922 marks a definite step in her career.

Jacob Flanders is never described directly, and he rarely reveals himself to the reader by what he says or does. Instead the reader derives his impression of him from the effect he produces on other people in the novel, for instance, upon Mrs. Norman who travels in a train to Cambridge with Jacob:

Nobody sees anyone as he is, let alone an elderly lady sitting opposite a strange young man in a railway carriage. They see a whole — they see all sorts of things — they see themselves ....

But since, even at her age, she noted his indifference, presumably he was in some way or other — to her at least — nice, handsome, interesting, distinguished, well-built, like her own boy? One must do the best one can with her report. Anyhow this was Jacob Flanders, aged nineteen. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done ....

Virginia Woolf here, obtrudes herself in a way in which she

25 Quoted by Sisir Chattopadhyaya in The Technique of the Modern English Novel, p. 182.

26 Virginia Woolf, Jacob's Room, pp. 28-29.
will not do in her more mature books. But the foundation of the new technique is laid. The impact of one personality upon another continues in all her novels to be an important means of composing the portrait of a human being. Throughout *Jacob's Room*, one can observe Jacob through the eyes of others. For instance Clara Durrant wrote in her diary that she liked Jacob Flanders and that he was so unworldly.

In this novel chronology ceases to be important and human experience is no longer presented whole, but is broken down into a series of shifting impressions which are constantly kept in position by the author's controlling eye. The author has not yet vanished from the scene. She is present on the scene of occurrence and she is present both as a commentator and as an interpreter of events, characters and even the flux of time. Here is a typical illustration:

Captain Darfoot liked him best of the boys; but as for saying why .... It seems then that men and women are equally at fault. It seems that a profound, impartial and absolutely just opinion of our fellow creatures is utterly unknown. Either we are men, or we are women. Either we are cold or we are sentimental. Either we are young or growing old. In any case life is but a procession of shadows, and God knows why it is that we embrace them so eagerly, and see them depart with such anguish, being shadows. And why, if this and much more than this is true, why are we yet surprised in the window corner by a sudden vision that the young man in the chair is of all things in the world the most real, the most solid, the best known to us - why indeed? For the
moment after we know nothing about him.
Such is the manner of our seeing. Such
the condition of our love. 27

From the conviction here expressed about the incompleteness
of our knowledge of one another; and from the certainty here
communicated that human beings as fellow men arouse in them
profound and valued feelings — from this conviction springs
Virgina Woolf's individual art of creating human beings.
The method is cumulative. In Jacob's Room, Virginia Woolf
consistently follows a particular method. The point of view
keeps shifting all the time. An individual character is the
sum total of his own impressions as also those that he makes
on his fellow creatures. Jacob is the principal character.
But his character is created throughout by many indirect
strokes. The minor characters too have a life of their own.
It is revealed unexpectedly by a sudden flash of light. The
novel grows round the life of Jacob. The boy Jacob grows up,
goes to Cambridge, to his lodging in London, has his love
affairs, visits France and then Greece and then dies in the
war. He lives and dies and what is left of him is left in
the impressions he created in the minds of others. He has
left his room full of earthly belongings which would probably
renew those impressions in his friends and relations.
Virginia Woolf seems to suggest all through that these fleeting
impressions have a profound inter-relationship of their own.

27 Ibid., pp. 70-71.
and that it would appear spontaneously throughout the story. When Jacob dies he does not cease to be. The experiences of his short life have all been gathered together and entombed in the past time, which in their turn have transmuted into the memory of those who had known him alive and would remember him dead. The events which constitute the plot of a traditional novel such as quarrel between lovers, a reconciliation, a marriage or a death are, from Jacob's Room onward, submerged beneath the current of life. Mrs. Flanders has lost her husband Seabrook before the book opens, at the close her three sons are fighting, one night at Seaborough, she hears the guns: "The guns?" said Betty Flanders, half asleep, getting out of bed and going to the window, which was decorated with a fringe of dark leaves." 28

There is a profound truth in Virginia Woolf's vision of the experience of the deepest of all sorrows, the death of those one loves. She attempts to show the continuation of life, the healing tyranny of habit and of the unavoidable demands made by living. She does not minimize the pain, but shows it as it is, continuous and yet frequently submerged. The concluding chapter of Jacob's Room is particularly illuminating and revealing.

"He left everything just as it was," Sonya marvelled. "Nothing arranged. All his letters strewn about for any

28 Ibid., p. 175.
one to read. What did he expect? Did he think he would come back?" he mused, standing in the middle of Jacob's room.

Listless is the air in an empty room, just swelling the curtain; the flowers in the jar shift. One fibre in the wicker arm-chair creaks, though no one sits there.

Bonamy crossed to the window. Pickford's van swung down the street. The omnibuses were locked together at Mudie's corner. Engine's throbbed, and carters, jamming the brakes down, pulled their horses sharp up. A harsh and unhappy voice cried something unintelligible. And then suddenly all the leaves seemed to raise themselves.

"Jacob! Jacob!" cried Bonamy, standing by the window. The leaves sank down again.

"Such confusion everywhere!" exclaimed Betty Flanders, bursting open the bedroom door.

Bonamy turned away from the window. "What am I to do with these, Mr. Bonamy?" She held out a pair of Jacob's old shoes. 29

This is how the unusual novel Jacob's Room ends. It is deliberately written for rendering human experience in flux. It is with intention that Virginia Woolf ends Jacob's Room with reverberations and echoes, and Bonamy's cry of 'Jacob! Jacob!' in the empty room which picks up the same cry on the seashore at the very beginning, suggesting so poignantly transience, loss and anguish.

In Jacob's Room one gets a set of not obviously related points, - incidents, thoughts, feelings, conversational

29 Ibid., p. 176.
snatches, flecks of foam on the stream of consciousness; and all the time as we read, the mind is guided from point to point, drawing in the significant lines so that the pattern emerges, and at the end we are left with a picture of Jacob Flanders, somewhat impressionistic but an unmistakable likeness.

Thus Virginia Woolf succeeded in creating a form of her own in Jacob's Room which does not depend upon the central assumptions about life embodied in the conventions of plot and character - made up of marriages, commerce and public events. In Jacob's Room she achieved this by reducing story interest to the minimal form of the chronicle, and by recording the experience offered in the novel not in its public or social aspects, but as the outward manifestation of states of being. The novel is the chronicle of Jacob Flanders' inward life. Jacob's Room represents Virginia Woolf's first serious experiment in technique. In this novel Virginia Woolf's 'quest for the meaning of human experience goes on' 30 as she gradually unfolds the mystery and shows the depth of man's inner-life. By recording Jacob's experience in flashes, discontinuous and fragmentary, in a series of rapidly dissolving impressions, she directed the ebb and flow of life through Jacob's consciousness.

Jacob's Room displays for the first time the author's characteristic repetition and use of imagery for structural purposes - so much so that the reader forgets he is following a young man chronologically from cradle to grave. But he isn't really following Jacob; Jacob as object is always elusive and indirect. The reader is really following the portrait other people have of Jacob; in that sense his room is another indirect means of looking at him. This new technique makes Jacob's Room a first novel. 31

It is interesting to recall Virginia Woolf's own criticism of Jacob's Room in her diary. "Now what will I say about Jacob? Mad I suppose: a disconnected rhapsody ...." 32 She further expressed her confidence in her new discovery - "There is no doubt in my mind that I have found out how to begin (at 4o) to say something in my own voice." 33 Virginia Woolf has quoted one of the publisher's note to her, in her diary. "We think Jacob's Room an extraordinarily distinguished and beautiful work. You have, of course, your own method ... and we delight in publishing it." 34

33 Ibid., p. 47
34 Ibid., p. 51.