INTRODUCTION

Another study of Virginia Woolf's novels after the wealth of information made available by Quentin Bell's biography, her autobiographical papers, and the volumes of letters so far published, is very much called for. This material points to the various sources of her creative energy and throws fresh and sufficient light on the growth and development of her artistic sensibility. Read with A Writer's Diary, the material also clarifies that a definite and profound theory of fiction was growing in Virginia Woolf from the very beginning and that she actually applied that theory to her novels. It is also evident that she took to writing with a high seriousness and explored and utilised all possible means to compose her novels as scrupulously as a musician would compose a piece of music or an artist paint a canvas.

Virginia Woolf was a very prolific writer. In addition to nine novels, she wrote biographies, reviews, critical essays, tracts and sketches which fill volumes. She was also a very varied writer. Only some of her fictional works can be considered as belonging to the genre while others can be classified under any category except that. Deriving very little from the convention of the craft and almost nothing from the traditional ingredients of the novel, she made not only others but also herself uncertain of how to describe her work suitably. She challenged the prevalent notions of 'reality' and viewed sceptically the authenticity
of any linear human experience. All this exposed her to the
charge of eccentricity, complexity, meaninglessness, etc.

But she emerges as a fascinating novelist and her work
becomes easily approachable once it is understood that she
offers the possibility of a new perception of man and nature,
as opposed to a whole series of firmly entrenched mental
habits. "In a Sketch of the Past", she wrote: "By nature,
both Vanessa and I were explorers, revolutionists, reformers."
Her fiction, indeed, shows a constant urge for experiment
precisely because she wanted to explore human motive and
conduct, revolutionise people's conception of 'reality' and
reform the novel so as to relate it to the intellectual and
eaesthetical currents of the day. Hers was a relentless search
not only for technique but also subject matter due to the
very distinctive quality of her beliefs and experiences. That
is why every book that she wrote was a departure from its
predecessor.

As Virginia Woolf saw it, the English novel in the
beginning of the twentieth century had fallen into the danger
of losing form mainly by trying to become a mechanical,
correct reproduction of 'reality'. The writers had much
less to say about the sense of form, namely, the capacity
to furnish visible objects with such properties as clarity,
unity, harmony, balance, fittingness or relevance. As with
Zola in France, so with Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy in
England, the form of the novel began to suffer a disturbance
created by the intrusion of wholly external encounters.
Perceiving was replaced with measuring and invention with copying; and facts of dubious nature were piled to prove that an individual's life had solidity, meaning and value. It is not that facts are not necessary for the novel; they are to the novel what the body is to art. Virginia Woolf recognises the importance of facts in the novel. "But", she warns, "to have facts thrust upon you by dint of living and accident is one thing; to swallow them voraciously and retain the imprint of them indelibly, is another." So, as the body, in order to be art, must become form and be accepted as such, the facts in the novel must be subordinated to a pattern in order to yield aesthetic pleasure. Virginia Woolf starts from a material fact and goes beyond its body of gross and absurd actuality into the regions of higher truth and beauty.

Virginia Woolf launched her literary career in an age of uncertainty and change and at a time when the art and literature of the immediate preceding period had come under attack. In sentiment and method, she belongs to what is now known as the "modernist movement" which swept European art, music and literature in the first quarter of this century. The writers who constituted the movement were Yeats, Pound, Lawrence, Eliot, Joyce in English, Proust and Gide in French, and Kafka, Hesse and Mann in German. Hermione Lee notes that prominent characteristics of the movement were: it was experimental; it was international; it was concerned with form; and it was the product of "an era whose political and social developments invited nihilism, scepticism and
despair. She adds:

Modern literature is, then, an attempt to create in an environment hostile to order and faith - and, it seemed after 1914, to life itself. Second, it is often pointed out that there is an intimate relationship between the 'apocalyptic' world view of modernism and the form of its repeated efforts to 'make it new'. The experiments of the modernists were very largely (and very minutely) concerned with form, as though, by an intensive ordering process of a kind not before attempted, the chaotic universe might be mastered.... Through elaborate structuring, through allusion and literary references - the fusion of 'tradition and the individual talent' - through images and through myths, the modern writer expressed 'a yearning to pierce through the messy phenomenal world, to some perfect and necessary form and order.'

Lee sums up and says that Virginia Woolf "is aware of herself as being part of (the) movement is clear from her brilliant statements on the future of the modern novel" found in her essays "Modern Fiction" (1919), "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1924), and "The Narrow Bridge of Art" (1927)."

The field of the novel had already been agitated for some years by the three powerful and conflicting movements of Neo-Classicism (Henry James), Romanticism (Meredith and Conrad) and Naturalism (Bennett and Galsworthy). To be out of the welter of these agitations, Virginia Woolf needed a path of her own. Becoming more and more absorbed in the drama of colours and sounds, she was particularly concerned with a problem - how to be faithful to both the material reality and her feelings. She wanted to write faithfully but feelingly of what her sensory organs recorded. Curious and contradictory in personal life, she desired to achieve a combination of impetuosity and restraint in her writings. She wrote almost entirely by intuition, yet she was probably one of the most conscious and intellectual writers of her
time. What resulted from her meditations and from her assimilation of other men's techniques and visions was the work of great power and apparent contradictions: serene yet full of tension; rational yet charged with feeling; remote yet compellingly real. It was work, finally, in which an attempt was made to restrict movement to the minimum, for movement involves transition - the process of becoming - while Virginia Woolf's paramount concern was to create a world that is stable and in which objects have assumed their final and essential form. This accounts for the reason why her characters are more or less stylised figures. But she also created contrasts that infuse her compositions with dynamic tensions.

David Garnett recollects that Virginia Woolf "was never satisfied to repeat herself but was always experimenting and developing." This is so because she was greatly concerned with the representation of formal values in the novel. Her deep understanding and appreciation of music, especially that of Beethoven and Wagner, combined with her passionate interest in the theory and practice of Post-Impressionist art, especially that of Cezanne, as articulated by Roger Fry and Clive Bell, inspired her to apply to fiction the aesthetics of these arts.

For his stupendous imagination and passionate sense of involvement, Ludwig Van Beethoven has no equal among his predecessors or contemporaries. The emotional intensity of Beethoven found its full voice in Richard Wagner who declared
that his conception of music-drama was inspired by Beethoven's symphonies.

Post-Impressionism was a revolt spearheaded by Paul Cezanne against Impressionism in painting in the early 1880's. Cezanne was determined to supply the elements which Manet, Monet, Pissarro, and Sisley lacked; namely, firm local form individual expressiveness and spiritual depth. He and his followers - Seurat, Gauguin, Degas, Matisse, etc. - concentrated on creating significant form within which they could express their individuality, create spiritual depth, and capture the essence of the moment. Cezanne also totally suppressed the storytelling aspect that had made older paintings so appalling. Indeed, he evoked the simple dignity of men and women by arranging them into stable, almost classical, groups of figures. Roger Fry, assisted by Clive Bell, exhibited Post-Impressionist paintings in London in 1910 and 1912, and significantly, his influence pervaded Bloomsbury of which Virginia Woolf was a prominent member.

Attempts to give the novel a theoretical base began right in the eighteenth century, but it is only during the last ninety years or so that these attempts have acquired a high seriousness, and a recognisable corpus of the novel - theory has emerged. A careful reading of Virginia Woolf's critical and creative writings would reveal that there is a deep correlation between the two. She belongs to a distinguished line of modern novelists who are also theoreticians of the novel, such as, Henry James, Marcel Proust, D.H.Lawrence, E.M.Forster and James Joyce. But what
distinguishes her from some of them is the stress she lays on the visual and the painterly aspects of the novel. In her essay, "Pictures", she says:

literature has always been the most sociable and the most impressionable of... all (the arts)... sculpture influenced Greek literature, music Elizabethan, architecture the English of the eighteenth century, and now undoubtedly we are under the dominion of painting. Were all modern paintings to be destroyed, a critic of the twenty-fifth century would be able to deduce from the works of Proust alone the existence of Matisse, Cezanne, Derain, and Picasso...

The present study will underscore Virginia Woolf's writings on the novel and relate these to the aesthetic illuminations of her time. Her own novels will be read as the product of her aesthetic doctrine.

The novel and its theory, from Fielding to George Eliot, have remained confined to a search for character, plot, realism, style, etc., and all these constituents have been employed to tend some specific moral values. The didactic function of the novel and the pattern of moral ideals of the novelist can be deduced from the curve of relationship between the hero and the society of the time. After some antagonism and skirmishes both reach a settlement and serve, ultimately, as examples for others to emulate. With the exception of perhaps Sterne, Jane Austen, the Brontes, Meredith and Hardy, the novelists of the eighteenth century and the Victorian age, were pedagogues and their work was an instrument of edifying social change. They gave their serious speculations not to the form of their work as such but to the presentation of certain social schemes desired to produce definite moral effects. This tendency on their part also resulted in their concentration on the outward aspects
of things and in their confusing gross human objectives and shifting natural objects with aims and items of veneration.

Virginia Woolf freed the novel from what Guiguet calls the "purely external factor of organization" and infused it with "inner cohesion." In fact, the various influences which worked on her gave her novel an altogether different form and flavour so much so it seems to have become a contribution not so much to the genre as to aesthetics.

Behind every work, Worringer finds "a particular psychic impulse ... seeking gratification." With the Augustan and the Victorian novelists, it was the mimetic and the moral impulse that sought gratification. They, no doubt, wrote about what they had observed and experienced, but their observation related only to the surface of human personality and their experience was measured only lengthwise. Their preoccupation with social themes and their intrusion into the lives of their characters led in turn to a loss of illusion that art, in order to be identified as art, and in order to yield appropriate pleasure, must create and preserve. Though varied in their temperaments and diverse in their approach to human problems and natural phenomena, novelists, such as, Fielding, Richardson, Scott, Trollope, Thackeray and Dickens, were one in considering the novel, directly or indirectly, as a vehicle of extra aesthetic concern.

A new impulse in the English novel asserted itself with Henry James. The perspective now shifted from the sociological and the moral to the psychological and the amoral. Sharing Flaubert's rationale of fiction, James
transformed the English novel into a new medium. Like Flaubert, he insisted on the autonomy of the novel and the disappearance of the novelist from his creation. "The artist", Flaubert advocated, "must be in his work as God is in creation, invisible yet all-powerful; we must sense him everywhere but never see him." James imbibed the Flaubertian canon of authorial impersonality and his extreme concern for form; and what was the imitation of an action in the old Masters became the representation of a state of mind in him. He founded the modern English novel-theory on a sound base in that throughout his critical formulations, the stress falls on the integrity of art and the sovereignty of the artist. He says: "We must grant the artist his subject, his idea, his donnee; our criticism is applied only to what he makes of it." He also says that the "questions of art are questions ... of execution; questions of morality are quite another affair."

Virginia Woolf introduced the sophistry and virtuosity of painting and music into the novel and the novel-theory. Her work, consequently, is an interweaving of themes and patterns. No monumental figures dominate the setting in her novels, nor the locale depicted is the comfortable and benign land of the Romantics with lovers and picnickers at ease in the shady bowers and on the river banks, strollers on the roads and in the fields, or homeless drifters at the stinking bars and restaurants of the Naturalists. Human figures, in fact, do not count for much. Forms are just enveloped in a great stillness and the characters are used
to express the real world's oppositions, harmonies and contrasts. The striking of the Big Ben and the dissolving of the hours into leaden circles (Mrs. Dalloway) indicate that even times of day have been abolished. So is the case with the seasons when they follow each other in quick succession (The Waves).

Like many artists tormented by inner confusion, such as, Keats and Cezanne, Virginia Woolf displayed a contrasting orderliness in her approach to her work. She developed what would be called a system, a clearly defined method for organising her visual and olfactory sensations of the natural world and transforming them into language that conveyed her personal way of seeing and hearing things. But her method was always freely mixed with her sensitive intuition, for she simply believed that the function of the novelist was to write of men and women so as to reveal their basic structures and their relationships in space and time. Seldom did she herself fail to create solid, well-balanced forms. Her second aim was to convey the unequivocal impression that her men and women were flat characters, not mere imitation of 'reality'. To achieve these ends, she devised her own ways of using sounds and colours and rendering triangular forms, combining them into a style of writing that is at once complex and beautifully simple, intellectual and highly intuitive — one that has succeeded in giving us an original view of man and nature. Her work, in her own beautiful language, can be said to be a "queer amalgamation of dream and reality, that perpetual marriage of granite and rainbow."
Virginia Woolf writes that "the great artist is the man who knows where to place himself above the shifting scenery." Hence, she was not attracted to subjects by their topical interest, charm or erotic content, their inherent drama or possible social or allegorical significance. She looked at them only as visual images beneath which lay a substructure of meanings to be found. It was only through the revelation of this meaning that the artist was able to express his deepest emotions. And the two things - the revelation and the self-expression that went with it - constituted her only reason for being an artist.

The degree of abstraction in the theoretical propositions of Virginia Woolf is due, no doubt, to the detachment from 'reality' which was the result of her personal circumstances and also the consequence of the splitting up of integrated culture into specialised activities, which tends to conceal the philosophical, religious and social meaning of the individual's life, to destroy the artist's function in the community and to reduce his task to a merely aesthetic one. But it was so also due to the reason that the visible world was only a starting point for her - the source of the materials she needed to construct her characters. She felt no necessity for the individual objects to retain their precise identities, in terms of shape and colour, they had in the real world. So we find in her the waging of an attempt to remove the novel from the area of representation. What was important to her, as already stated, was the relationship of shapes and colours in space and time, for her
fidelity to nature was simply fidelity to these relationships. To understand where Virginia Woolf adhered to and where she departed from the real world, it is useful to think of Cezanne and of his reading of the model as a kind of dismantling process. When the various components of the strict reality were, in a sense spread before her, she would select those components most expressive of the meaning of the scene and unite them in a composition.

Surprisingly, it was Cezanne's handling of the figures more than anything else that caused such a furor about his maturest work, the Great Bathers, which was executed in the last days of his life (1895-1906). No artist before him had so daringly simplified and abstracted the human figure. His interest in conventional representation was so slight that his figures seem to have no faces, and it is difficult even to determine their sex. But Cezanne was trying to realize a very elusive goal; to integrate his figures into the overall structure of the picture, to relate them rhythmically to mountains, trees, bushes, clouds, sky, meadows and water, and to give them neither more nor less importance than those other forms.

A great deal of misunderstanding about Virginia Woolf's work, similarly, stems from the notion that her characters lack a solid realistic base. Without trying to understand her intention and execution, Arnold Bennett and others following in his trail, found no value in Virginia Woolf's novels. The fact is, as Virginia Woolf acknowledges in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", by 1910, a kind of crystallisation
of taste had taken place; and with the roll of a few more years, there occurred a radical change in men's whole system of reference to the world and 'reality'. With thinkers, scientists, artists, novelists and art theoretists, such as, Bergson, William James, Einstein, Max Planck, Cezanne, Worringer, Hulme, Fry, Proust, etc. on the scene, immutable principles, mathematical certainties, eternal truths seemed less immutable, certain and eternal, and as the twentieth century advanced, it became increasingly difficult to define the real purely in terms of the visible external world, as it had been defined since the Renaissance. The effect of these changes was felt in all the spheres of intellectual life, and in painting and literature it led to a turning inside and to a tendency towards abstraction. The thing seen was now no longer as important as the way the painter or the writer saw and painted or wrote about it. In short, the age acquired a new ethos.

Virginia Woolf recorded in her Diary: "I mean to eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity: to give the moment whole; whatever it includes." Coming under the influence of Roger Fry, on the one hand, and Marcel Proust, on the other, Virginia Woolf's ceaseless effort was to contain and preserve the passing world and make from the very stuff of change that which is unchangeable. She is severely critical of her contemporaries, especially, Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy because she is not interested in reproducing the visible world with photographic exactitude. Nor does she
think that the novel is supposed to be a social commentary, an illustrated story or a piece of decoration. It is an expression of the aesthetic emotion evoked in the writer by the spiritual state of man, and enduring forms, sounds and colours of the natural world. Virginia Woolf's appreciation of Defoe, Jane Austen, the Brontes, Conrad, Meredith, and Hardy speaks, no doubt, of her catholic taste, but also of her cherished belief that it is not the actual and the visible but the probable and the hidden that is real and true, and it is only in a moment of illumination that a novelist can catch a glimpse of this reality and truth.

Though The Voyage Out (1915) and Night and Day (1919) have the conventional theme of love and marriage and are cast in the traditional mould, Virginia Woolf's search for form that could enclose her vision of life is apparent. Attempt is made to see what lies behind things; and character and event are seen but tentatively and impressionistically. An effort to transcend the purely personal relationships and to enter a place of impersonal existence can also be felt to have started. As in music and Post-Impressionist paintings, peculiarities of character and event have begun ceasing to dominate. The following passage in The Voyage Out exhibits this proclivity:

Although they sat so close together, they had ceased to be little separate bodies; they had ceased to struggle and desire one another. There seemed to be peace between them. It might be love, but it was not the love of man for woman (320).

The Mark on the Wall (1917) reveals a mind given to
speculation and fantasy and *Kew Gardens* (1919) an eye focussed on the visual and the painterly. These, in combination with *An Unwritten Novel* (1920), contain the seed of her future novel. An urge to experiment is manifest from these pieces; and when *Jacob's Room* appeared (1922), the public was perplexed just as it had been a decade earlier by the Post-Impressionist paintings. It became clear, however, that from now on Virginia Woolf would deal only with what she calls "the important and lasting side of things and not with the passing and trivial." With this end in view, she invented a new form derived from the music of Beethoven and the paintings of Cezanne.

Ines Verga and John Hawley Roberts made much helpful beginnings in their articles, "*Virginia Woolf's Novels and Their Analogy to Music*" and "'Vision and Design' in *Virginia Woolf*" published in 1945 and 1946, respectively. But both these articles leave a very wide scope for a thorough examination of Virginia Woolf's novels. Verga's study is very cursory and Roberts's very limited. In her extremely brief article, Verga compares a paragraph or two from *The Voyage Out, Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, The Waves,* and *Between the Acts* to the music of Beethoven, Wagner, and Debussy. Roberts extends Virginia Woolf's application of the principles of Post-Impressionist art, as enunciated by Roger Fry, only to two of her novels - *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. Verga and Roberts, therefore, leave room for a more thorough analysis of Virginia Woolf's work and also for an extension of such an analysis to the rest of her novels. More recently, Allen McLaurin in his full-length critical
study, *Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved* (1973), has recognised Virginia Woolf's indebtedness to the techniques of painters and musicians. But much of his emphasis falls on locating repetition and rhythm in her novels. His anxiety to trace the influence of writers, such as, Samuel Butler, on Virginia Woolf also dulls the sharpness of his argument.

None of these scholars (Verga, Roberts and McLaurin), moreover, has brought out consistently how Virginia Woolf applied, apart from their terminology, the structure of painting and music, to her novels. Besides, they have not made any attempt to study Virginia Woolf's novels from a theoretical point of view. The present attempt hopes to supply these omissions and also expects that it will succeed in making Virginia Woolf's readers keenly aware of the strong theoretical base that her novels possess. A simultaneous attempt will be made to compare her theory with other theories of the novel to judge whether it is a viable one; and if in the process, an appreciation of her achievement enhances, it will be a very welcome gain.

Out of nine novels Virginia Woolf wrote, this study will analyse four - *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves* and *Between the Acts* - as these are considered to be more mature and experimental and present her artistic predilections at their best. Her dissatisfaction with the contemporary novel, her search for significant form, her concept of the novel as an autonomous structure, her desire to make it a feast of sound and colour, her substitution of realistic narrative with symbol and image, her stress on consciousness...
rather than action, her abstraction of character, her replacement of story and plot by themes and patterns, are best illustrated in the above mentioned novels. They are proof of the fact that she shook the foundations on which the novel of her time rested and that she challenged ingrained habits of seeing things in order to supply certain ideals that we ought to value.

Virginia Woolf's genius - and her importance - lies in her ability to fuse the sound, pure and classic with the elements of the Romantic tradition. She brought together two great and seemingly incompatible styles just as Beethoven in music and Cezanne in painting had done. In fusing the two traditions, Virginia Woolf's work opened up new horizons of creative writing and showed that the vision of the men who were to shape the modern novel was never again the same. The charge against her of indifference and irresponsibility to the political and social issues of her age is untenable. Her art, though refusing to service the code of the market place or a particular individual, save her own, reflects the conflicts, confusion and insecurities of her age. She is very explicit about the responsiveness of the artist to the issues of his time. But she is opposed to these convulsions affecting the form of his work.17

The function of art, under any condition, is to express the nature and meaning of human existence and not to involve itself in the political and social tirades and crusades of the period. Moreover, detachment reflects the greatness of the artist. Rudolf Arnheim writes:
The greater the art, the more energetically it went beyond its limited social assignments. It showed the perfection of man in the Greek athlete, it made power and striving visible in the cathedrals of the Middle Ages, it sounded the passions of love and hatred for the ladies and gentlemen in the theatres and opera houses. But... (in) men such as Beethoven, or Cezanne, Flaubert or Ibsen, one notices something essentially new. These men did not pretend to work for anybody except, possibly, for everybody.18

Virginia Woolf too believed — and practised — that the novelist, like the painter and the musician, and even the poet, must remain unattached and uncommitted. Only in being thus free, he can escape the cramp of his circumstances or the demanding moods of his patrons and be in a position to contemplate the human condition as such. She writes:

it would be impossible, when we read Keats, or look at the pictures of Titian and Velasquez, or listen to the music of Mozart or Bach, to say what was the political condition of the age or the country in which these works were created. And if it were otherwise — if the Ode to a Nightingale were inspired by hatred of Germany; if Bacchus and Ariadne symbolized the conquest of Abyssinia; if Figaro expounded the doctrines of Hitler, we should feel cheated and imposed upon, as if, instead of bread made with flour, we were given bread made with plaster.19

The last chapter which evaluates Virginia Woolf's theory of the novel takes stock of the characteristics desirable for the genre as enumerated above and concludes that as a theoretician of the novel and as a novelist her contribution is considerable and that she is very much a live force. She still enjoys a wide reading public and is an unacknowledged source of inspiration for the succeeding generations of novelists. The writers may be averse to experimentation or antagonistic to Bloomsbury ethics, but they can never afford to be apathetic to aesthetic values in their work. Indeed, a revision of the whole attitude towards content and form of
the novel which took place with Virginia Woolf has come to stay. The present-day novel, as Majumdar and McLaurin succinctly describe it, is a blend of the "Victorian solidity of social reference (and) the individual vision which we associate with Virginia Woolf."20

REFERENCES


4. Ibid.


12. Ibid, p. 95.


> Obviously the writer is in such close touch with human life that any agitation in his subject matter must change his angle of vision.... But why should this agitation affect the painter and the sculptor? it may be asked. He is not concerned with the feelings of his model but with its form. The rose and the apple have no political views. Why should he not spend his time contemplating them, as he has always done, in the cold north light that still falls through his studio window?... to mix art with politics... was to adulterate it...

