The early twentieth century witnessed a new dimension in English fiction. A broader horizon was open to the new enthusiastic writers bent on new experimentation with novel form, breaking away from traditional style of writing. Almost every aspect of the novel came to be modified or rejuvenated at the skilful hands of the new writers. Among them a bold experimentalist, Virginia Woolf strove persistently to redefine life, reality and Man himself (through his consciousness). Thriving to get hold of the atoms of life, at the same time to make up human personality, the new writers were now absorbed in collecting the minutest details of all sorts of experiences, perceptions and moods. This resulted in a transformation of the regularity of form and structure in the traditional novel to that of a new form and structure. At the same time, a
shift in the narration owing to the new concepts of reality was observed in the works of new writers like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

One of the aims of this thesis is to provide an insight into the narrative rendered in psychological context as far as four of her major experimental novels *Jacob’s Room*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* are concerned. In addition to this, the chapter will provide details of a few narrative techniques she adopts to realize her aim.

The narrative strategies of a novel are decided by the vision the novel has to embody. Virginia Woolf found that the traditional method of writing novel adopted by H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy failed to embody her perspective regarding human life. She believed that ‘The method of writing smooth narration can’t be right; things don’t happen in one’s mind like that’\(^1\). Hence, she repudiates the orthodox narrative conventions of constructing time schemes, coherent focalisers, voices and characters. Consequently she was engaged in search of a literary design which would adequately convey her vision of inner reality and the eternal flux of human psyche. This, she found could be appropriately realized by the stream-of-consciousness technique. Hence, Mrs. Woolf took up the stream-of-consciousness technique and evolved her own
technical apparatus to successfully explore the subtle, psychological map of intangible reality and to artistically render how her characters could perceive ‘form’ in the ‘chaos’.

Virginia Woolf, in the early part of the twentieth century joined new novelists James Joyce who were concerned with experimentation with new form of novel writing. Their main interest was to probe into the chaotic flow of consciousness and to evolve a pattern out of that state. These new novelists saw intuitively that the characters were capable of expressing the workings of their mind, through their feelings, intuitions, mental images and ideas. They now strove to represent the myriad and subjective random impressions, sensations, memories and thoughts that comprised the activity of the character’s mind in their narrative. Mrs. Woolf’s aim was to capture such moments as she writes in her essay entitled ‘Modern fiction’:

Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and in coherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness.
Each of her novels was an exercise in bold experimentation. And the medium she chose was innumerable and varied. However, it may be pointed out that Mrs. Woolf’s choice of her narrative technique was deliberate. Mitchell A Leaska has rightly observed that in Mrs. Woolf’s narrative ‘everything is there not by chance but by choice’. The very techniques she adopted were designed to capture the idiosyncratic world views she wanted to capture. She was to construct a fictionally “possible” world of the human consciousness. Mrs. Woolf’s narrative disproves Lubbock’s claim that ‘in order to be considered as good art, ought to be unified around a consistent narrative point of view’. Rather what we observe is the same rejection by Wayne C. Booth in his *Rhetoric of Fiction* and interest in the ‘many voices’.

Turning to the four major novels from experimental point of view *Jacob’s Room*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, and comparing them with the first two novels *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*, we will find a different reading experience. It is because each of the novels is narrated differently from the previous one. In her first two novels *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*, Virginia Woolf attempted to extend the scope of the novel as handed down by her ancestors, at the same time to coalesce it with the new narrative techniques. A slight shift in the narrative from the conventional
method of storytelling was already observable in these two novels. Direct
description and overt commentary on character and situation shifted to the
point-of-view narration in the style of Henry James. Some of the new narrative
techniques like flashbacks, dramatization of inner thought at points, rendition of
fragmentary impressions and fluid characters can be seen in these two novels.
Juxtaposed with these new narrative aspects are the conventional narrative
tools like that of the chronological sequence of episodes, direct observation and
description of characters and smooth dialogues. In the course of writing these
two novels, Virginia Woolf found herself in a dilemma for she could neither
bring herself to follow the traditional methods whole-heartedly, nor could she
experiment boldly with new tools. The two novels however had their
importance in the course of her artistic evolution, for they compelled her to
abandon the traditional methods from the forthcoming novel onwards.

From *Jacob’s Room* onwards, Virginia Woolf did away with the “appalling
narrative business of the realist: getting on from lunch to dinner”. Rather she
handled the stream-of-consciousness in her own style. Events were no longer to
be in a chronological order but as free association brings them to mind. Life in
its essence is chopped up into bits and disjointed. Hence, presenting a story
(also loosely called plot) no longer becomes the end of her venture. As Joan Bennett asserts:

The convention of plot and interrelated character 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 and to our minds “truth is stranger than fiction”, because in fiction an order has been imposed on, or elicited from, experience by the writer.⁷

This however doesn’t mean that Mrs. Woolf stops to tell her story. She tells her story but in an order that departs from a plain chronological sequence, flashing backwards and forwards to indicate events in their simultaneous existence.

Virginia Woolf’s later novels grew more subjective than her first two novels. The later novels induced larger space to mental states of the characters, and proportionally less emphasis being placed on their words and actions. Soon, after her second novel Night and Day, Mrs. Woolf made up her mind to become one of those writers of whom Scott Donaldson remarks as:
...the true writer stands close up to the bull and lets the horn – call them life, truth, reality, whatever you like – pass him close each time.\(^8\)

She is all set to get inside the head and hearts of her characters; at the same time to squeeze and expand the moment of experience. With all the means at her disposal, in her later novels beginning with *Jacob’s Room*, she followed the windings and recorded the changes which were typical of the modern mind. Each of these later novels observed deliberate application of different narrative approaches to meet her end. An attempt is hereby made in this chapter to analyse Virginia Woolf’s four major experimental novels *Jacob’s Room, Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* individually on the narrative art she has adopted.

I

**Jacob’s Room (1922)**

To come to *Jacob’s Room* first, let us capture the story: The story line is in fact discordant series of hints to come at the grips of certain aspects of Jacob Flander’s personality. Jacob is a small boy, finding a sheep’s skull on the beach.
Jacob grows up and goes to Cambridge, talks literature and philosophy with his friends; joins Guy Fawkes Night party and reads Marlowe in the British Museum. He has series of affairs with women. Finally, it is the eve of the Great War. He joins the War and gets killed.

**Narrative Method:**

Kate Campbell in her *Journalism, Literature, and Modernity: From Hazlitt to Modernism*, writes:

On the evidence of her early work Virginia Woolf was adjudged ‘a supremely important writer’, but ‘a negligible novelist’. *Jacob’s Room*, which occasioned this judgment, was not a novel, marred by its failure to ‘concern itself primarily with humanity’, a failing shared by Bryher’s Development.⁹

Different critics may certainly pass different opinions; it all depends on their mind – sets. But to be sure, when Mrs. Woolf for the first time stepped out of the conventions completely; it came as a shock to those writers who wrote for the mass market. She was not intent on giving a story, with elements of
suspense; to keep the reader turning the pages to find out what happens next. Rather, what she intends was to give the life of Jacob Flanders, in its fleeting and elusive state. What strikes one here, in this novel *Jacob’s Room* is the treatment of her characters and her mode of narrating. Mrs. Woolf is not talking about her characters, rather presenting them and this presentation is from within instead of from without. There is no more telling of the thoughts or motives of her characters in order to understand their conduct; but she makes us feel, how the situation presents itself to these people themselves. As a result, she satisfies her reader of the reality of the experience in question; however the readers may like or dislike it.

By the time Mrs. Woolf wrote *Jacob’s Room*, she had completely abandoned the realist method of narrating a story. Instead she attempts to present the life of Jacob Flanders in a more complex manner. Since her intention is not to depict the story of Jacob’s life, rather to develop Jacob’s shadow in the minds of the characters. As a result, Jacob’s experiences are not presented coherently. The narrator jumps from incident to incident without any signal. In other words, the progress of the narrative thread to the fabric of the novel comes to acquire an arbitrary and a zigzag motion. Jacob Flander’s life is
organized with isolate moments which are fragmented, discontinuous and
discrete. Even the chapters exist without any connection but yet focusing on
specific moments in Jacob’s life or in the life of his friends. Nevertheless on the
whole, the sum of Jacob’s shadows emerging as the focal point in most of the
incidents helps in building up the life of the novel.

One clearly observes Mrs. Woolf’s sustained struggle with the stream-of-
consciousness technique in Jacob’s Room. Unlike in her first two novels The
Voyage Out and Night and Day, here Mrs. Woolf is concerned with giving an
interpretation of life in all its fragmentary state, not through a chronological
sequence of events leading to a logical conclusion comedy or tragedy. The novel
from the beginning to the end consists of many brief actions each describing a
scene or conversation, a fragment of Jacob’s life usually seen by someone other
than Jacob himself. Then Mrs. Woolf goes on immediately to another fragment
of Jacob’s life. This way Jacob Flanders, through a vast series of such moments is
continually revealed to the other characters and to the reader. Each of these
scenes are not coherent or sufficiently integrated as a part of a whole work nor
related to each other, though there is a unifying subject of course in the
character of Jacob Flanders.
For the first time, Mrs. Woolf successfully records the states of changing minds. We will observe the human mind wondering from subject to subject like the swing of a pendulum. The novel becomes a series of impressionistic flashes from one character to another. Mrs. Woolf’s narrative in this novel progresses from one point of fragmented thought or observation to another. The essence of the story in *Jacob’s Room*, for that matter all her later novels is what goes on in the minds of the characters on a given occasion. And the predicament boldly overcome by Mrs. Woolf with *Jacob’s Room* is to present what is going on in the mind of her characters at a given moment in such a manner that the reader forgets her and experiences a sense of being actually there.

The scene of action is transferred to the character’s mind and in the process of reading the reader is allowed to gather information directly from the character’s thoughts, thus dispensing very largely with the formal and official explanations from her side. As a result, the readers have a scope of enlarging their own experience. For:

The old-time reader of novels sat down with his book and made a simple demand upon the author: “Beguile me offer me comedy and tears, tell me about droll people and lovers, and a story that
will keep me rooted to the spot and my eyes glued to the page.”

The case is reversed when we come to the subjective novel. It is the author who says to the reader: “Here is the artistic record of a mind, at the very moment that it is thinking. Try to penetrate within it. You will know only as much as this mind may reveal. It is you, not I, who will piece together any ‘story’ there may be. Of course I have arranged this illusion for you. But it is you who must experience it.”

Mrs. Woolf now tries to steer this process of making the readers creative agents rather than passive recipients of what authors write. The overall task of constructing a linear chronology of events from the discordant moments or impressions provided by the novel lies with the reader.

At first glance, *Jacob’s Room* appears disjointed and fragmentary even to the degree of making a less sophisticated reader bewildered while reading her novels for the first time. The novel may appear a collection of fragments without a smooth plot, compiled up by the random impressions made by Jacob’s existence on other people. However, the chronology of Jacob Flander’s life is not destroyed – it is portrayed from his childhood to his death; and yet his
character remains blurred. Both the random organization of Jacob Flander’s life, as well as the random organization of his Room is itself likable to the elusive nature of life.

In the course of her narrative, Mrs. Woolf gives up the received convention of an author’s omniscience to a large extent concerning her characters – for the very reality which she was trying to reach was ever changing and complex. The need to discover and record life as it feels to those who live impelled her to eliminate comments. Throughout the text, one attends to the thoughts and speech of the characters but never to Mrs. Woolf’s own. The very ‘flow’ of her narrative is determined by the “livingness” and “flow” out of the consciousness of the characters. The third person narrator is made minimally present. It is overshadowed by other voices. The principal voices are that of Jacob’s mother, his friends and other people whom Jacob meets.

In other words, the point of view that Mrs. Woolf presents is multiple largely that of his mother, his friends at Cambridge and the various people whom Jacob meets and interacts with including his girlfriends. Attempts are made to remove the role of the narrator completely from the novel, in order to present the character of Jacob Flanders through each other’s eyes, through
their random mental impressions. However, the narrator is never completely removed; at times an omniscient narrator comes up to describe the characters or comment on them:

Meanwhile, poor Betty Flander’s letter, having caught the second post, lay on the hall table – poor Betty Flander’s writing her son’s name, Jacob Alan Flanders, Esq., as mothers do, and the ink pale, profuse, suggesting how mothers down at Scarborough scribble over the fire with their feet on the fender, when tea’s cleared away, and can never, never say, whatever it may be – probably this – Don’t go with bad women, do be a good boy; wear your thick shirts; and come back, comeback to me.¹¹

The omniscient narrator, here, comes to an intrusive level; revealing the hidden consciousness that runs counter to the surface. Even if narrators are found at many points, they are impersonal, able to speak in the collective first person “we” transcending the individual “we”.

Again throughout the text, Mrs. Woolf abstains from indulging in any form of descriptions till the end of the novel. Far from giving an account of
Jacob’s death, she merely suggests his death in the war. Betty Flanders and Bonamy come to his room:

‘He left everything as it was,’ Bonamy marvelled. ‘Nothing arranged. All his letters strewn about for anyone to read. What did he expect? Did he think he would come back?’ he mused, standing in the middle of Jacob’s room.

Bonamy took up a bill for a hunting – crop. ‘That seems to be paid,’ he said . Listless is the air in an empty room, just swelling the curtain; the flowers in the jar shift. One fiber in the wicker arm-chair creaks, though no one sits there. ‘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.\textsuperscript{12}
Here, Mrs. Woolf abstains from giving any clear information; for information would have been partly inartistic. She doesn’t narrate Jacob’s death, yet we realize that he has been killed in the war from her indirect suggestion.

Finally, dialogues are reported almost completely in direct speech. And though it is still written in the grammatical third person, in most part the reader comes in touch with the character’s thoughts or impressions of Jacob Flander’s on them. This break in Mrs. Woolf’s narrative observed from *Jacob’s Room* onwards will now continue till *Between the Acts*. Also the use of multiple points of view and inner thoughts will become quite fundamental to the workings of Mrs. Woolf’s narrative except for *Orlando*, where the periodical male biographer’s point of view dominates.

At the end, we can add that whatever its achievements are, *Jacob’s Room* remains a landmark, so far as Mrs. Woolf’s artistic evolution is concerned. It is here, for the first time, she breaks completely from the conventional linear chronology. Though the chronology of Jacob Flanders life is not destroyed; the chronology observed comes nowhere to the linear chronology (smooth and continuous movements through time). The narrative certainly moves from childhood to death but instead of the consecutive narrative movement, it
moves in a series of discrete jumps through Jacob’s life each separately focusing in specific moments on Jacob’s life or on the life of his friends. Moving from incident to incident, character to character without hesitation or apology, the novel is compounded of specific, isolated moments strung together relating to Jacob and his association with his friends and family. This jaggedness of the narrative however is deliberate, to embody the nature of life as she understood it. And Mrs. Woolf was no longer intent on giving a smooth plot. She writes:

I can make up situations, but I cannot make up plot. That is: if I pass a lame girl I can, without knowing I do it, instantly make up a scene: (now I can’t think of one). This is the germ of such fictitious gift as I have.13

It is now for the implied reader to gather information of Jacob Flanders no matter how fleeting and transitory from the various impressions, dissolving and merging. From Jacob’s Room onwards, the kind of reading experience one will get is one such as Alan Friedman observes:

Instead of a “willing suspension of disbelief” before the unreality of the theater stage, the co-operative reader submits to (the novel
produces) another kind of suspension, which we regularly call identification – a suspension of dissociation before the intrusion of personality.¹⁴

II

Mrs Dalloway (1925)

Story:

Clarissa Dalloway, the wife of Richard Dalloway, M.P. and a fashionable London hostess is to give an important party. She gets herself engaged in its preparation. All on a sudden, her one-time suitor Peter Walsh, returns from India after five years’ absence. Her childhood friend Sally Seton too joins her party. Finally by the end of the day, one of her guests brings news of an unfortunate shell shock victim, Septimus Warren Smith committing suicide.

Narrative Method:

Mrs. Woolf’s focus now is not on the flaccid chronological organization covering all of Clarissa’s life (as in Jacob’s Room) but rather on the events of one day, constantly informed by pressures and vestiges of the past. The narrative
flow represents the durational flux and is the direct and lived intuition. Here, in this novel, what Mrs. Woolf intends to render is human awareness in its true colour, in its continual motion of melting and permeating each other to form a continuous flux. One will observe the limitations of time and place, carried to much greater extremes. Frank Swinnerton’s novel *Nocturne* (1917) presents the entire action confined to the events of a single night, thus anticipating Joyce’s performance in *Ulysses* (1922). Mrs. Woolf follows Joyce, by confining the events in *Mrs Dalloway* to less than a day. However, in the narrative, the events go backward and forward from the present to the past. In other words, like the other clever writers of fiction of her time, she is constantly occupied now:

... to render the very feel and texture of experience, not merely erotic, but of all experience that which comes within the compass of the author’s subject.\(^{15}\)

She adopts the stream of consciousness, the most direct way of reporting on the subjective or psychic state of people, and ignores the less direct, and most commonly used method of descriptions. There is no plot involving linear sequence in the direction of time. She confines her entire narrative to events
less than twenty hours and within the period she has spread wide, breadthwise, and plunged down far into the psychology of her characters Clarissa Dalloway, Richard Dalloway, Peter Walsh, Septimus Warren Smith, Sally Seton, etc. On the surface level, the novel records the events of one day in Central London; however in its deep structure it unfolds the past lives of the characters. This method had its own advantage – it made up for the want of plot and a more comprehensiveness of view.

Throughout the novel, we are drawn inside Clarissa’s memories of the past and yet living in the present moment; so also Peter Walsh and few other characters. This way, Clarissa takes the reader to Bourton, to her childhood, to Sally Seton’s kiss and so on. In the process, the temporal perspective of Mrs. Woolf’s narrative keeps changing without any announcement; in fact her subtlety lies in her construction of personal memories between two kinds of time. She defies the idealist philosophy of the river of time. Time as Bergson also shows can be contracted and expanded. In *Orlando* Virginia Woolf says:

> An hour, once it lodges in the queer element of the human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its clock length; on
the other hand, an hour may be accurately represented on the time piece of the mind by one second.\(^\text{16}\)

Clarissa Dalloway, performing such commonplace acts as doing her hair, or opening the window; experiences sensations similar to the ones she had felt many years before, and these sensations lead to a complete recapture of the past. These commonplace acts start a flashback which provides us with some very important facts of Clarissa’s life. This way, Mrs. Woolf enables the reader to experience the significance of the past for Clarissa and the other characters whose unconsciousness travel to earlier times more often than not. However, the characters are compelled to return to the narrative present by the device of actual clocks and bells, invariably ticking and ringing.

Whenever a similar event or situation arises it compels the character to remember and move backwards to a variety of impressions received in the mind way back long ago. The opening of the window in the beginning of the novel is one such event. Clarissa opens the windows into her personal past. Where a traditional novelist would have contented himself with a mere description of simple act of opening the window; Mrs. Woolf goes on to suggest as well the many ‘fleeting shades’, the multitudes of emotions passing through the single
moment. The noise of the hinges and the fresh flavour of the June morning set off to associate a visual memory of her youth. She recalls the time at Bourton, when she was eighteen years old:

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen; looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling; standing and looking until Peter Walsh said, ‘Musing among the vegetables?’ – was that it? – ‘I prefer men to cauliflowers’ – was that it? He must have said it at breakfast one morning when she had gone out on to the terrace – Peter Walsh. He would be back from India one of these days, June or July, she forgot which, for his letters were awfully dull.
Here, the act of opening the window makes memories flow into her consciousness. Borne on the stream of her thought which overflows, she once again felt the fresh, calm and stiller air which she felt years ago at Bourton. Her feeling for Peter Walsh came back mingling itself with the scene of the morning. This reminded her of his letters, his pocket knife, his sayings and that one of these days he was coming back from India.

This extract from the beginning of the chapter makes us acutely feel and experience the smooth flow of consciousness in Clarissa’s mind. Mrs. Woolf indeed succeeds in evoking the original emotion in all its complexity standing at the open window how she felt something awful was about to happen; looking at the flowers, at the trees ..... melted and mixed with her feelings for Peter Walsh. The single moment of experience has been made richer by the blending together of different shades of emotions called forth. As the day progresses she yields to bouts of memory taking her back to olden days and events, provoked further by the appearance of her past lover Peter Walsh. During the day, Clarissa experiences a lifetime well of impressions alternating with the present. The reader follows her hour by hour throughout the novel.
The narrative structure of the novel comprises the movements and shifts of her thoughts on the day. One difference observed in the narrative structures of *Jacob’s Room* and *Mrs Dalloway* is that, in the former we are exposed to the impressions of Jacob on the minds of other people, dissolving and merging in their thoughts, while in the process we are never given access to Jacob’s own thoughts. But in *Mrs Dalloway* we follow Clarissa’s thoughts from moment to moment. Her mind is her own and is made up like stalactites, drop by drop. The turn and twist of her thoughts are rendered by the stream of consciousness and the interior monologue.

Our moods and sensations are indeed queer blendings of such elements as memories impinge upon and the present sensory impressions of confused sounds, smells and sights, all forming themselves into highly fluid states of consciousness ever merging into one another. Mrs. Woolf successfully suggests ‘innumerable fleeting shades’ of various strands of consciousness which coalesce into a larger sensation. Her narrative is a mime of the everyday experience with the interpenetration of several memory components dating back to different past times when they first occurred. This interpenetration of the multitudes of the earlier memories is a phenomena of everyday experience.
These memories mingle and merge with each other to produce a reverberant pattern which enters into a present pattern and again back forth. This interpenetration of memories may be seen from the following passage:

‘Yes,’ said Peter. ‘Yes, yes, yes,’ he said, as if she drew up to the surface something which positively hurt him as it rose. Stop! Stop! He wanted to cry. For he was not old; his life was not over; not by any means. He was only just past fifty. Shall I tell her, he thought, or not? He would like to make a clean breast of it all. But she is too cold, he thought; sewing, with her scissors; Daisy would look ordinary beside Clarissa. And she would think me a failure, which I am in their sense, he thought; in the Dalloway’s sense. Oh yes, he had no doubt about that, he was a failure, compared with all this – the inlaid table, the mounted paper-knife, the dolphin and the candlesticks ……… - he was a failure! I detest the smugness of the whole affair, he thought; Richard’s doing, not Clarissa’s; Save that she married him ……… while I – he thought; and at once everything seemed to radiate from him; journeys; rides; quarrels; adventures; bridge parties; love affairs; work; work, work!\textsuperscript{18}
Seeing Clarissa sitting there sewing this morning he recalls how Clarissa had tortured him so infernally years ago. As the memory progresses he finds it hard to bear for he had already made up his mind to start his life anew. The picture of Daisy come flashing to his mind, about how she felt for him. His mind again comes back to the present pattern – the inlaid table, the mounted paper-knife ........ After considering Clarissa’s life, Peter Walsh’s thoughts wander back to all the events that happened in his life – journeys, rides, quarrels, adventures, bridge parties, love affairs, work, work, work! This passage reflects the way in which the reverberant patterns in his mind gradually adjust themselves to reproduce patterns, a mixed one.

Mrs. Woolf’s narrative doesn’t exclusively comprise of occasional immersion in one’s memories, along with it comes many more uncertainties which techniques like “flashback” fail to fully describe. We observe an extensive use of indirect interior monologue. The characters’ thoughts are presented in the third person by the impersonal narrator. The narrator enters the mind of the character and reports his or by thoughts verbatim, but with the absence of first and second person pronouns of direct interior monologue. It is sometimes signaled by the usage like “she thought”, “Clarissa thought”, “he thought”, etc.
And “In the end, it becomes apparent that everything – the actual and the imagined, the public and the private – is interconnected by wires and waves of association radiating from the present.” Like the hands of the Pendulum, Mrs. Woolf move from the unconscious to the conscious, and then again to the unconscious. Indeed, the recollections of the past is so frequent that the novel seems to waver between two different time levels – the present day, here and now in London and the summer at Bourton thirty years ago. In order to present the continuous flow of the character’s consciousness, a timeless world is introduced to bring a unity to the experiences of past and present. However, the tolling of Big Ben breaks the wall between the inner and outer worlds reminding of the progress of the physical time.

The momentary experiences of life presented in fragments in *Jacob’s Room* are now ordered and organized in *Mrs Dalloway*. The characters are connected and interconnected. Mrs. Woolf’s narrative from the beginning to the end of the novel is disjointed because of the complementary mad scenes associated with Septimus Warren Smith which is logically not connected with the Dalloway scenes. Septimus Warren Smith, another character, roams the streets of London and is totally absorbed with the traumatic images of the past,
bringing back the old dreadful experience of the war. The disturbing visions of the past, along with the voices are juxtaposed with sights of the present; he has vision of his friend Evans. However, unlike Clarissa’s case Septimus’s represents the process of memory of a pathological one. Clarissa can evolve from her memory to a perfect hostess in her party at the end of the day; whereas Septimus succumbs. The Dalloways’ world is connected to Septimus’s world by the news of Septimus’s death brought by Mr and Mrs Bradshaw; though through Clarissa’s consciousness, in the beginning, a hint of the forthcoming death of Septimus is already given (a kind of introduction to their relation). The Dalloways’ scene is related to Septimus again in the reverie of Mrs Dalloway on learning the death of Septimus. During her party, Clarissa leaves her guests and goes into a little side room; she sees the old woman in the opposite room going to bed and ‘staring straight at her’. The scene resembles the one when Septimus was to jump; and ‘she felt somehow very like him – the young man who had killed himself.’ Here, her narrative alerts her reader of the sameness-in-difference in multitudes of neglected others; through her impersonality.

Again, throughout her narrative Mrs. Woolf follows a slow tempo in the “release” of “solid” facts or exposition. Her method is seen in the introduction
of Clarissa on a given occasion (opening the window), brooding over the situation in which she finds herself. Whatever we learn about the antecedent circumstances comes out, in the beginning, as it were by accident. A given fact is alluded to – the opening of the window is alluded to the same act about thirty years ago at Bourton – because it is there in the background of Clarissa’s thought. At the very beginning of the novel, *Mrs Dalloway*, we begin with Clarissa Dalloway herself, not with an account of who she is. We begin with the way she feels, when she opens the window of her London house. We are not told of the important party she is to give, but we infer from her fear ‘that something awful was about to happen’ that she was looking out for its success. We are not told either of who is Peter Walsh; we simply infer from her feelings that he have been a person who have touched her life. We are not told of what sort of a person Clarissa is, what she looks like, nor what kind of life she had led. We are never told about any of these matters. But in due course of time we learn all that we need to know, mostly by the process of what Clarissa thinks and from what she has to say to other people. She is aided by other characters in this task. We gather slowly, that she is to give an important party that day, and that Peter Walsh was her one-time suitor and so on. We have
intimations, from her own thoughts, of “something awful” that were to happen, of Septimus death by the end of the day.

One thing that is observed in all this is that, the reader learns about what he needs to know not because the author gives it to him – but because a certain character (here Clarissa) in the story happens to be thinking about the matters in question. Such is the manner of setting forth her “solid” facts. This is certainly a very slow and inefficient method of putting the ponderable facts to the reader. But it has its advantages for it delineates clearly and vividly the quality of character’s feeling and approach to life. While the facts wait to come, the story moves on, and so insensibly these “solid” items are insinuated into the course of the narrative that we never realize that this process has taken place.

Another aspect of her narration in Mrs Dalloway is that Mrs. Woolf alternates regularly between two methods – the reader moves freely in time with the consciousness of an individual, or moves from person to person at a single moment in time. Mrs. Woolf explores different consciousness and different types of memory within the same reference point of “life”. She multiplies the flashback of memory by presenting a stream of consciousness, shifting from one to another, unified by the common situation. The memories of
the characters serve as vehicles for the multiple perspectives. Mrs. Woolf uses this special device for presenting all her diverse human figures at approximately one and the same moment. An instance is the appearance of the mysterious car driving through London and the Sky – writing aeroplane flying over their heads. A group of disparate characters like Emily Coates, Sarah Bletchley, Mrs Bowley, Lucrezia and others share the same curiosity. They are attracted by this view, however momentary these moments are; yet they show the archetypal feelings aroused by such situations. The flow of the character’s consciousness moves without an obstruction and confusion. At the same time, the impressions of the same experiences are also exposed through the consciousness of each of the individuals. Mrs. Woolf indeed successfully documents the shower of atoms upon human brain at the same time hints towards the reality of human experience and the impossibility of understanding each other. With the flow of consciousness, Woolf indeed treats these atoms without any narrative obligation.
Story:

The main story line is Jame’s wish to go to the lighthouse and its materialization. Parallel to it runs the progress of Lily Briscoe’s painting. Young James Ramsay looks forward to going to the lighthouse which he had dreamt of doing for a long time. Mrs Ramsay promises that if the weather the next day is fine, he would be taken to visit the lighthouse. However, Jame’s hopes gets shattered when Mr Ramsay says, “But it won’t be fine”. These words unintentionally hurt little James. Days pass off and years too. Ten years of life – of marriages, birth, deaths are recalled. After ten years they return to the summer house along with their memories and dreams. James starts off for the lighthouse along with his sister Cam and his father, while Lily Briscoe completes her painting, she started ten years ago; realizing her vision just as James realizes the lighthouse and thus realizes his dream.

Narrative Method:

In Mrs. Woolf’s own opinion, To the Lighthouse is less complicated than Mrs Dalloway and less spasmodic than Jacob’s Room and “freer and subtler”.
Mrs. Woolf’s exceptional skill in the manipulation of time observed in *Mrs Dalloway* is carried further in *To the Lighthouse*. Although, Section –II implies a lapse of ten years, the novel on the whole imagistically follows the movement of an entire day, from the late afternoon of the first part through the dark night of the second, to the early morning opening of the third section. Suzanne Nalbantian classifies the three sections of *To the Lighthouse* as ‘the encoding, the storage and the retrieval of memory’. The emotions and feelings which tie Mrs Ramsay to the different characters, especially Lily Briscoe are sealed inside their minds in the form of memories. The whole of the emotions undergoes a long span of storage for ten years. Mrs. Woolf allows ten years to pass, following the death of Mrs Ramsay. Finally the memory is retrieved through Lily Briscoe’s painting depicting her. The association of the same place provokes the memories of Mrs Ramsay while the passage of time had strengthened the memory.

The interchange is striking in the juxtaposition of clock times – a day in *Mrs Dalloway* and ten years in *To the Lighthouse* with subjective human time in the form of memory intruding upon the chronological time and distorting it. While it depends almost entirely on the passage of time, it expands or contracts the time-sense very freely. The first and the longest part of the book are almost
stationary. It describes a party of people gathered in the summer at a house on the Scottish coast. Jame’s hopes of visiting the lighthouse are thwarted. In the second part, much briefer; ten years passes and memories are recorded and recalled. In the last part, the house again comes alive with the former guests. James accomplishes his dream at the same time Lily Briscoe completes her painting. Regarding the passage of time, Moris Beja observes ‘Time passes, and yet true time does not pass’. In fact he observes that:

No act, no event can be pinned down: even Mrs Ramsay’s dinner party, by far the longest scene in the book, is not self contained for it concludes with her own realization that the party had begun to end some time ago. Not an act or a series of acts, but action itself – movement rather than movements – is described by this novel.

In To the Lighthouse, Mrs. Woolf extensively uses the stream-of-consciousness techniques and interior monologues. Broken bits of conversation appear at many times. The role of the narrator or central intelligence is both more important and less noticeable than in Mrs Dalloway. In Mrs Dalloway, the narrator is a means by which the reader attains a unity of response to the
diverse personalities within whose consciousness he has the illusion of being; he is objectively unconscious of a narrator, but the narrator makes possible both the artistic validity of the novel’s statement and his acceptance of it. However in *To the Lighthouse*, the objective accounts of a central intelligence approaches and assumes the character’s consciousness, but does not become completely identified with any one consciousness. This central intelligence is thus free to comment upon the whole in what seems a completely impersonal manner. The reflection is supplied impersonally by the narrator and therefore, laying a great strain upon the mind.

The novel has its own motion: a shift from perception to perceptions, meeting or crossing; of the feelings and thoughts of people: of instants, in which the thoughts and feelings are radiant or absurd, have the burden of sadness or of the inexplicable; somewhat like ‘the flashing of fireflies’.  

The whole of the novel *To the Lighthouse* is a trip into the minds of the leading characters. Unlike in a conventional novel, which records one event linearly following another; here it is “a stream of consciousness” where characters are viewed through his or her own thoughts and actions, as well through the consciousness of other characters. Hence, there is no one single
point de vue, but multiple points of view particularly of Lily Briscoe. The consciousness of one or more characters is focused on Mrs Ramsay, which indeed provides a better insight into the complexities of her personality. By this Mrs. Woolf is able to capture the ‘semi transparent envelope’; she could achieve it to the fullest through this method, for what she believes is that the fluidity of life could best be grasped when the characters are viewed not merely through his or her own thoughts but also by the thoughts and reactions of other characters towards them.

To impose unity on the chaotic experience of life, Mrs. Woolf uses a journey image – journey to the Lighthouse. In the first section, James looks out towards a journey to the lighthouse. Unfortunately, his hopes do not materialize on account of bad weather. But after ten years, he sets off for the same journey with his sister Cam and father Mr Ramsay. Finally he realizes his goal, the same moment, when Lily Briscoe finishes her painting started ten years ago. The character’s concern with the journey is itself symbolic of their quest for the meaning of reality. The actual realization of the true reality which dissolves the differences between the characters brings forth harmony and order.
Structurally *To the Lighthouse* is divided into three parts: *The Window*, *Times Passes* and *To the Lighthouse*. In the first part, the personality portraits of the main characters particularly Mr Ramsay, Mrs Ramsay, James Ramsay, Lily Briscoe and other characters are depicted through Mrs Ramsay’s reflections as well as others. When the novel opens, James the youngest overlooks the lawns and the sea at a distance. For some time now, James had been looking forward to visit the lighthouse. Mrs Ramsay promises that if the weather the next day was fine, he would be taken to visit the lighthouse. His hopes are smashed when:

“*But,*” said his father, stopping in front of the drawing-room window, “*it won’t be fine.*”

Young James, from this moment harbours extreme hatred for his father. The day progresses. It is evening and dinner is served. The progress takes place for each character, as a trip into their minds; in discontinuous state, for this is how the mind works: springing from one thing to another.

Lily Briscoe on the other hand, is not satisfied with her picture as she paints it. She is unable to convey what she really feels and thinks. The first part
ends with the famous dinner scene. What one observes throughout the chapters is that, some small incident becomes the starting point for a trip into the character’s mind. It is all internal monologues that take place within the minds of each of the characters. Mrs Ramsay in the dinner scene sits at the head of the table telling everyone to take their places. But she is in a reflective mood:

But what have I done with my life? Thought Mrs. Ramsay, taking her place at the head of the table, and looking at all the plates making white circles on it. “William, sit by me,” she said. “Lily,” she said, wearily, “over there”. They had that – Paul Rayley and Minta Doyle – she, only this – an infinitely long table and plates and knives. At the far end, was her husband, sitting down, all in a heap, frowning. What at? She did not know. She did not mind. She could not understand how she had ever felt any emotion or affection for him. She had a sense of being past everything, through everything, out of everything, as she helped the soup, as if there was an eddy – there – and one could be in it, or one could be out of it, and she was out of it. It’s all come to an end, she thought, while they came in one after another, Charles Tansley –
“sit there, please,” she said – Augustus Carmichael – and sat down. And meanwhile she waited, passively, for some one to answer her, for something to happen. But this is not a thing, she thought, ladling out soup, that one says.\(^{30}\)

What we observe here, is a continual weaving together of conversation and Mrs Ramsay’s thoughts. Her mind is split: on the one hand she is concentrating on her duties as a hostess – she is concerned with who is to sit where and the act of ladling out the soup; while on the other she is engrossed in her thoughts with a sense of despair. Her love for her husband had ebbed away, indifferent to his frowning. Because of her sense of isolation, all her guests seem to be cut off from each other. And ‘the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her’.\(^{31}\) Gradually, from this gloomy beginning, the mood changes with the ebb and flow of conversation. The dinner party proves a success and the sense of isolation is resolved.

The second part of the novel *To the Lighthouse* is indeed Mrs. Woolf’s masterpiece in her narrative art. The whole of this part is a voyage into the memories of old Mrs McNab. It is a trip down memory lane – memories come
rushing back when marriages, births and deaths, are recalled and recorded.

Night comes and the guests have retired for the night. Time continues to pass:

But what after all is one night? A short space, especially which the darkness dims so soon, and so soon a bird sings, a cock crows, or a faint green quickens, like a turning leaf, in the hollow of the wave.

Night, however, succeeds to night. The winter holds a pack of them in store and deals them equally, evenly, with indefatigable fingers. They lengthen; they darken.

Ten years have passed with ups and downs; the uncertainties and the unpredictability. Ten years of life is then recalled. Memories come back rushing of marriages, births and deaths. The death of Mrs Ramsay, which is in one way, the central event of the novel, is mentioned very casually in a parenthetical sentence:

[Mr Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty.]
So also the death of Prue and Andrew are conveyed:

[Prue Ramsay died that summer in some illness connected with childbirth, which was indeed a tragedy, people said, Everything, they said, had promised so well.]

[A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous.]

The whole section *Time Passes* is a metaphor of the hopelessness and meaninglessness of life. Even the deaths are described as mere incidentals. These events are shown as illustrations of universal patterns; rather than having significance in themselves. Mrs Ramsay’s death is also dealt in a similar way.

Again, in the third section of *To the Lighthouse*, Lily Briscoe, the artist takes up the whole task to transfer her recollections of the ten-year period of her friend Mrs Ramsay into a painting which would preserve her memory forever. Lily had first contemplated Mrs Ramsay as her model sitting in front of a window which looked out at a lighthouse. As she tries to plot out an abstract
design of her painting, she has a moment of great insight awakened by environmental cues. With an eye on the lighthouse which had been associated with the nurturing Mrs Ramsay figure and with a glance at the pattern on the tablecloth that she had contemplated ten years before at the last dinner with Mrs Ramsay, her memory is triggered, enabling her to complete her what Suzanne Nalbantian calls ‘the memory painting’. At the same time, James Ramsay in a complementary narrative realizes his dream of reaching the lighthouse. The seeds of psychic rebirth start fructifying in James and Cam by the end of their journey; an invisible inner psychological transition takes place in their minds.

IV

*The Waves* (1931)

**Story:**

The story line of *The Waves* is the intricate development of the six personalities – six childhood friends Louis, Jinny, Rhoda, Neville, Susan and Bernard through the successive stages of man, from childhood to old age.
**Narrative Method:**

Although the novel implies a long period from one’s childhood to late middle age, the novel also imagistically follow the moment of one day from dawn till sunset. The interludes of *The Waves* describe the progress of the sun across the sky from dawn till sunset (a single day). *The Waves* is indeed a sequence of interior monologues; the successive stages of the development of the six characters are gradually revealed through their minds and their workings.

There is no story in the true sense, no narrative, nor dialogue; but a series of soliloquies in which the characters explain themselves to themselves at various stages of their careers – as children playing together, at school, at college, in business or in family life. They begin together in one house, and soon drift apart to pursue different careers. But they all come together twice. Once, they dine together to bid farewell to Percival in London. And second time at Hampton Court, by way of realizing each one, what the others are like and stiffening their own individualities one against another. Finally one of them (Bernard) comes up and “sums up” the process in one long soliloquy.
The Waves, a ‘communal bildungsroman’ is a series of direct monologues grouped between anonymous italicized narrations describing the passage of the ‘non-human’, the sun over the course of a single day. In each of the nine sections, the soliloquies are united through the repetition of phrases and a shared concern with identity, individuality and the body. The characters utter their thoughts about themselves in these soliloquies. They represent the “stream of consciousness” of the several characters. It reflects what they perceive through their senses, what they consciously think, and what they feel about themselves and one another without being actually conscious of it. The whole work in fact gives a character of abstract composition.

From the beginning to the end, Mrs. Woolf makes ample use of interior monologues where the flow of a character’s inner emotional experience is presented through the first-person narration “I”. It proves a successful means of rendering the stream of consciousness of the six characters, at a particular moment. Through this technique, she successfully captures the swirl of associations and images that characterize human consciousness. The lives of the six characters are unfolded through the interior monologues, where the first-person narration presents the unspoken thoughts of the protagonist. Such a
narrative enables Mrs. Woolf to relate a first-hand experience and to come intimate with the characters. And this narrative is by far more natural and credible, for a character to reveal his/her thoughts than to let the author intervene and tell us what he/she is thinking or feeling:

At home the hay waves over the meadows. My father leans upon the stile, smoking. In the house one door bangs and then another, as the summer air puffs along the empty passages. Some old picture perhaps swings on the wall. A petal drops from the rose in the jar. The farm wagon strew the hedges with tufts of hay. All this I see, I always see, as I pass the looking-glass on the landing, with Jinny in front and Rhoda lagging behind. Jinny dances. Jinny always dances in the hall on the ugly, the encaustic tiles; she turns cartwheels in the playground; she picks some flower forbiddenly, and sticks it behind her ear so that Miss Perry’s dark eyes smoulder with admiration, for Jinny, not me. Miss Perry loves Jinny; and I could have loved her, but now love no one, except my father, my doves and the squirrel whom I left in the cage at home for the boy to look after. 38
The whole passage presents the embryonic, unuttered and ceaselessly flowing thought of Susan. It’s very lack of a well-defined border with beginning, a middle and an end; itself is the true picture of the original, disjointed, illogical and symbolic form of the inner mind of Susan.

Through her skilful hands, Life is rendered as the moments of experiences, hence recorded without connecting them. And the fragmentary experiences received by the various characters of the novel are the documents of the moment of life felt by ‘man’ in real life, both men and women. Mrs. Woolf’s narrative strategy here to some extent succeeds in avoiding the question of sex through a disembodied, interpersonal voice that freely penetrates all the characters. For instance, in this passage from *The Waves*, an impersonal narrator reveals the gender consciousness that betrays a female as well as male perspective:

Then coming from the street, entering some room, there are people talking, or hardly troubling to talk. He says, she says, somebody else says, things have been said so often that one word is now enough to lift a whole weight. Argument, laughter, old grievances – they fall through the air, thickening it. I take a book
and read half a page of anything. They have not mended the spout of the teapot yet. The child dances, dressed in her mother’s clothes.\(^{39}\)

In fact, what Mrs. Woolf desires for is ‘a non-gendered collective of readers upon a common ground’\(^ {40}\) which is open to all. This persona-without-boundaries that Mrs. Woolf devised for her narrators is a new-way to be freely “human”, to present the inner experiences and impressions, unalloyed.

In her diary entry of Wednesday, November 28\(^{th}\), 1928, Mrs. Woolf records:

The idea has come to me that what I want now to do is to saturate every atom. I mean to eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity: to give the moment whole; whatever it includes. Say that the moment is a combination of thought; sensation; the voice of the sea. Waste, deadness, come from the inclusion of things that don’t belong to the moment; this appalling narrative business of the realist: getting on from lunch to dinner: it is false, unreal,
merely conventional why admit anything to literature that is not poetry – by which I mean saturated?41

This is what Mrs. Woolf does in *The Waves*, she includes nonsense, fact, sordidly: but made transparent. In order to give the feel of a timbre of feeling, to come as close to the pattern of the thought process Mrs. Woolf adopts the interior monologues. Its use proves powerful, elemental and sweeping and reveals all the contradictory qualities of the six characters. Their minds flash and dash from side to side, goaded on by the curious steed, Life. The very narrative style, gives her space, quite naturally, to say what she wants to say. It doesn’t crush the thing she wanted to say, but allowed her to slip it in, without any compression or alteration.

One more technique Mrs. Woolf adopts in the novel ‘to keep the flights of the mind, yet be exact’42 is the shift from indirect statement to direct (the stream itself) and possibly back again without introduction, for the economy and swiftness it efforts. In this passage from *The Waves*, we find the use in one and the same passage third person shifting to first person, than to third, to second and back to first, than to the third, and to the first; and all is quite clear:
'This is here,' said Jinny, ‘this is now. But soon we shall go. Soon Miss Curry will blow her whistle. We shall walk. We shall part. You will go to school. You will have masters wearing crosses with white ties. I shall have a mistress in a school on the East Coast who sits under a portrait of Queen Alexandra. That is where I am going, and Susan and Rhoda. This is only here; this is only now. Now we lie under the currant bushes and every time the breeze stirs we are mottled all over. My hand is like a snake’s skin. My knee are pink floating islands. Your face is like an apple tree netted under.\(^{43}\)

On the other hand, the series of interior monologues in *The Waves* serve as an instance of subjective and dramatic narrative of the six character’s subjective experiences. The narrative is ‘zeroed in’\(^{44}\) on the self. The use of these interior monologues allows the reader to move into inward darkness of the characters. Their mental thoughts are directly presented. The readers at once feel the sensation of being present, here and now, in the scene of the action. But obviously a certain amount of exposition is necessary to any story: there are some things we must know in order to understand the scenes in which we are present. The non-human cyclic movement of the sun during the day serves the
purpose of exposition. The progress of the sun in its course of the day represents the advancement in the life of the six characters from childhood to their late middle age. Throughout, Mrs. Woolf leaves no space for comment and explanation, for they will only weaken the imaginative appeal, removing the reader one degree further from direct experience. Indeed Mrs. Woolf succeeds in achieving:

... a saturated unchopped completeness; changes of scenes, of mind, of person, done without spilling a drop.\(^45\)

Finally, *The Waves* being a series of dramatic soliloquies running homogeneously in and out, in the rhythm of the waves, it is for sure, a less sophisticated reader will be bewildered at following these soliloquies consecutively. This, Mrs. Woolf admits her inherent faults that ultimately leads to complete failure from a readers point of view. To lessen this effect, Mrs. Woolf introduces the interludes, so as to work all the soliloquies into one. And as to make a conclusion, she “merge all the interjected passage with Bernard’s final speech and ends with the words O Solitude: Thus making him absorb all those scenes and having a further break”\(^46\).
Regarding the endings of her novels, Mrs. Woolf’s own perspective regarding the end of life engenders her narrative strategies with open endings implying life as it goes on:

It is the sense that there is no answer, that if honestly examined life presents question after question which must be left to sound on and on after the story is over in hopeless interrogation that fills us with a deep, and finally it may be with a resentful despair. 47

The design of life Mrs. Woolf paints is an open form, expanding endlessly wherein the characters are forced to organize events to attempt to resolve experiences which cannot be resolved. Hence:

“The End” consistently turns out to be another opening in experience, endlessness has become an end. 48

For the factual truth is that there can never be a close to experience.
NOTES


18 Ibid., p.49.


21 Ibid., p.198.


42 Ibid., pp.319-320.


46 Ibid., pp.159-160.
